Trickster's Path to Language Transformation:
Stories of Secwepemc Immersion from Chief Atahm School

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Abstract

I am a Secwepemc woman. I weave my identity around my land, my nation, and my family. My journey has led me to live my life working to help revitalize the Secwepemc language through immersion education. Through this qualitative study, framed by the oral tradition of stsptekwle, I share stories of my own involvement in language regeneration and stories from community members who worked alongside me to develop an Indigenous immersion school. These stories are set within the village of Sexqeltqin, in the South-Central Interior of British Columbia. They focus on the early experiences of the founding members of Chief Atahm School to help uncover how an Indigenous community, filled with hegemonic beliefs of its own obsolescence, worked to reconnect the self to community, through language.

Throughout this research journey, narrative and autoethnographical elements merge with the Secwepemc oral tradition. Through using the oral tradition as a theoretical and conceptual tool, I reframe Aboriginal language revitalization as a journey of reconnecting self to community. The development of the “Restorying” Coyote Research and Theoretical Model not only asserts my rights as a Secwepemc researcher, but also, my responsibility to give back to community. The Trickster and Transformative elements of Coyote help to frame the research findings as a dynamic interplay whereby the self, community, and the colonized world, all compete for the rights to the Secwepemc language. Within the research analysis, the findings from Chief Atahm School loop back to connect to colonial history in my creation of an interactive community game utilizing Coyote’s Path to Language Power.
As a Secwepemc mother who has raised four children within the loving circle of the Secwepemc language, I join my fellow storytellers in this telling of the Chief Atahm School Creation Story. This story becomes a part of Coyote History, as it jumps forwards and backwards, to link the story of language loss to stories told for over tens of thousands of years. This story tells of how ordinary people become heroes through learning to trust in each other and in the wisdom of their ancestors.
Preface

This work is approved by:

• The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H08-02139) – on January 23rd, 2009;

• Adams Lake Indian Band Chief and Council (BCR 2008/09) – on January 30th, 2009;

• Chief Atahm School Tek’wemiple – on February 6th, 2009.
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<td>Vision quest; training for power</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>K’wseltktnéws</em></td>
<td>Family; interrelationship</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Knucwestsut</em>s</td>
<td>Take care of yourself; strengthen self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pteseg</em></td>
<td>An adaptive character found in Secwepemc stories that gives evidence of conflicts and transitions within the post-contact era</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Séme7</em></td>
<td>Term for “Whiteman”</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Secwepemc</em>⁴⁵</td>
<td>The Secwepemc language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Secwepemculecw</em></td>
<td>The land of the Secwepemc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sek’lep</em></td>
<td>Coyote, the Trickster in Secwepemc storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Senxuxelecw</em></td>
<td>Another name for Coyote meaning “the Great Traveller”</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Stsptekwle</em></td>
<td>Secwepemc storytelling; oral tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tek’wemiple</em></td>
<td>The law makers; Chief Atahm School parent governing body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Welme7 yews</em></td>
<td>Forever</td>
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¹ The Secwepemc spellings used throughout this thesis are based on an alphabet system developed by Kuipers (1974). However, to facilitate file sharing, I have chosen to write most of the words without the accent marks that are normally used to indicate stress. To hear audio recordings of these words please visit www.trickster-path.net
Acknowledgements

To assist me through this endless research journey I employed one of the teachings received from my Elders, the Secwepemc value of knucwestsuts, or take care of yourself by preparing yourself. Implicit in this value is that you must always come prepared for work, share your strengths, and never be a burden to anyone else. My father always felt that this value was at the core of one’s personal spiritual training called etsxe, often translated as “vision quest”, the solo wilderness journey of a child transitioning to adulthood. He expanded the meaning of etsxe through using the metaphor of a “kit bag”. Throughout your lifetime, with the help of family and mentors, you collect tools, skills, and knowledges to place in your “kit bag” for future use. The first test of how well you’ve packed your bag came during your solo journey into adulthood. As the first etsxe marked only the beginning of many tests and challenges, my father counselled us to never stop filling our “kit bags”.

Throughout this doctoral program, I have had to remind myself to look into my “kit bag” when I got to feeling like I was on a solo journey into the wilderness. Luckily, there were many teachings that I could draw upon, especially through my involvement with the Elders at Chief Atahm School. I was also fortunate to have had many opportunities to fill my kit bag throughout every stage of this doctoral program. I have relied heavily on the support and camaraderie of my cohorts in the Indigenous education doctoral program to help keep my vision strong, the work progressing, and the laughter flowing. In addition, I am grateful that UBC created a space for Indigenous faculty to share their stories of transformation. I appreciated the quiet wisdom of Dr. Lee Brown that helped temper the necessary wake-up call from Maori scholar, Dr. Graham Hingangaroa Smith. Moreover, I’m certain that my supervisor, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, took lessons from my
father on how to deliver a message wrapped in kindness, patience, and wisdom, that could rattle inside you until morphing into powerful inspiration. Without all these people placing markers on the path, I would never have been able to stay on task or remember to pay attention to the details. *Kukstsemc xwexweytep.*

Yet, through this long journey, I almost wore out my most treasured items in my “kit bag”, my *k’weseltktnéws*, my family. I’m especially thankful for my mother’s steady guidance. Just seeing her strength throughout my father’s last year with us has helped me truly appreciate her many gifts. *Kukstsemc* goes out to others in my family who have generously given me the space to *etsxe*: to my sister Janice, for always being there and for putting up with being my hockey linemate; my co-workers, Kim and Ada, for keeping the balls in the air during my absence; my Uncle Larry, who is so good at just being himself; and to the Chief Atahm School community and Adams Lake Band, for the years of support. Also, *kukstsemc* to my husband Rob, for keeping our family life sane and complete. Lastly, I send baskets filled with love to my children, Seth Cwelpexe, Tekawus, Sekwaw’, and Melpetkwe, for making the journey worthwhile.

*Kukstsemc xwexweytep re k’weseltktnéws.*
Te Qe7tse

Cicwélst Joe Stanley Michel, 1929-2009
Chapter One: The Great Coyote Story

Part One: Everything Starts with a Story

There were many times I lost my way along this research journey. For a time I couldn’t find the magic in the story. It seemed as if the story of Chief Atahm School had become a tragedy to me. Before this research, I never had to explore within the darker layers of language loss. I tended to focus on the positives associated with language revitalization without giving much weight to the barriers and challenges.

When I embarked on my doctoral studies, I had a goal of activating others in the wonderful world of language education. With my single-minded approach and optimism, I was sure that I could plow through all the obstacles in my path to get to the finish line. I recall being in one of my first classes and hearing some alarming statistics showing that personal crises, such as work and family issues, were the leading reasons that people failed to complete the doctoral program. At that time, I remember feeling confident that I would be able to complete my studies in a timely manner and that I would not become part of those statistics.

During my first years of coursework, I was still making steady progress towards completion. Although I found returning to academic life challenging at first, I thoroughly enjoyed the support of my fellow cohort members and relished the challenges of becoming an Indigenous researcher. Even through to the completion of my comprehensive exam, things were under control and on schedule. I completed my research proposal quickly in anticipation of starting research on my worksite,
Chief Atahm School, a model of Aboriginal language immersion education.

Everything seemed to be going smoothly when I received some devastating news.

A few months into my research, my father was diagnosed with cancer of the bile duct. We were all in shock when the doctor predicted he had only up to 6 months to live. My studies were put aside as I helped my mother and family deal with the difficulties of caring for the terminally ill. I spent as much time as I could with my father, while still juggling full time work, a busy family life, and my research.

As my father’s illness progressed, I found it increasingly difficult to get through each day. It seemed as if there was no escaping from the feelings of panic that would overcome me as I anticipated losing someone who figured so largely in my life. This fear also seemed to resonate throughout the school community. His illness was an unpleasant reminder of the urgent and fragile state of our language program. Key Elders that were heavily relied on for their language skills were getting older, while the younger staff members still struggled with increasing their language fluency.

Personally, I began to lose the “just do it” attitude for which I was known. I began to sense what others must feel like when they see language revival as being too overwhelming to bother striving for. Normally, I was the one that could be relied on to motivate the school in moving forward and to not dwell on negativity. Yet, as my father began fading away, so did my hopes for the future of our language. I could not seem to shake that sinking feeling that we were losing an irreplaceable part of our program, perhaps one from which we would never recover.
During this period, I lacked the motivation to continue with my research. Negativity overtook me. I questioned all of the years spent developing the immersion program with so little progress being made for language fluency nationwide. Were we doing too little, too late? What would become of us when the Elders were gone? I sank into unfamiliar territory for me: fear and self-pity. I succumbed to the inertia that affects so many. Why bother? Language revitalization required so much effort and it seemed we received so little in return.

The irony of this negativity was that my initial plans included focusing on my research question through the perspective of appreciative inquiry, whereby I would focus on the positive, life giving aspects of Chief Atahm School. Appreciative inquiry, although primarily an organizational model, paralleled my belief in mobilizing positive change “through crafting an ‘unconditional positive question’” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, p. 10). I felt that this affirmative path would best parallel the optimistic, or maybe idealistic, history of the school’s development and provide an alternative to problem-based research that prematurely sounded the death knell for Aboriginal languages. The possibility of adequately representing the school’s spirit of “looking to the future”, now seemed unlikely, since I was immobilized by fear and doubting the sanity of it all.

Each time I thought about reviewing the interview transcripts of the school community members, my heart would become heavy. Each interview was so intertwined with memories of my father. I found I spent more time reminiscing about our times together than on focusing on the research. My father and I had a strange relationship that required both of us to find the balance between annoyance and
respect. His penchant for storytelling and his talking in circles often clashed with my impatient desire for a straight answer and need for action. He needed to mull over ideas forever, while I impulsively jumped into things. Yet, even through our many differences, we still held much respect for one another. Whereas I counted on his guidance through his wider view of situations, I always knew he admired me for my spunk. He loved to tell his Chief Atahm School creation story about the time I came to ask him whether he thought it was possible for us to start an immersion school on the reserve. He told me that he thought we could do it if we had enough time, money, teaching resources, and trained staff to do it right. He said that it would take at least four or five years to get it off the ground. Yet, just two weeks later, I returned to tell him that our group of young parents had decided to start an immersion school in September, just three months away. He always laughed when he told this story as it exemplified the attitude that helped propel the school in its early years.

Although at first my father inwardly questioned the potential of developing a school, he was always willing to help us. What he offered the school and community was an almost encyclopedic knowledge of the Secwepemc language and culture and a willingness to share it. This generosity was evident even when he was in such a weakened state. He braved his illness with strength and humility, long past the initial six months he was given. My father vowed to make it to his 57th wedding anniversary at the end of June. True to his word, he showed up at the celebration, arm in arm with my mother, in a suit and bowler hat. He delivered a parting speech to the community that reminded us all to “yucwmenentwecwiye” - look after each
other. Just days after this event, we were all gathered by his bedside to say our goodbyes. Even then, he apologized for ruining everyone’s holiday.

After his passing, I spent months trying to find my bearings. It seemed that everywhere I turned, I noticed his absence. Up to this point, every part of my journey towards language revitalization involved my father. His role in the development of Chief Atahm School was immense. The hole he left in the school community seemed to have sucked the life out of our language initiative. Once again, we had to lean on each other as a school community to help each other look to the future again.

Looking back, I realize that this period of despair allowed me a clearer insight to some of the challenges faced in Indigenous language revitalization. I finally understood how emotional responses could prevent individuals and communities from moving forward on the path towards language revival. I began to see how easy it is to become overwhelmed with the sheer enormity of the task of language regeneration. How do you go about mobilizing people who are immobilized by fear, loss, and trauma? I realized that it is immensely challenging to overcome these negative emotions without some type of support system in place. From this perspective, I could appreciate how insurmountable a task it might seem to some communities to start a language-based education program. How difficult a journey it must seem to some to gather up the motivation, support and resources to deliver a program in an ancient language to children being raised in a world dominated by English.
Although my fall from the mountain made me feel that the path back up was too steep to climb again, I knew how disappointed my father would be if I gave up. When my dreams began to be filled with images of his stories, I realized he was “stalking” me to continue work on my research (Basso, 1996). His stories slowly began working their magic by guiding me back to reviewing the transcripts again. This time I was ready to accept the bittersweet memories of the school’s early years. It was as if with each reading of an interview transcript, my grief was being lifted. The stories became my healing. The recurring themes I heard of community and connection reminded me that I was a part of a big circle. As I recounted story after story of how the development of the school transformed the lives of so many, I remembered that it had transformed me too.

So here I am, once again, ready, willing, and able to take up the challenge of communicating the transformation of Chief Atahm School through stories of its creation. I know that I have the spiritual presence of my ancestors and the Great Coyote Story to guide me in helping reconnect our people to language. Now, when I walk the halls of Chief Atahm School and hear the energetic voices of young children learning in Secwepemctsin, I celebrate the reminders of my father. I once again find pleasure in following the trails we travelled together in building Chief Atahm School. It is now time to move forward on his dream that a better life for our people can be found through a Secwepemc education with our stories, our ways, and our language, welme7 yews, welme7 yews.
Part Two: Introducing Coyote

A long time ago, the world was not a good place for people. It was dark and cold. There was very little food for the people. Everything was out of balance. There were no rules for living. Monsters and giants constantly threatened the qelmucw, the people.

The creator of the world, Tqeltkukpi7, the high chief, had made everything then walked east, into the mountains. He promised the people he would help them if they were ever in danger. The people asked Tqeltkukpi7 to return. He said that he wouldn’t return but he would send his helper, Sek’lep, the Coyote, and his animal friends to make the world right. The friends included Grizzly Bear, Rabbit and Fox. Grizzly Bear had a powerful bow with magical powers. Rabbit had the power to bring anything back to life by jumping over it four times. Fox had the power to bring Coyote back to life if he was killed. Coyote had the power to change into anything by twitching his tail three times. (Matthew, p. 1, 2000)

Everyone needs a creation story. A story that places you in context with the universe and that helps you to establish your position in relation to life around you.

Stories have always had the capacity to help us make sense of our world. For thousands of years humans have explored the meaning of their existence through the vehicle of mythical tales telling of misadventures and misdeeds within the animal world. These stories have often enlisted characters called “Tricksters” to help explain the complexities of human experience. These characters were often animal

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2 In stories from the Cstelnec (Adams Lake) area, Rabbit, Fox, and Mole had the power to jump over Coyote three times to bring him back to life
spokespersons with uncanny abilities to shift in and out of human form who helped humans articulate the world (Kroeber, 1998).

Historically, humans have used story as a means of communicating their world for thousands of years. Storytelling is one of the truly universal human traits, found in every culture and in every language. The story form provides a mechanism for teaching societal mores and proper spiritual and ethical behaviour to younger generations (Cajete, 1994; J. Campbell & Moyers, 1991; Kroeber, 1998). Well-developed oral traditions helped to create an interconnected ‘mind map’ so that members of society could incorporate geographical features of land within their interrelationships between the plant and animal world. Many Indigenous\(^3\) societies utilized myth as an educational tool to develop skills in their youth so that they could learn to live as interdependent individuals within a collaboratively-minded community. The power of the oral tradition comes through the dynamic retellings of stories that reflect a people’s history, knowledges, and values to younger generations, thereby ensuring the continuity of culture.

As a member of the Secwepemc\(^4\) Nation, situated in south-central British Columbia, I am familiar with the tradition of storytelling called stsptekwle. The Secwepemc oral tradition has been used as a way to guide children into their roles in the community since ancient times. These stories share the dynamic adventures of the Trickster,

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\(^3\) A note about terminology used in this paper: ‘Aboriginal’ is used interchangeably with ‘First Nations’ to denote the original inhabitants of North America with established systems of knowledge, language, and history that predate colonial occupation. The term ‘Indigenous’ is used when appropriate as an international reference to the original inhabitants of an area.

\(^4\) Secwepemc is the term for the original inhabitants of the Secwepemculecw, an Interior Salishan First Nation, of which I am a member. The name, Secwepemc, is commonly referred to in literature as “Shuswap”, a misnomer originally used by early explorers.
Sek’lep (Coyote), and other magical Transformers. In stsptekwle, all of the elements that make a good story are combined to create an ideal communication system for transferring the traditional values, spiritual beliefs, societal expectations, and history of the Secwepemc people.

The resiliency of stsptekwle throughout the ages can be credited to its ability to disguise teaching as entertainment. The inclusion of the Trickster Sek’lep’s buffoonery and the magical acts of other Transformers always makes for a good story. The use of a Trickster character as a key protagonist is common to many First Nations oral traditions across North America. The Salishan and Plateau Coyote joins the ranks of other notable Tricksters from across Canada including Raven, Wesakechak, Nanabush, and Hare. The Trickster character presents an exaggerated version of humanity that offers the audience a window through which to see themselves. Although Coyote antics are often extreme and subversive, his actions are effective reminders of our human frailties. The success of stsptekwle can be attributed to its ability to communicate the antics of absurd characters within a landscape familiar enough to enhance believability. Hsu (2004) in The Secrets of Storytelling, describes how stories with familiar elements are more successful in creating connection:

However narrative is defined, people know it when they feel it. Whether fiction or nonfiction, a narrative engages its audience through psychological realism—recognizable emotions and believable interactions among characters. (p.26)
The success of Coyote stories lies within the sense of “psychological realism” achieved through the artful placement of the Trickster within a setting filled with archetypal characters and familiar plotlines. Through the inverted lens of Coyote, the different worlds of the Secwepemc universe are revealed to us that help nudge us towards areas needing reflection.

**Looping Back**

Within Secwepemc stsptekwle, the Trickster, Sek’lep is often depicted walking into the story, as if he is just coming from a previous adventure, such as, “Stek’ekwe r Sek’lep ne Cstelnetkwe….” (And here comes Sek’lep, in Adams Lake). The story begins in the middle of an action as if to invite the listener to jump into a continuous Coyote adventure. The implication being that the audience is familiar to the story format and can locate Coyote in the landscape by referencing past experiences of story. Although the story may begin with this expectation, as it unfolds, the storyteller gradually adds more details about the setting, characters, and plot until even a person uninitiated to the story form can understand. This form of looping back to pick up details missed earlier helps the listener to confirm or reinforce their understanding of the story without being overly pedantic. Within stsptekwle, there is a general expectation that the audience actively participates in helping produce story through adding their own details from existing knowledge.

Through this expectation of participation, Coyote stories not only served to effectively reflect the multiple layers of the Secwepemc world to Secwepemc youth, but also acknowledged their role within it. The implication is that the individual
connected to the whole by “jumping into” the timeless, Great Coyote Story. Through
the vehicle of Coyote stories, older generations initiated younger generations into
the community and into their future roles and responsibilities.

**Connecting to the Great Coyote Story**

In a sense, by choosing to frame this research journey within the *Secwepemc*
tradition of *stsptekwle*, I join with generations of *Secwepemc* before me who have
used the adventures of Sek’lep to interpret human experience. The process that led
me to embrace *stsptekwle* as the medium to communicate stories of language
regeneration reads like a story itself. The influence storytelling has had on me is
reflected throughout the thesis, including my choice of research purpose and major
research questions, theoretical approach, research methodology, themes, and
writing style. Many of the stories and teachings shared with me by family members
and Elders at Chief Atahm School have been integrated into what has become my
truth. I have often referred to *stsptekwle* to help me generate mind maps that guide
me towards solutions. Admittedly, I have not always welcomed the powerful
messages sent to me through story, especially ones that were obviously trying to
steer me in the right direction. My father, in particular, was fond of adapting our
traditional story form into an effective “instrument of torture”. I’m sure that my being
the eighth child of nine gave him plenty of time to perfect his unique adaptation of
the oral tradition. I remember that his “discipline through story” sessions began in
my adolescent years, probably after I had succeeded in exhausting my poor mother.
Often, these sessions would require me to sit facing him at the dining room table
while he told me a story (stories I now know were based on our traditional *stsptekwle*). Somewhere during his storytelling, probably when he saw my attention lagging, he would stop to ask me a question about the story. Most often, I would be caught without an answer. To my horror, he would start his story again, right from the beginning, and the vicious cycle would continue. I soon realized that any daydreaming, eye rolling, seat shifting, grumbling, or loss of eye contact, would prompt him to ask another question. Although his only expectation of me was active listening, he may as well have asked me to fly to the moon. My poor attention span, combined with my bad habit of tuning out authority figures, led to many marathon sessions of “discipline through story”.

Looking back, I believe these sessions were effective at many levels, beyond a marginal improvement of my listening skills. Although I resented my father’s method of discipline, I came to realize that his circular ramblings did have some meaning and that, somehow, his stories were connected to me. I wasn’t always able to grasp what he was trying to communicate through story, yet they had a habit of popping up at unexpected times as symbolic messages reminiscent of Basso’s concept of being stalked by stories (1996). I felt as if his stories implanted coded messages in my brain that had the power to reappear at the most inconvenient of times, as warnings to a misguided teen. Through using the time-honoured tradition of storytelling to guide me towards adulthood, my father helped reconnect me to my role within family and community, at a time when my peers advocated rejection and rebellion.

Fortunately, my experiences with Secwepemc *stsptekwle* have since broadened to include many wonderful stories told in our language by gifted storytellers from our
Nation. One of the greatest milestones in my life was achieved when I finally had enough comprehension in Secwepemctsin to understand a stsptekwle told entirely in the language. From that point onward, whenever I hear stsptekwle, it feels like I am entering into a Secwepemc time warp, where time seems to suspend and my senses grow preternaturally acute. The stories hold a power to transport me into what I like to call, “The Great Coyote Story”, wherein past, present, and future intertwine. While in this space, I truly understand why Elders often comment that “it’s a lot funnier in the language” when they hear stories translated into English. With this new world of stories opened up to me, I found that all my hard work in learning the language had reaped magical benefits.

My reintroduction to stsptekwle as an adult confirmed my belief in the power of story. Just as my father’s stories had wormed their way into my subconscious as a teenager, I found that some stories held the power to guide me towards a shift in perspective. This ability of stories to communicate powerful and enduring messages is described by Western Apache Elder Nick Thompson in Basso’s Stalking with stories:

So someone stalks you and tells a story about what happened long ago. It doesn’t matter if other people are around – you’re going to know he’s aiming that story at you. All of a sudden it hits you! It’s like an arrow, they say. Sometimes it just bounces off – it’s too soft and you don’t think about anything. But when it’s strong it goes in deep and starts working on your mind right away. (1996, p. 58)

Archibald, in Indigenous storywork (2008), builds from this image in sharing her experiences with story “piercing” her consciousness:
My imagination was challenged to visualize the stories’ plot and characters and to think about the possible meanings of the stories. It was as though these stories became embedded in my body, in my emotional being, in my consciousness, and in my spirit. (p.93)

Archibald also shares Interior Salishan scholar, Shirley Sterling’s perspective on the ability of stories to be transported through individuals. Sterling describes story as having a life of its own, changing shapes as it travels from person to person, giving each person a message relevant to their own life (p.97).

Several studies focusing on Indigenous oral traditions highlight the ability of story to establish and reinforce an individual’s connection to land and place (Archibald, 2008; Basso; 1996; Cruickshank, 1998; Robinson & Wickwire, 2005; Silko, 1981). The beauty of narrative lies in its ability to package teachings focused on individual growth within a holistic setting interrelating cultural perspectives on land, epistemology, and ontology. In a public lecture titled, *Comparing mythologies* (2003), Cree playwright and novelist, Tomson Highway, encapsulates the magnitude of the oral tradition:

…mythology defines, mythology maps out, the collective subconscious, the collective dream world of races of people, the collective spirit of races of people, the collective spiritual nervous system, if you will, where every cord, every wire, every filament has a purpose and a function, every twitch a job in the way that collective human body, mind, and soul moves and operates from one day to the next to the next and to the next. Without this mechanism, that is to say, there would be no reason for getting up in the morning to go to work, to school, or to play. Life would have no meaning. And suicide would flourish. (p. 26)
Stories were the medium through which our traditional knowledges and historical consciousness were transmitted to younger generations thereby ensuring the continuation of culture. Apparently, my father was well aware of the power of stories, because he was able to transform his words into shaping something called a conscience.

While many people’s memories of stspekwle are filled with warm images of a nurturing grandparent telling bedtime tales by candlelight, my memories trigger disciplinary reminders to pause and reflect on my behaviour. Perhaps my father’s successful stalking of my conscience as a teenager exposed a brain open to future attacks. For whatever reason, the fact remains that during the making of this thesis I was once again stalked by stories. Since breaking through the writer’s block that curtailed my research for a time, I was haunted by stories my father had shared with me. I would often wake in the middle of the night with mini revelations being shot through me like arrows from a story stalker. Instead of fighting the constant flow of seemingly random stories and images, I decided to surrender to the power of story by letting “the story do the talking”. Draft after draft I tried to incorporate these images into my work, yet they always seemed disconnected and unwieldy. Finally, I decided to completely give in to story by letting it lead the way in communicating the research of Chief Atahm School. It was then that all of the pieces came into focus. Through stspekwle, I had the vehicle in which to travel through time to the multiple worlds of Coyote to communicate messages of Secwepemc language survival.

The power of story to transmit enduring messages has profoundly altered the way I think and perceive life. Although Secwepemc stspekwle has helped shape me,
there have been other stories from outside the Nation that also have had the ability to stalk my consciousness. One story in particular, held the power to restructure “the story of my life”. However, before I share this story with you, I will have to loop backwards in the timeline to the steps leading up to my “conversion” into becoming a Secwepemc language advocate:

I grew up in the B.C. Interior in the city of Kamloops in a large family with two Secwepemc parents. Both my parents were born in Adams Lake, were fluent speakers of the Secwepemc language, and were former students of the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Having this shared upbringing influenced their choice to raise their family away from the reserve in order to give them the best chance to succeed in Canadian society. Their relocation to the city in the early 1960’s came at a time when there were very few First Nations families living off-reserve.

Throughout my elementary school years, I was the only ‘Indian’ child in the class. The difficulty of finding my place within this structure was compounded by my parents having chosen to raise us as “Canadians”, as if their culture and their language had no place within our lives. This absence of any connection to our heritage and language created a space that was too easily filled with external negative images of ‘being Indian’. Without any positive reinforcements of my identity, I internalized such images such as ‘the drunken Indian’ and ‘squaw’. I identified with Dion & Dion’s (2004, p.81) interpretation of this ‘invisible’ heritage being, “so confusing because we knew we were ‘part’ Indian but we didn’t know what that meant. The Indians we learned about at school and on TV were noble chiefs and pretty princesses who lived in tipis, rode on horses, and carried bows and arrows.” I quickly understood that the images of successful people reproduced in the classrooms did not share the same skin colour as I. Each year reinforced my beliefs that I was
the wrong colour, had too many siblings, had too little money, and had the misfortune to be born an Indian.

By the time I finished elementary school I had developed many strategies to fit into the middle class world of my classmates. However, with the move to high school, I began to associate with the group that best mirrored my feelings of difference and isolation, the teens with angst and attitude. But by grade eleven I realized that in order to graduate I would have to do a better job of balancing the academic demands of school with the physical demands of the party scene. Luckily, I had seen enough of my older siblings go on to post-secondary to realize that education offered two bonuses: my parent’s respect and freedom at last.

While other students may have seen post-secondary as a way to open up career opportunities, I saw it as an opportunity to escape the “Indian” label and blend into the multicultural backdrop of UBC. I started in the Bachelor of Arts program in the fall after graduation. For the first three years, I bounced around several disciplines, including Fine Arts, Psychology, and English, before finding a quirky fit within the Department of Religious Studies. There were a couple of bonuses in choosing this relatively obscure major: First, I knew I could delay having to make any immediate career plans. Second, my mother was ecstatic because she thought I was on the path to becoming a nun.

Although I may have dodged making a grown-up career choice, I was soon immersed into the real world when my son Seth was born. At this time, I was just beginning my third year at the University of Ottawa. My life changed rapidly as I desperately crammed for the new role of “Supermom”. I was now committed to both finishing my degree on schedule and to being the best parent I could be. This goal required a certain amount of planning, as demonstrated by my usual morning routine:

Get up, get myself ready, get baby ready.
Put baby in seat at the back of my bicycle.

Pedal 10 blocks to sitter’s house.

Drop baby off.

Bike back home.

Exchange my 10-speed for my motorcycle.

Ride to university.

Be diligent student.

Return home.

Be good mother.

I was grateful to have some family support again when we moved back to Vancouver to do my final year. It was such a relief to have all the crazy scheduling finally end when I completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in 1987.

It was during this time that I attended the World Indigenous Peoples’ Education Conference held at UBC. I remember when Verna Kirkness, the Native Indian Teacher Education Program supervisor, was looking for students to “volunteer” to record the workshops. I was assigned to record a workshop given by the powerful Maori delegates from New Zealand. It was the first time I had witnessed a group of Indigenous people deliver such a passionate message of cultural and language survival.

During the end of the Maori presentation, one of the young mothers involved in their language nest program called, Te Kohanga Reo, came up to give a speech. She began speaking in Maori and then later translated what she said to the audience. When she began to translate her speech in English by saying, “A year ago I did not know how to say one word in Maori”, I was astounded. Up to this point in my life the Secwepemc language wasn’t something I even thought about or felt connected to in any way. Years of feeling left out of my parents and the older people’s code language underlined this sense of disconnect. Yet, here I was, witnessing a young mother say that
she was able to learn her language as an adult and, furthermore, be strengthened by it.

Just as my father’s stories had stalked me, this young woman’s story continued to impress upon me for days after the conference. Yet, as it tends to happen in our busy lives, the memory of her talk soon faded as I settled back into daily routines. However, a strange event happened about ten days after the conference to “remind” me of the Maori’s words. A young boy, around 9 or 10 years old, came to my door asking for me. He said that a Maori Elder gave him my name and address and told him to bring this coat to me. He quickly shoved a big black fake fur winter coat in my hands and turned to leave before I could ask him any questions. At first, I thought maybe the Maori woman had lost it or maybe she felt I needed it for our cold Canadian winters. I hung it in my bedroom closet for safekeeping while I figured out what to do with it.

Every night before going to bed my thoughts kept going back to the coat. It served as a constant reminder of the young mother’s speech. Her words had triggered a realization of my disconnection from my family and culture. I began to worry that I was perpetuating this pattern through raising my son so far from home. I knew that the Maori coat had worked some powerful magic when I awoke with a start in the middle of the night and yelled out to it, “Alright, I’ll do it!” In the morning, I surprised my partner with the announcement that I was going to move home to Chase to start a language nest. Apparently, story, once again, found its way into my imagination. This time it helped propel me to finally choose a career path: Secwepemc language education.

To this day, I credit this young woman’s story (aided by a fake fur coat), and the guidance of the Secwepemc oral tradition with helping connect me to my family, culture, language, and traditional knowledge. In recognition of the power of story,
and in memory of the teachings I have received from my father, I invoke the ancient spirits of the oral tradition to guide the discovery of creation stories of Chief Atahm School. Now, instead of a solitary research journey, I have Sek’lep (Coyote) at my side to help mark the paths connecting Indigenous language revitalization within and beyond the borders of the Secwepemc Nation.

Part Three: Jumping into the Story of Chief Atahm School

I join with generations of Secwepemc who have utilized stsptekwl to guide them through the complexities of an ever-changing universe. To honour the storytellers in my life, and to give voice to the stories that stalk my dreams, I hereby “jump into” the Great Coyote Story through interweaving the stories of past and present leading to the creation of Chief Atahm School. I hop on Coyote’s back and travel backwards, forwards, and sideways, with the main purpose of discovering the tales of language agency and resiliency from within the Chief Atahm Secwepemc Immersion Program. The magical world of Coyote creates the backdrop for the planning, exploration, and discovery of new pathways for Indigenous language immersion. In a sense, this research journey has initiated the creation of a new stsptekwl that incorporates the new landscape from which we must engage in battle against our new enemy, the language monster.

The uniqueness of the Chief Atahm School story lies in how the characters involved in the battle against language loss successfully mobilized self and community. The fight for Indigenous language survival is ongoing and exists in a multitude of sites worldwide. Language is a barometer of the health of a culture. Language exists
within the individual and the collective; it can be spiritual as well as worldly; and it can be relegated to history or be seen as our present and our future. Through sharing stories with you that focus on the development of Chief Atahm School, I hope to promote community dialogue and discovery of ways in which we can make Indigenous immersion education a part of everyone's future, thereby supporting the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledges and languages. In keeping with the Secwepemc value of k’wseltktnéws, or, the value of relationship, I share the findings of this research to encourage the growth of Aboriginal languages through immersion education.

The Setting

In 1987, a small community located over 50 kilometers away from the nearest urban centre of Kamloops, responded to the rapid loss of language by developing their own Indigenous immersion education model. Community members from three First Nations bands, Adams Lake, Neskonlith, and Little Shuswap, have strived to reconnect with traditional values and practices through the establishment of an immersion model of education that honours the history, language, values, and practices of the Secwepemc. The initial program, Secwepemc Ka Language Nest, was modelled on the Maori’s Te Kohanga Reo, and offered Secwepemc immersion for children from birth to five years old. This initiative influenced the development of Chief Atahm School in 1991, which offered a nursery to grade three all day Secwepemc immersion program. Chief Atahm School is the first of only a few First Nations immersion sites in the province of B.C.
The two programs, situated on Adams Lake Reserve near Chase, B.C., were founded on the belief that raising happy, healthy Secwepemc children required an education model based on Secwepemc ways of knowing with the Secwepemc language as the medium to communicate this knowledge. As part of their vision, Chief Atahm School states:

Chief Atahm School is grounded on the belief that knowledge of the language, traditional practices and beliefs of the Secwepemc will establish and maintain a healthy and balanced living environment. Individuals will be prepared for today’s world and help to protect the earth for future generations. (Chief Atahm School, 2007)

Throughout many years of collaboratively working the vision, Chief Atahm School has demonstrated the viability of a Secwepemc model of education. Many of the graduates of the program have successfully learned to negotiate through a world dominated by western-based knowledge while maintaining a relationship to Secwepemc knowledge and language.

From its beginnings, Chief Atahm School has been fortunate to have a vital core of community members to guide the program. The school has drawn its strength from the language and cultural knowledge of Secwepemc Elders. Presently, the school has seven Elders on staff, who work alongside younger teachers in the immersion classrooms. It has been through the intense determination of key players within the school community that the vision of the school remains that of “a Secwepemc speaking community living in balance with nature”. The success of this program is nothing less than remarkable considering that during its beginning stages there existed within the larger community of the local area bands and the community of
Chase, a prevailing atmosphere of apathy, hegemony, and even, open hostility towards a culturally-preferred educational model based on Secwepemc language, knowledge, and pedagogy. A special focus on the underlying negative forces at play in language programming as well as the change agents that promote resiliency of language initiatives will help illuminate the way towards successful practices in Indigenous language education.

The identification of key areas that supported the development of Chief Atahm School may prove to be a catalyst towards culturally-preferred Indigenous education models becoming the norm not the anomaly in B.C. There is a sense of urgency in First Nations’ communities to reclaim their languages and cultural identities before they are lost. Instead of being paralyzed by fear that our languages are doomed and feeling powerless to combat the colonizing forces of assimilation, we need to take back our right to our own histories and languages. Smith (2006) writes about cultural identities being fragmented by the forces of colonization: “People now live in a world which is fragmented with multiple and shifting identities, that the oppressed and the colonized are so deeply implicated in their own oppressions that they are no more nor less authentic than anyone else” (p. 97). In order for us to reverse over a century of oppressive practices on First Nations, we need multi-layered strategies in all areas of life, including in what language, and whose knowledge we choose to educate our children.

In all areas of Secwepemc life, we see negative aftereffects of a colonizing society intent on assimilation and integration of its First Nations into the body politic. It is within this challenging landscape that Chief Atahm School asserted its belief in a
community led immersion school based on time-honoured Secwepemc values. This study focuses on the initial stages of the development of Chief Atahm School including the historical, social, economic, and political context surrounding it. Ultimately, these external influences can be examined within the larger framework of Canada’s colonizing agenda towards First Nations. This research helps shed some light on how a small group of parents and Elders with a shared vision asserted their Indigenous right to educating their children in their own language. The key research questions explored are:

1. What motivated people to become involved in the Chief Atahm School immersion program?

2. What factors helped sustain involvement in Aboriginal immersion education?

Through sharing stories from the school community, I seek to give hope and guidance to other First Nations in their quest to reconnect to their cultural ways and language through Indigenous education.

**On Collecting Stories**

With the curiosity of Coyote, I embarked on a research adventure to find stories surrounding the area of Secwepemc language revitalization. Using Coyote stories to frame and guide the search, I share with you the personal and group stories from a successful Secwepemc immersion school program. Tapping into the motivating stories of Chief Atahm School helps expand our understanding of Aboriginal language revitalization within a culturally preferred education model and promotes
the viability and relevancy of Indigenous knowledges. In Archibald’s *Indigenous methodology: A Coast Salish storywork approach*, Salishan Elder Ellen White reinforces the importance of a synergistic education:

To young people my grandparents always said, ‘You’ll do all right if your hands are full to overflowing’. One hand could be filled with the knowledge of the White man and the other could be filled with knowledge of your ancestors. You could study the ancestors, but without a deep feeling of communication with them it would be surface learning and surface talking. Once you have gone into yourself and have learnt very deeply, appreciate it, and relate to it well, everything will come very easily. They always said that if you have the tools of your ancestors and you have the tools of the White man, his speech, his knowledge, his ways, his courts, his government, you’ll be able to deal with a lot of things at his level. (cited in Neel, 1992, p.108)

Students who attended Chief Atahm School during its early stages of development are demonstrating that balance between two worlds can be achieved as they engage in a variety of post-secondary and employment opportunities while maintaining a sense of collective identity and responsibility. Through exploring the narratives of key players within the school community, we can gain a better understanding of the individual and collective actions that helped transform the dream of an immersion school into reality. These “creation stories” from Chief Atahm School will explore what motivates and sustains Aboriginal communities in the pursuit of language revitalization. Although I will be specifically focusing the research on the developmental years of Chief Atahm School, I hope to unveil a range of human experience that enlightens the path towards Indigenous language revitalization.
The Path of Research

Mining the varying levels of data surrounding the development of Chief Atahm School allows a view of Aboriginal language resiliency from many perspectives. This mapping of the past will serve to guide future school leaders and help ensure the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next. A qualitative research approach was used to help interpret the full range of human experience that supports the development of Secwepemc education. Within the qualitative research tradition I used the phenomenological approach to help study and understand lived experience. The process of studying a problem within this tradition includes “entering the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live and display the phenomenon; and looking for meaning of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 1998, p.31).

As the study progressed, I began to shape my understanding of the participants’ experiences using Secwepemc storytelling, or stsptekwle, as a guide. Apart from looking purely for the essence of understanding of phenomena, I found myself organically constructing story to help make sense out of their experiences. To this end, narrative inquiry, with its strong sense of the application of story structure, seemed a natural fit with phenomenology. In narrative inquiry, research of human experience contains many of the same elements of a good story: “A scene is set, a problem is introduced, characters are described, tension is introduced to create an unfolding plot, and there is some climax and resolution” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.11). Through the influence of the Secwepemc oral tradition, and with the guidance of Archibald’s, Indigenous storywork (2008), and Ignace’s doctoral dissertation, Our

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or*al* *histories* *are* *our* *iron* *posts* *(2008)*, *my* *original* *application* *of* *narrative* *inquiry* *to*
help *uncover* *the* *multiple* *layers* *of* *meanings* *as* *we* *tell* *the* *stories* *of* *our* *lives
(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi) *shape* *shifted* *into* *an* *Indigenous* *research*
methodology *with* *storytelling* *at* *its* *core.*

As *Secwepemc* *stsptekwle* *provides* *a* *time-honoured* *vehicle* *through* *which*
generations *before* *me* *have* *shaped* *their* *understanding* *of* *person* *and* *place,* *I* *was*
confident *it* *would* *provide* *a* *solid* *framework* *for* *communicating* *the* *theory* *and*
process *of* *this* *research* *journey.* *The* *theme* *of* *stsptekwle* *has* *been* *carried*
throughout *the* *thesis* *to* *connect* *the* *Chief* *Atahm* *School* *phenomenon* *to* *the* *wider*
story *of* *language* *and* *cultural* *loss* *within* *Indigenous* *communities,* *and* *to* *the*
*Secwepemc* *consciousness* *as* *perpetuated* *through* *the* *Great* *Coyote* *Story.* *In*
addition, *the* *overarching* *Secwepemc* *values* *of* *knucwestsut.s,* *take* *care* *of* *yourself,*
and *k’wseltktnews,* *we* *are* *family,* *frame* *the* *theoretical* *perspective* *through* *which*
the *stories* *are* *interpreted.*

Certainly, *within* *the* *area* *of* *Indigenous* *language* *revitalization* *there* *is* *a* *compelling*
story *to* *be* *told.* *The* *process* *of* *knowledge* *gathering* *included* *collecting* *personal*
and *group* *narratives* *from* *key* *players* *within* *the* *Chief* *Atahm* *Secwepemc*
Immersion School Community. *Through* *the* *process* *of* *discovering* *Chief* *Atahm*
School *creation* *stories* *several* *outcomes* *were* *achieved:*

- The re-affirmation of the vision, principles, and practices of Chief Atahm School;
• A collection of historical artifacts including photographs, meeting minutes, and memorabilia;
• A story integrating the summarized findings of this study to assist First Nations communities in mobilizing self and community towards empowering models of Aboriginal language immersion education; and
• The re-affirmation of the role of Secwépemc stsptekwle in reinforcing the relationship between the values of knucwetsut.s (strengthen yourself) and the value of k’wseltktnéws (family).

By sharing the stories of creation of Chief Atahm School others may be inspired to reconnect to their own Story to create a better future for their people.

Markers Along the Way

Throughout this research journey, I felt connected to the ongoing Coyote Story. I saw the importance of locating myself within the larger story of the Secwépemc and to the stories of other Indigenous nations. As the path of discovery was my etsxe (vision quest), I began with the preparation and the planning. In order to understand the story of Chief Atahm School it was important for me to investigate the emotional, social, historical, and political interplays that lay at the root of language loss. In the introduction to Chapter One and in this chapter, I position myself within the research as an “insider” through sharing personal stories relating my involvement in Chief Atahm School. In Chapter Two, I jump into the story of language loss as a globally occurring phenomenon. From there, I travel back to the beginnings of time, to construct a picture of Secwépemc life when the language was healthy and
stsptekwle was actively used to reinforce the values connecting individuals to their responsibilities to the community.

In part two of Chapter Two, Coyote is presented as the “Colonial Trickster” to help tell the story of the colonial agendas influencing the breakdown of the Secwepemc language. Through identification of the Tricksters in our midst that persistently undermine efforts in language revitalization, we can begin the process of “Restorying” the connections to language and culture for community and self-empowerment. Gramscii’s theory of hegemony, Said’s concept of the “Other”, and the works of Indigenist theorists, G.Smith’s Kaupapa Maori transformational praxis, and L. Smith’s Decolonizing methodologies, helps to strengthen our understanding of the history of domination and oppression of Indigenous peoples leading to the present situation of language loss.

In Chapter Three, I embrace the transformative properties of Coyote through a survey of the literature surrounding the field of Indigenous language revitalization and Indigenous education. The chapter ends with a discussion of the “Restorying” Coyote Theoretical and Research Framework that merges Secwepemc values with elements from Kaupapa Maori Transformative Praxis, Freire’s theory of conscientization, and Indigenist research.

With foundational Secwepemc values grounding the research, Chapter Four documents the process of gathering stories of language rebirth from Chief Atahm School using the “Restorying” Coyote Theoretical and Research Framework.
In Chapter Five, I reframe the Chief Atahm School narratives within the Secwepemc oral tradition. In this chapter, I “restory” the study’s findings into a transformative tale to be shared with Indigenous communities with the hopes of that this story may “stalk” others to participate in language revival.

In Chapter Six, I apply Coyote’s lighthearted personality to the usual somber discussion of language loss through offering an engaging way for communities to explore language regeneration.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I loop back to connect to the timeless Coyote Story by interweaving the stories of our past, present, and future. Through summarizing the multiple sources drawn upon throughout the research, including the Secwepemc oral tradition, Indigenous theory, narrative research, and personal experience, I leave markers on the path for others to reconnect self to community through “Restorying” language back to life.
Chapter Two: Searching for Stories of the Trickster

In this chapter, I jump into the ongoing Coyote Story through investigating the stories told by those who have travelled the paths before me that help us to understand how and why the Secwepemc language was weakened. Many of the pathways I travelled on to expose the intersecting stories of the rise and fall and redemption of the Secwepemc language have been cleared by my ancestors, Indigenous scholars, critical theorists, and language warriors, who travelled before me. It is through tapping into the “Great Coyote Story” that I am empowered to tell the stories of how and why Chief Atahm School came to engage in the battle against the language monster. In Part One of this chapter, I begin by discussing my personal motives behind my journey into the field of Secwepemc language regeneration. From here, I widen the lens to explore language loss within the Secwepemc Nation as a part of a greater trend of Indigenous and minority language loss worldwide. In Part Two of this chapter, I survey the literature on Secwepemc traditional knowledges, pedagogy, and social and cultural practices. This sets the stage for discussion in Part Three of the underlying influences of colonization that lie at the root of language loss.

Part One: Making the Connection

In a Coyote story, time does not exist in one dimension. The story unfolds within a flexible timeline whereby events can randomly trigger connections to the past, present, and future. This mechanism helps create an illusion of life as continuous and connected and serves to encompass the listener within the circle of Secwepemc
Within the previous chapter, I circled back through time to help connect my personal story to the greater story of Secwepemc language survival. I shared my sense of isolation of being raised in cultural silence with little of my parent’s language, cultural knowledge, and stories being shared with me. During research on my master’s thesis, I was able to question my mother about why she chose to raise us without language or connection to our culture. Her response was filled with regret:

“My husband and I thought we were doing the best for our children. We were hoping they would go to university and everything…they would never need the language. And now, when I think back, the joy I have in knowing the language, in using it, and knowing who I am, I guess I could say I almost feel guilty. I wonder why I did that. I think I didn’t put thought into it. And I say, ‘holy cow, somebody just about won. We just about got this colonization. They just about succeeded. The government just about succeeded’. (Michel, 2005, p.72)

Her heartfelt words helped me to understand the powerlessness felt by my parents’ generation and helped me to locate my personal experiences within the larger context of colonization within Canada.

In order to journey past these times of disconnect, I now assert my right and my responsibility, to uphold the value of k’wstktktéws (family), through connecting to the ongoing Coyote Story. This I am compelled to do as a symbolic gesture of empowerment, for there was a time when I felt my story was unimportant. Before becoming involved in the Indigenous cohort through Educational Studies at UBC, I had framed my life’s work as being for my children and my culture. I hesitated to
write myself into the picture. I described myself as a bridge between the past and the future, given little credence to what my generation had to offer. I often felt that those of us raised with an “invisible heritage” formed the weakest link in the survival of our Nation. I felt ashamed of having been raised in cultural silence. Now, through connecting my story to the greater Coyote Story, I feel I am also reaching out to other indigenist research that “gives voice to Indigenous people” and “whose goals are to serve and inform Indigenous struggle for self-determination” (Rigney, 1997, p.119). I view this exploration as both a process of knucwestatus, or helping myself, by clarifying my understanding of my role in language revitalization, and a process of kwelktktnéws, or interconnecting family, by adding to our collective understanding of Indigenous language revitalization. Within this chapter, my stories expressing feelings of inadequacy and disconnect, merge with the stories telling of the invasive acts of Canada on First Nations’ languages and cultures.

**The Story of the Disappearing Languages**

The backdrop to the personal and collective stories of Chief Atahm School needs to include the greater story of linguistic loss worldwide. Although the Chief Atahm School language immersion programs are testaments to a strong desire for linguistic survival, they are only representative of the work of a small community. The continued operation of immersion education programs on Adams Lake Reserve since 1987 provides an isolated example of resiliency in First Nations’ language immersion within B.C. A wider perspective indicates that the majority of the world’s
Indigenous languages are rapidly diminishing, with few communities making the commitment to educating their children in mother tongue language programs.

**Globalized Language Loss**

The pattern of Indigenous language loss can be seen as paralleling major shifts in human history. Transitions of power and population resulting in major political, social, and economic upheavals greatly influence language usage. Dalby, in his *Language in danger* (2003), notes that language loss is inevitable when two cultures are in prolonged contact with each other, with one inevitably overtaking the other.

Figures from *Ethnologue*, a database tracking the world’s languages, indicate that nearly 3,400 of the world’s estimated 6,900 languages are either classified as endangered or critically endangered (Lewis, 2009). The ever-increasing push for globalization has supported the growth of only a handful of the world’s dominant languages at the expense of thousands of minority languages:

> As the big languages advance, the minority ones retreat. They come to be seen as backward and embarrassing. As children stop learning them and fewer people speak them, they become ever less useful. In the end, the last speakers die, taking their languages to the grave with them. (Babel runs backwards, 2004)

Skutnabb-Kangas (2002) uses the term “linguistic genocide” to differentiate the systematic destruction of Indigenous languages from languages that have eroded over centuries of language shift. She maintains that education has been a prime perpetrator of linguistic and cultural genocide:
Assimilationist submersion education where indigenous and minority children are taught through the medium of dominant languages, causes mental harm and often leads to the students using the dominant language with their own children later on, i.e. over a generation or two the children are linguistically and often in other ways too forcibly transferred to a dominant group. This happens to millions of speakers of threatened languages all over the world. There are no schools or classes teaching the children through the medium of the threatened indigenous or minority languages. The transfer to the majority language speaking group is not voluntary: alternatives do not exist, and parents do not have enough reliable information about the long-term consequences of the various choices. Because of this, we are NOT talking about 'language suicide', even if it might at first seem like the speakers are themselves abandoning their languages. 

(Language policies and education: The role of education in destroying or supporting the world’s linguistic diversity 2002, para 34)

The challenge that is shared by the world’s minority languages and Indigenous languages is that of maintaining language use in a world constantly offering economic and social enticements made available to only a few chosen languages.

**Loss of Indigenous Languages**

The social and historical context surrounding Indigenous language loss is similar to the forces that affect minority languages worldwide. The loss of the world’s Indigenous languages is occurring at an alarming rate. It is estimated that over ninety percent of them will disappear within the next one hundred years (Nettle & Romaine, 2000). In North America, from over 300 Indigenous languages documented in the early 1900’s, only around 180 remain today (Campbell, 1997;
Mithun, 2005. To provide a more accurate picture of worldwide language loss, Terralingua, an international non-governmental organization for bioculture and biodiversity, sponsored a quantitative study titled, *The index of language diversity* (Harmon and Loh, 2010), to measure the numbers of mother-tongue speakers of the world’s languages. The Index included the following findings specific to Indigenous language loss:

- Between 1970 and 2005, Indigenous linguistic diversity declined by about 60% in the Americas, 30% in the Pacific, and 20% in Africa.
- Concerns about mass language extinctions are completely justified. The figures indicate a widespread shift of speakers away from smaller languages as mother tongues and toward just a few dominant larger languages. This shift is considered a precursor to extinction.
- The worldwide trend of language loss affects the planet through the loss of valuable environmental knowledges that are contained in Indigenous languages.

All studies indicate that the rapid loss of Indigenous languages worldwide necessitates immediate and large-scale efforts to stem future losses to the world’s linguistic heritages.

Saving our world’s Indigenous languages is important to the continuity of human life on this planet. Several studies share the perspective that Indigenous languages provide a crucial link to ancient knowledges and perspectives that are key to human survival (Crystal, 2000; Harmon, 2002; Krauss, 1992; Maffi; 2001; Skutnabb-
Kangas, 2000). Anthropologist Russell Bernard (as cited in Reyhner, 1996) states that:

...any reduction of language diversity diminishes the adaptational strength of our species because it lowers the pool of knowledge from which we can draw. We know that the reduction of biodiversity today threatens all of us. I think we are conducting an experiment to see what will happen to humanity if we eliminate 'cultural species' in the world. This is a reckless experiment. If we don’t like the way it turns out, there’s no going back. (Bernard, 1992, p.82)

Indigenous languages can be seen as the window through which we can communicate, interpret, and translate thousands of years of collective knowledge of living on this earth.

**Language as the Soul of a People**

The rapid loss of Indigenous languages and the knowledges contained within them signals a growing disconnection to our planet. This sense of disconnect associated with language loss is reflected throughout the community through emotional trauma and societal dysfunction. Fishman in *What do you lose when you lose a language?* explores the deep relationship that exists between the “heart” of the culture and its language.

And that means they are going to lose the metaphor about the language being the soul of the people. The language being the mind of the people. The language being the spirit of the people. Those are just metaphors, but they are not innocent metaphors. There is something deeply holy implied, thereby, and that is what would be lost. That sense of a holy, a component of holiness
that pervades people’s life the way a culture pervades their life through the language. (Fishman, 1996, pp.82-83)

When people talk about language loss, they speak in terms of the spiritual, of a sense of emotional wholeness, of completeness. He highlights the collective emotional need for language as it relates to the internal experience and as the individual relates to community.

Battiste & Henderson (2000) share an Indigenous perspective on the role of language as being important to articulating worldview and societal mores:

The reconstruction of knowledge builds from within the spirit of the lands and within Indigenous languages. Indigenous languages offer not just a communication tool for unlocking knowledge, they also offer a theory for understanding that knowledge and an unfolding paradigmatic process for restoration and healing. Indigenous languages reflect a reality of transformation in their holistic representations of processes that stress interaction, reciprocity, respect, and non-interference. For Indigenous researchers, there is much to be gained by seeking the soul of their people in their languages. (p.133)

In Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s *Decolonizing the mind* (1986) he expands on the role of language as being critical to establishing our perception and connection to ourselves and our culture:

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics, and at the social production of wealth, at their relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable
from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (p.16)

Several studies from Canada share findings that link First Nations language fluency to positive identity formation (Brandt & Ayoungman, 1989; Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; Hoover, 1992; Sachdev, 1995).

The Legacy of Language Loss in Canada

The state of First Nations languages in Canada are indicative of the global trend of Indigenous language loss. Although First Nations communities are aware of the urgency surrounding their languages, not enough is being done to help stop the rapid language loss in communities throughout Canada. Figures from the 2006 Census shows that approximately 1.2 million people reported having at least some Aboriginal ancestry, representing almost 4% of the total population of Canada. From this total, only about 29% of Aboriginal people responded that they were able to carry on a conversation in their language and only 1% declared fluency in their language (Statistics Canada, 2006). Kinkade, in The decline of Native languages in Canada, (1991) predicts that only four Aboriginal languages in Canada have a large enough base of younger children learning the language, to survive. Unfortunately, none of these four languages are B.C. First Nations languages.

First Nations Languages in B.C.

In British Columbia the language situation appears significantly worse than in many areas of Canada. Owing to its greatly varied geographical landscape, the province of B.C. is home to eight distinct language families representing between 27 and 34
languages (Ignace & First Nations Education Steering Committee, 1998, p.6). Among these, five are labelled “endangered” in an Assembly of First Nations (AFN) language study, as having less than ten speakers remaining (1992, p.8). With nearly 60% of Canada’s Aboriginal languages existing in B.C. alone, it has remained a daunting task to launch any sustained unified campaign for language revitalization. The sheer diversity of languages, each with relatively small numbers of speakers often living great distances from one another, have resulted in B.C. having the most languages at risk in Canada. By the 1980s, most First Nations families in B.C. had at least two generations of children whose first languages were no longer Aboriginal languages. More recently, a report prepared by the First Peoples’ Heritage, Language, and Culture Council indicates that just over 5% of the total First Nations’ population in B.C. are fluent speakers of their language (2010, p. 4).

**Secwepemc Language Loss**

Within the Secwepemc Nation, the pattern of language decline is consistent with that found in B.C. and the rest of Canada. In a 1995 survey conducted in seven Secwepemc communities, it was found that virtually all the fluent speakers were over the age of 50 and that no children were being raised as first language speakers of Secwepemctsin (Ignace, 1998). Ignace also reported the following:

- even those who can speak the language often do not use it in the home, especially with younger children;
• almost no children are being raised speaking the language at home;

• to date (with the exception of an immersion program which was started in one community a few years ago), school programs have not produced proficiency or fluency in the language, and have not resulted in the use of the language, except for a few words, among younger generations (1995, pp. 17-18)

Apart from the Ignace report on the Secwepemc language, there have been few published sources specifically addressing the loss of language within the Secwepemc Nation. Of these sources, some have specifically examined the language revitalization initiatives at Chief Atahm School, such as McIvor’s Language nests in B.C. (2006) and Haig-Brown & Haig-Brown’s video production, Pelq’îlc: Coming home (2009).

**Part Two: Coyote Travels the Secwepemculecw**

In order to provide a more complete picture of language loss within Secwepemc communities, we will need to look at the historical and political events influencing its threatened state. By examining how the Secwepemc negotiated through Canada’s colonial and assimilative practices, we can gain more perspective on the role these events played in language loss. Throughout this process, we can identify some of
the obstacles on the path towards cultural and linguistic revitalization within First Nations of B.C.

I begin the discovery of Secwepemc history by looping back through the literature to gain a vantage point into early Secwepemc life before the arrival of European influence. Throughout this journey into the past, I was mindful that the process of a literature review essentially privileges written knowledge, and therefore limits the discovery of the expansive knowledge available within Indigenous oral traditions. The lack of written records of oral cultures becomes problematic when searching for historical sources from Indigenous perspectives. Although I have tried to balance this somewhat through referencing some traditional stories and knowledge, a greater picture can only be gained through a lifetime of listening to stories in their original oral form.

The Secwepemc

The Secwepemc people believed that there were four kingdoms; one on earth, a second one under the ground, a third one through a hole in the sky and forth one under the water. Until they underwent a change, all creatures could live in any of the kingdoms. The fish could live on land; people could marry fish and live in the underwater kingdom. After they acquired new traits through an adventure, they had to live in only one kingdom. Only Coyote, Fox, Grizzly Bear and Rabbit kept their special powers.

It is said, that when the animals with special powers finished their task of making the world right, they walked back into the mountains. The Tqeltkukpi7 [High Chief, Creator] reassured the Qelmucw [people]
that he would send them back if they were ever needed, if the world got out of balance. (Matthew, 2007)

As we circle back through Secwepemc history to pick up the threads of stories that lay at the root of language loss, we find evidence of a once vibrant culture. The history of the Secwepemc people dates back over 10,000 years. Ethnographer James Teit recorded that the Secwepemculecw, or land of the Secwepemc, covered a vast area encompassing approximately 55,000 square miles that spreads across South-Central British Columbia (as cited in Ignace, 2008). In 1909, Teit described the Secwepemc Nation as consisting of five major divisions each with a unique land base and dialect (p.462). The Sexqeltmc division, included the following bands surrounding the Chase/Shuswap Lakes area: the Cstelnec, Sk’atsinec, and Qw’ewt. Chief Atahm School is located at Sexqeltqin, near Chase, B.C., a traditional fishing site of the Cstelnec, or, the people of the Adams Lake area.

The language of the Secwepemc is called Secwepemctsín. It is one of 23 languages within the Salishan language family. The Salishan language family is located throughout the Plateau area of North America, from the American Northwest to the Canadian Southwest (Cooper, 1998; Thompson & Kinkade, 1990). The Secwepemculecw (land of the Shuswap) borders the neighbouring Salishan tribes of the Nlak’pamux (Thompson), the Stl’at’imx (Lillooet), the Silxw (Okanagan) and a Dene language tribe, the Chilcotin. The neighbouring Interior Salishan tribes share some common vocabulary and similar sentence structures, with the Nlak’pamux language being most similar in structure and vocabulary to Secwepemctsín. The Secwepemc language has two main dialects called the Eastern (east of Kamloops),
and the Western (west of Kamloops) with minor variations of rate of speech and vocabulary within each dialect grouping (School District 73, 2006).

**Traditional Secwepemc Life**

Traditionally, the Secwepemc were hunters, gatherers, and fishers. An archaeological report of the Chase area notes:

Hunting, fishing, and the collection and processing of roots occupied the spring and early summer months. Fish were harpooned, speared with leisters, gaffed, caught in basketry traps and weirs, hooked by trolling and straight line, trapped with drag-nets. ...Roots were collected in upland areas using digging sticks, and usually processed in earth ovens near the collection areas. (Arcas Associates, 1987, p.16)

Summers were spent harvesting plant foods including a variety of roots and berries such as, blueberry, Saskatoon berry, soapberry, avalanche lily root, and Indian potato. Great care was taken to preserve the summer produce for consumption during the long winter months ahead. In late summer and fall, hunting and fishing became the primary activity as well as the drying of the meat and fish.

Within the Secwepemculecw, in particular in the more mountainous regions such as those found in Cstelen (Adams Lake area), the winters made for harsh living environments. To reduce the competition for resources during the prime food gathering seasons from spring to fall, small bands of people, usually extended families, would travel together to harvest food. Winters would be spent in semi-permanent larger villages that contained several earth-covered semi-subterranean pithouses or c7est7istcen.
As with many Indigenous cultures, Secwepemc epistemology and ontology are characterized by a sense of connectedness between all things in the natural world. The earliest written account of the Secwepemc belief system was written from ethnographer James Teit’s perspective. Teit’s (1909) study of the Shuswap from 1900 to 1904 marks the only existing written document of a Secwepemc worldview before major external cultural influences on the people. His documentation of Secwepemc life at the turn of the century contained oral narratives and detailed accounts of social structure and belief systems. Another written resource from this period referencing Secwepemc belief systems is Notes on the Shuswap people of B.C. by George Dawson and the Royal Society of Canada (1892). Dawson recorded some place names, cultural documentation and a few oral narratives, but not to the extent of Teit’s work.

Adding to these early sources are various studies in the areas of archaeology, anthropology, and ethnobotany (Compton & Gardiner, Thomas & Michel, 1994; Hayden, 1992; Peacock & Turner, 1998; Turner, Ignace & Compton, 1998; Turner, Ignace & Ignace, 2000). In the 1970’s and 1980’s research led by Dutch linguist, Aert Kuipers, on the Secwepemc language resulted in the development of a dictionary (Dixon & Kuipers, 1974; Kuipers, 1974; 1983). Kuipers development of a Secwepemc alphabet based on Roman orthography was instrumental in transitioning the language from a strictly oral language to a literate one. During the 1980’s, other language publications began to emerge, namely articles and language study aids by elders May Dixon and Mary Palmantier with linguist Kuipers (1982),

**The Value of K’wseltktnéws**

Many sources on the early history of the Secwepemc report that the social structure was largely egalitarian, in that social status was based on individual strengths as related to group productivity and well-being. Everyone’s skills were utilized to improve the chances for the band’s survival. Haig-Brown writes,

Within the Secwepemc society existed all the complexities of a culture: government, religion, science, technology, acknowledgement and celebration of life passages, traditions, and oral history, which included a theory of origin. As with all cultures, language served as an expression of and for the transmission of culture. (Haig-Brown, 1989, p.23)

A key concept documented is that of interrelationship or k’wseltktnéws. Neskonlith Elder, George Manuel, refers to this concept in his book, *The fourth world*, co-written by Michael Poslun (1974). Manuel chronicles his life and contrasts the collective, earth-centred practices found in Secwepemc society with the exploitive greed predominant in colonial culture. He shares his understanding of the Secwepemc value of interrelationship:

The land from which our culture springs is like the water and the air, one and indivisible. The land is our Mother Earth. The animals who grow on that land are our spiritual brothers. We are part of that Creation that the Mother Earth brought forth. More complicated, more sophisticated than the other creatures, but no nearer to the Creator who infused us with life. (p. 6)
He further relates how important it is to maintain this connection to the land:

   So long as there is a single thread that links us to the ways of our 
grandfathers, our lives are strong. However thin and delicate that thread may 
be, it will support the weight of a stronger cord that will tie us securely to the 
land. (p. 4)

Within recent Secwepemc scholarship, the value of k’weslktktnéws is explored in 
traditional oral narratives. In Ignace’s, *Our oral histories are our iron posts: 
Secwepemc stories and historical consciousness* (2008) he demonstrates how 
kw’seltkten, or relationship through kinship, helps tie the individual to land and 
culture. He describes kw’seltkten as being:

   …a network of kin-based relationships, whereby each Secwépemc person 
has ties of kinship and/or in-lawship that, if we can remember enough 
generations and individuals’ kinship ties, literally extends throughout 
Secwépemc territory. (pp.186-187)

Ignace explores how the value of kinship is extended in oral narratives to include 
beings from the natural world as relatives.

Ignace’s work also helps validate the oral tradition as a source of historical 
information. Through examining historical evidence found in *stsptekwle* that parallel 
historical and scientific findings (p.33), he substantiates the argument brought forth 
by a number of scholars that stories are not limited to the role of teaching societal 
mores, but also contribute to our understanding of historical events (Cruickshank, 
1998; Tonkin, 1992; von Gernet & Canada, 2002; Wickwire, 2005). His use of the 
oral tradition as a window into Secwepemc history allows us an opportunity to see a 
more complete picture of the past, beyond what has been available in written
documentation. As there has been little documentation available on early Secwepemc life, many curriculum resources on Secwepemc culture have drawn from Teit’s records. From descriptions by early ethnographers, Teit and Boaz, we find general accounts of late 1800s to early 1900s Secwepemc society. They described a fully functioning society complete with its own language and systems of laws, customs, beliefs that supported a way of life finely tuned to their environment. Teit’s ethnographic accounts are considered by some to provide a clearer representation of Secwepemc life, due to his association with the neighbouring N’lîkepemc tribe (Wickwire, 1998). Although Teit’s ties to native culture may have influenced his observations, other sources, including Ignace’s work and Elder’s personal narratives (Manuel & Poslun, 1974; Thomas, 2002), acknowledge the presence of the core value of interrelationship.

The Value of Knucwestsuts

Although the value of k’wseltktnêws, or interrelationship, can be considered a foundational value of the Secwepemc, another value can be considered key to the maintenance of a strong Nation. The value of knucwestsuts reinforces the importance of developing “self” in order to strengthen the collective value of k’wseltktnêws. The late Mary Thomas, a highly respected Neskonlith band Elder, expanded on the theme of interrelationship through emphasizing the role of individual strengthening in maintaining healthy families. Within a book she co-produced with the University of Victoria titled, The wisdom of Dr. Mary Thomas she wrote:
All these adults, young moms, young dads, uncles, big brothers, sisters, grandparents, were on the outside of the circle. In the middle was the little children and each one of these people on the outside of the circle had an obligation to teach these little ones in the middle how to become strong, to be part of the strong family circle. (2002, p. 80)

The value of knucwestsut.s was an integral feature in Secwepemc ontology and epistemology and can be found within many Secwepemc stories and teachings.

Recent work by Neskonlith band member and co-founder of Chief Atahm School, Dr. Janice Billy also adds to our understanding of the relationship between the values of k’wseltktnéws and knucwestsut.s. As Ignace’s research adds to our understanding of Secwepemc history through an Indigenous perspective, Billy’s research, Back from the brink: Decolonizing through the restoration of Secwepemc language, culture and identity (2009), gives an Indigenous perspective to Secwepemc pedagogy. Her study is of particular relevance as the author is a former teacher of Chief Atahm School and she focuses on the development of an educational training model based on Secwepemc epistemology and pedagogy. Billy explores the interrelationship of traditional values and childrearing. The value of knucwestsut.s can be seen as an important part of traditional childrearing as care was to taken to educate the child on their responsibilities to the community and to the land that provided for them. She writes,

As in other Indigenous cultures, paramount to Secwepemc child-rearing practices was the constant and consistent attention to the child’s moral development. Morals, beliefs, and attitudes that promote and maintain harmony, respect, and non-interference were instilled at a young age. (p.37)
Throughout childhood, each child was expected to hone their individual strengths in a series of physical, spiritual and intellectual challenges often presented to them by a mentor or grandparent. The value of knucwestsut.s was a key feature in etsxe, the vision quest that marked transition into adulthood. Young adolescents would be challenged to live alone in a remote site with the ultimate goal of connecting to their sne7e or personal power spirit (p.30). Billy’s findings support that these teachings were reinforced within stsptekwle and within Secwepemc pedagogy through the development of such skills as observation, mindfulness, perseverance, and sharing.

Billy’s education model based on the principles of shared decision-making, collective responsibility, independence, and relationship is encapsulated in a quote from a research participant, “We start from the family (following these principles) and expand into the community” (p.191). In support of this development she proposes the employment of “multiple strategies of decolonization” in order to help restore traditional knowledge systems to form a stronger foundation for educating Secwepemc youth.

The key concepts of strengthening self and interrelationship, as shared by Elders George Manuel and Mary Thomas and reinforced by Secwepemc scholarship, help to expand on the values shared within Secwepemc stsptekwle. Both Billy and Ignace are examples of a growing trend towards empowering Secwepemc voice within research. Ignace, a fluent speaker and storyteller, help to validate stsptekwle as a source of Secwepemc knowledge and history. Billy’s paper establishes the foundational values within traditional Secwepemc child rearing within the context of a decolonizing agenda. The focus on transformation in her research gives agency to
the development of culturally preferred Secwepemc education models such as Chief Atahm School.

Part Three: The Myth Behind the Margins

Using the subversive spirit of the Trickster, I now turn the world upside down to look at the guiding research questions in reverse. Through a reshaping of Secwepemc history as myth, I will uncover the experiences that led to the disruption of language and knowledge transfer within the Secwepemculcw. In addition, I also invert the focus from the motivating factors and resiliency of language programs towards the colonial myths that influenced language apathy and immobilization.

The Trickster’s First Contact

To help us understand the extent to which colonization altered Secwepemc consciousness, we will need to retrace the stages of colonial contact within the Nation. In ethnographic records, Teit documents that the coming of the white man, or “séme7”\(^5\), into Interior Salishan territories, was prophesized by Nlaka’pamux Indian doctors, long before their arrival (Teit, 1900, pp. 364-366). However, the earliest written records of contact are found in the journals of North West Company explorer, Alexander MacKenzie, documenting his expedition in 1793 from the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean (MacKenzie, 2001). The first extended period of contact in the Secwepemculcw began in 1811 when Alexander Ross and David Ignace notes the term “séme7” may derive from the Salish root “sem-”, to tell stories. The word “shama” in reference to a whiteman is found in Chinook jargon. My late father, Joe Michel and his brother, Lawrence Michel believed it referred to “shaman”, in reference to their magical weaponry and other “powers”.

\(^5\) Ron Ignace
Stuart of the Pacific Fur Company began plans to set up a permanent trading post in Kamloops. The fur trade era was considered by many to be a time of generally peaceful relationships between the newcomers and the Secwepemc with little changes within Secwepemc traditional life (Campbell, 1983; Cropped Ear Wolf & Secwepemc Cultural Education Society, 1996; Fisher, 1977).

**Settlement in the Secwepemculecw**

As the fur trade gave way to a new tide of European settlement, the fight to maintain a subsistence lifestyle became more challenging. The appointment of James Douglas as the first Governor of the Colony of British Columbia in 1858 indicated a transitioning of colonial interest from the fur trade to settlement (Fisher, 1977, pp.50-53). The discovery of gold in 1858 along the Fraser and Thompson Rivers dramatically sped up the process of displacing the Secwepemc from their lands and traditional gathering areas. In an attempt to enforce British interests in the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush, Douglas quickly placed territory in the Cariboo under Crown title. Settlement was offered at attractively low prices, but for British subjects only. Within a few years, the newly formed town of Barkerville, bordering Secwepemc and Chilcotin First Nations, became known as the largest mining town in the Cariboo. During the peak of the Gold Rush between 1863-1864, approximately 10,000 people resided in the area (B.C Archives, 2010).
The Emergence of the Colonial Trickster

With growing colonial interest in the Gold Rush, we begin to see evidence of the “Colonial Trickster” laying claim to large areas within the Secwepemc territory. Up to this point in time, the Secwepemc had co-existed with the fur trade with little indication of language erosion. However, the rapid population shift upped the ante, so to speak, for colonial claim to Secwepemc territory. The clash between the Secwepemc values of relationship and cooperation versus the European values of competition and personal wealth, created a new host of problems in Secwepemc communities. Not only did the Secwepemc and European economic systems widely differ, but also did their underlying epistemologies. The Secwepemc view of the earth and its resources as interrelated and inseparable from self was directly contradicted by the European view of resources as commodities to be extracted from the earth and sold to accumulate wealth. Within the fur trade era the Secwepemc language remained healthy; however, the introduction of new forms of economy signalled the beginnings of cultural and economic transitions.

The early ethnographical accounts of Teit and Boaz, published in the early 1900s, are but a few literary sources from which we can reconstruct the history of cultural shift during this era. However, as has occurred in other Indigenous communities, the Secwepemc world was soon documented by waves of anthropologists, linguists, ethnographers, and other social scientists from the early 20th century onwards. With each act of naming the Secwepemc world through the perspective of the colonizer, they symbolically placed European title on Secwepemc land and traditions. Smith, in Decolonizing methodologies, characterizes this process of describing our world in
Eurocentric eyes as a colonizing weapon of control (2006, p.51). This naming became an act of establishing territory, an act of discovery and symbolic ownership by the colonizers.

Although many of the researchers believed that their research could help bring aid to the tragic, dying Secwepemc, often their accounts merely appeased the curiosity of the new settlers. The romanticized views of the 'savage life' describing a quaint and primitive existence succeeded in distancing the Secwepemc from colonial, civilized society. This dichotomy is explored in Said’s discourse, Orientalism (1979). Said argues that Western discourse on the Orient began as a systematic process of knowledge gathering with the intent to portray its subjects and its systems as inferior to that of Western civilization. He describes the management of knowledge as a process whereby the West had to “conceive of the difference between cultures, first, as creating a battlefront that separates them, and second, as inviting the West to control, contain, and otherwise govern (through superior knowledge and accommodating power) the Other (pp. 47-48). In essence, the gathering and dissemination of knowledge about the Secwepemc can also be viewed as a process of naming, claiming, and establishing of boundaries that marginalized the Secwepemc.

A 1912 article from the Catholic Encyclopedia provides an example of how the “Shuswap” were often portrayed in text:

In their primitive condition the Shuswap were without agriculture, depending for subsistence upon hunting, fishing, and the gathering of wild oats and berries. The deer was the principal game animal and each family group had
its own hereditary hunting ground and fishing place… The tribal organization was loose, without central authority. Village chiefs were hereditary, and the people were divided into "nobles", commons, and slaves, the last being prisoners of war and their descendants, perhaps purchased from some other tribe. There were no clans and descent was paternal. (Mooney, 1912, para. 4)

It continues with:

Heathenism and old custom are now extinct, the entire tribe being civilized and officially reported Catholic, with the exception of one band of forty-five attached to the Anglican Church. (para. 6)

Such research served to entrench in colonial consciousness, stories portraying First Nations through a Western perspective that positioned the colonial world as superior to the savage world. The “Colonial Story” depicting the Shuswap Indians as an inferior, primitive society in need of rescuing, helped reinforce the dominance of Euro-Canadian society and introduced the Secwepemc to a distorted mirror from which to view their reflection.

The reproduction of the “Colonial Story” within research, education, and the media, has influenced individual’s attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about language. Linguists Kroskrity and Field (2009) describe Indigenous language ideologies as being “grounded in the social distribution of both Indigenous social inequality and the differential impact of colonial and postcolonial contact experiences (p. 6). Several studies in diverse Indigenous communities report a prevailing belief in the inferiority of the Indigenous languages in relation to English (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1998; Dorian, 1987; Kroskrity, 2004; Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari, 2003). In the
Secwepemc Nation, the rapid decline of language use by individuals and within community can be seen as being directly influenced by both overt and hidden hegemonic practices.

**Trickster Claims the Souls of the Shuswap**

The establishment of ideological and physical boundaries that marginalized the Secwepemc was essential to colonial settlement in B.C. With the ending of the fur trade era and the sudden onslaught of goldminers, settlement in the Secwepemc territory became a priority. Unfortunately, this sudden population influx also coincided with the arrival of smallpox into the Secwepemculecw. Teit (1909) reported the loss of many Secwepemc lives to the smallpox epidemic that spread from the Coast and into the Interior:

> The population is somewhat more than that of the Thompson Indians, but it is now probably less than one-third of what it was fifty years ago. Small-pox epidemics have been the prime cause of this decrease. This disease has visited portions of the tribe twice; and in 1862 and 1863, it was especially severe, wiping out whole villages. (p.463)

One report estimates that the Shuswap population “declined by nearly 70 percent—from approximately 7,200 people in 1850 to 2,185 in 1903” (Coffey et al., 1990, p. 37).

During this period, the Christian missions capitalized on the vulnerable state of the people by enjoying record numbers of conversions into the faith. The Christian missions seized the opportunity to reinforce the road to salvation. Grant’s (1984)
Moon of wintertime, explores the trend of Christian conversions that coincided with times of crisis:

One of the great attractions of Christianity was the hope that it would open to Indians opportunities hitherto available only to whites. Some of these opportunities, constantly held out as inducements by the missionaries themselves, were tangible and material. (p. 5)

The acceptance of a Christian model of faith can be seen as indicators of rising doubt in the ability of traditional knowledge systems to navigate past the new monster, smallpox.

Unfortunately, the greatly diminished Secwepemc population provided an ideal opportunity for the colonial government to accelerate settlement. Secwepemc Elder and statesman, George Manuel (Manuel & Posluns, 1974), observed that the rise of Christianity facilitated the establishment of a new colonial political structure by first undermining the foundational beliefs of our land-based culture (p.60). Michelle Pigeon (2008) explored how the positioning of Christianity over Indigenous beliefs was related to establishment of power:

The conception of power in terms of superiority and inferiority is based on Euro-Western values. Consequently, power becomes a useful concept when considering the hierarchical nature of epistemology that places Euro-Western ways of knowing and being at the top and Indigenous values and epistemologies at the bottom. Such hierarchies run counter to Indigenous understandings of relationships and the interconnectedness of these relationships, whether animate, inanimate, or spiritual. (p.31)
Key to the goals of Euro-Canada, was expansion into new territories where trades and practices would support a capitalistic economy. Smith, in *Decolonizing methodologies*, draws relationships between the social institutions of British society and their economic systems as “These institutions were underpinned by economic systems, notions of property and wealth, and were increasingly legitimated in the West through Judaeo-Christian beliefs” (2006, p.46). The Christian religious structure provided the ideological foundation for the establishment of a paternalistic hierarchical system found in European society that facilitated a capitalistic economy.

Not only did the implementation of Christian models of faith serve to advance European interests and authority in the Secwepemc territory, it also served to erode the authority of Secwepemc language, culture, and knowledge. George Manuel (Manuel & Posluns, 1974) reflected on the role that religion played in displacing traditional forms of government, spirituality, and leadership, “This was the role of the church. It was not only our chiefs and wise men who had to contend for power. Our Mother the Earth had to contend with Holy Mother the Church” (p.60). Secwepemc Elder, Mary Thomas, noted that it was difficult for the people to reconcile their earth-based spiritual beliefs with the Christian myth that placed Man at the centre of creation:

> So I like to tell these funny little stories; they just give you food for thought. Because of the change in our belief, the way we believe, we were connected to Mother Nature, that we’re part of Mother Nature, and we have respect for Mother Nature. And these things that came in really confused our people. And I guess it took a long time for our people to really – I hate to use the
word, but I guess brainwash – to believing in the Christianity. (Thomas, 2002, p. 49)

Although conversions indicated a public acceptance of the faith, this did not necessarily indicate an understanding of Christian beliefs. Due to the language barriers and contrasting belief systems, it is unlikely that the transition to Christianity was immediate. Ignace’s (2008, pp.283-284) examination of Catholic rituals and hymns translated into the Secwepemc language in the late 1800s gives evidence of the resilience of cultural beliefs. He noted the presence of many Secwepemc motifs imbedded within the songs and prayers, indicating a continued influence of traditional spirituality. Although Christian missions were established within all five major divisions of the Secwepemc Nation by the end of the 18th century, Teit notes that the vast majority of Secwepemc maintained a traditional lifestyle (1909, p. 463). The Secwepemc language continued to be the language used for communication within families and communities.

**The Trickster Goes to School**

The changes within the Secwepemc Nation occurring in the late 1800s to early 1900s were consistent with the process of colonization occurring in all First Nations of Canada. In 1871, with the colony of British Columbia becoming the sixth province to incorporate into Canadian Confederation, there was renewed focus on the “Indian problem”. Several studies document policy changes in this era that led to further displacement of B.C.’s First Nations (Fisher, 1977; Knight, 1996; Tennant, 1990). To maximize the growth of the new country, it was understood that Aboriginal ties to
the land had to be negated by destroying the spiritual and cultural systems that supported that connection.

Although missions were well established in all areas of the Secwepemculecw and there was growing colonial settlement throughout the Nation, the Secwepemc still clung to their rights to harvest from their lands and to live a lifestyle consistent with their worldview. The Secwepemc claim to the land was as strong as ever, as evidenced in a document presented to the Government of Canada in 1910:

For a time we did not feel the stealing of our lands very heavily. As the country was sparsely settled we still had considerable liberty in the way of hunting, fishing, grazing, and so on, over by far the most of it. However, owing to increased settlement in late years this was changed, and we are being more and more restricted to our reservations which in most places are unfit or inadequate to maintain us. Except we can get fair play we can see we will go to the wall and most of us be reduced to beggary or to continuous wage slavery. (Memorial to Sir Wilfred Laurier, 1910)

The new citizens of B.C. and of Canada saw the inability of the Secwepemc and other First Nations to embrace the new model of society as an obstacle to gaining full dominance in all areas of Canada. It became apparent that the most advantageous route was to educate the First Nations away from their traditional lifestyles and towards becoming “model British citizens”.

Owing to the successful implementation of the public school model in Canada, the disciplinary powers of education were then applied to help contain the “Indian problem”. Borrowing from Bourdieu's perspective (1997), the introduction of education to First Nations was essential in promoting and perpetuating the British
colony’s cultural capital. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital helps explain the role educational and artistic institutions play in legitimating and perpetuating dominant society’s knowledge and culture. His theory of social reproduction helps to frame the education of First Nations in Canada within the colonizing agenda of Euro-Canada. Replacing traditional paths of knowledge transfer with an educational system that reproduced the values and beliefs of the dominant culture was an effective mechanism that destroyed the ability of “the other” (First Nations) to pass on their traditions.

The reproduction of the message that First Nations were inferior to Euro-Canadians was supported through educational practices that rewarded the privileged few who could quickly grasp that the secret to success lie in rejecting their savage upbringings and embracing the new cultural ethos of Canada. Bourdieu states how, through this process:

…each family transmits to its children, indirectly rather than directly, a certain cultural capital and a certain ethos. The latter is a system of implicit and deeply interiorized values which, among other things, helps to define attitudes towards the cultural capital and educational institutions. (1976, p. 110)

Other critical theorists have expanded on the relationship between education to underlying political, social, and economic agendas (Apple, 1979; Bernstein, 1975; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Critical theory has helped to expose the role of education as a structural support that assists in maintaining the power and authority of a dominant society.
From as early as 1889 we can find evidence of the underlying agenda for education of First Nations. This quote by Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed demonstrates the intention of displacing Indigenous knowledges and languages:

... every effort should be directed against anything calculated to keep fresh in the memories of children habits and associations which it is one of the main objects of industrial institutions to obliterate. (cited in Titley, 1988, p. 78)

Early educational policies focused on replacing traditional paths of knowledge transfer with an educational system promoting Euro-Canadian values and beliefs and that trained First Nations to serve the needs of the dominant culture. To develop Euro-Canadian social and cultural capital, the role of the educational system was to establish a position of superiority over First Nations by negating their knowledges, beliefs, and languages.

**Day Schools and Boarding Schools**

By the 1890s, there were 20 industrial schools operating in Canada. By 1910, there was a shift towards government funded boarding schools run by the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic churches. In some remote and rural First Nations’ communities in B.C., day schools instead of boarding schools were established. Initially, the government looked favourably on this model, as it required fewer resources to operate. Although these schools struggled with little resources and could not attract the best teachers, the benefit to communities was that the children could return home everyday. In many of these communities, the First Nations language and culture proved more resilient. Paradoxically, the areas once
pronounced failures by school officials have become the areas with the most potential for language survival today.

To compliment education policies aimed at assimilation, the government enacted several other policies to further assert their authority over First Nations. By the early 1900s, overwhelming external pressures made it nearly impossible to continue living a Secwepemc traditional lifestyle. As their traditional economies collapsed, they were compelled to seek survival in a system intent on destroying their culture.

**Coyote transforms into Pteseg**

Indications of tensions and cultural shift within the Secwepemc Nation during this period can be found in the oral historical narrative and in the storytelling tradition of stsptekwle. Ignace theorizes that the traditional stories often present historical happenings within the narratives:

…storytellers like Harry Robinson creatively used Coyote stories to make points about our peoples’ relations with the Crown, and set out the agenda to “live by stories”, interweaving ancient “mythical” events of powerful animal beings, what we Secwépemc call stseptekwll, with “historical” events that can be situated in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. (Ignace, 2008, p.35)

A form of historical narrative describing cultural shift from this period can be found in a genre of Secwepemc stories often referred to as Pteseg (Pit-a-saw) stories. These stories are based on a traditional storytelling form, yet often depict Secwepemc people working at menial jobs for the seme7, or Euro-Canadian employers. This dramatic shift from stories depicting human-to-animal relationships to stories centering on human-to-human relationships reflect the arrival of a new cast
of characters in Secwepemc life. Within these stories, the new Secwepemc hero Pteseg replaces the Trickster Coyote. Pteseg is portrayed as a crafty, carefree character that skillfully manipulates his new environment. He often gains the upper hand over his employer and other colonial settlers who hold positions of power.

These stories exemplify the adaptive nature of the oral tradition and its ability to incorporate timely themes. Kroeber, a scholar of the Native American mythic tradition, refers to myth’s role in reflecting societal pressures:

… oral myths come into being through individual imaginings of the cultural conditions of the imaginers, and that myths frequently serve as means to investigate whatever pressures produced the subject of the myth. (1998, pp. 75-76)

Following along this argument, we can assume that the introduction of a Secwepemc hero in stories was an adaptive feature of the storytelling tradition that helped assist with understanding of the new colonial order that was persistently pressuring Secwepemc society.

**Compulsory School Attendance**

In 1920, Indian Affairs minister, Duncan Campbell Scott, successfully pushed for changes to the Indian Act that made school attendance compulsory. This significant policy change began a new era of forced assimilation practices of the Canadian
government. Scott’s plans of civilizing the Native population brings to mind Said’s (1979) *Orientalism* as it related to palimpsest\(^6\), or cultural erasure:

The outlook in British Columbia is certainly encouraging; there is fine material among the natives to make good British citizens, and in two or three decades we may expect that a large number of Indians will have been absorbed into the ordinary life of the Province. (Scott, 1931, p.11)

The advent of compulsory schooling occurred at a time when Secwepemc society was already in a weakened state. Some families rejected the imposition of the government while others saw it as an opportunity for their children to learn how to fit into the new society. In the Secwepemc Nation, there were two residential schools, the Kamloops Residential School, and the Williams Lake Residential School. The effectiveness of the plan was demonstrated when most Secwepemc children entered into the schools with the Secwepemc language as their only language and returned home with a newfound sense of shame in their culture, language and heritage. Celia Haig-Brown, in her book titled, *Resistance and renewal: Surviving the Indian residential school*, shares an experience of one of the students of the Kamloops Indian Residential School:

> Before I left [home], I was full of confidence: I could do everything that was needed to be done at home... But when I arrived here all that left me. I felt so helpless. The Shuswap language was no use to me... the supervisors couldn’t understand. (1989, p. 49)

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\(^6\) “Palimpsest”, originally a term for a parchment from a scroll or book with the text scraped off in order for it to be used again, helps to describe the process of rewriting, or “othering”, of existing cultures through colonial discourses placing colonial society as superior.
The residential school system made a profound and lasting impact on Secwepemc life. Evidence of cultural erasure can also be found in a story shared by a residential school survivor:

They took away my belongings, they took away everything from me. Everything that’s important to me, mother, father, culture. But not my spirit, no way. They stripped us of everything. Gave us brown uniforms and a number. And they put what they wanted into us, made us ashamed of who we are. Even to this day, it still affects me. Like I really want to get into Indian things and I just can’t because of them telling us it was of the devil.

(Jack, 2000, p.29)

The government’s goal of assimilation has resulted in generations of First Nations unable to recover from the debilitating effects of Canada’s version of “identity theft”.

Students who attended the residential school became the first generation of parents in Secwepemc history whose children were raised knowing only English. James Crawford (1997), a researcher on bilingual education writes about how the decision of raising children in the dominant culture’s language is often not a conscious choice, but one that is greatly influenced by social disruption. He comments on the choices made by Aboriginals who attended boarding schools:

Some people believe that the boarding school experience has had a delayed effect, inducing shame amongst many Indians about their culture or at least convincing them that their languages are a source of educational difficulties. So, on becoming parents themselves, they have raised their children only or mostly in English, believing this would help them in school. In my observation, such practices are not uncommon among Indian parents even today.

(Crawford, 1997, p.56)
One Secwepemc Elder, reflecting back on this era, recalls the decisions he made for his own children:

...before going to school I often hear my parents say that the language wouldn’t do us any good in finding work and everything like that. Why you kept us in school was that we could find work outside the village, and this is what I was doing when I was growing up and when I was raising a family. I was living outside my reserve and not thinking at all. I was just thinking about my work, what I done during the day to bring home the bacon, as it were. But I didn’t even give them [my children] one idea about the language. (Michel, 2005, p.72)

Although the residential school system is not the only reason that the use of the Secwepemc language declined, it served to be an effective mechanism to destroy the will of an entire generation of Secwepemc people to raise their own children in the language.

The Government of Canada’s role in the development of the residential school policy, and its consequent enactment over several decades, clearly had the destruction of Aboriginal language and culture in mind. The growing body of literature that documents the residential school system in Canada helps to frame the residential school era within a national context (Chansonneuve & Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005; Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 2006; Grant & Cardinal-Schubert, 2004; Haig-Brown, 1989; Jack, 2000; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). These texts inform the research by providing a variety of perspectives of a period in Canadian history in which First Nation language loss occurred at a rapid rate. As the true magnitude of the devastation brought on by the residential school experiment is still
being uncovered, we can predict that it will be strongly implicated in the destruction of Aboriginal languages. The story being shared was that the social and cultural capital belonged to the séme7 (Whiteman). The message was clear: in order to have a future in Canada they would have to leave their Secwepemc language and culture behind.

The impact of residential schooling extends into future generations, as families reproduce the cycles of oppression, abuse, shame, and grief, originating in residential school. Green (2009) draws on the works of critical theorists Fanon (1965), Memmi (1967), and Said (1979) to explore how individual and collective memories have shaped Indigenous identities:

Identity is never “pure,” uncontaminated by the racist imposition of colonialism. It is always a response to culture, politics, and the particularities of communities’ histories. What Indigenous identities are now are a consequence of pre-existing factors and colonising processes and conditions. Identity is complicated by the multiple cultural and political influences internalized by individuals and shared across communities. (Green, p. 37)

We can look to the historical and collective memories of the staff, parents, and students of Chief Atahm School to witness how one generation’s experiences influence the next. As many of the Chief Atahm School Elders are former students of the Kamloops Residential School, their experiences can be viewed as representative of this era. Their subsequent choice to become involved in language revitalization gives testament to the resiliency language and offers hope to others seeking to move past the “Colonial Story”.
The Plan for Integration

The Government of Canada has actively pursued the extinguishment of First Nations cultures, languages, and knowledge systems throughout its first 100 years of power. Initially, these efforts were defined within its policy of assimilation, and later, through its policy of integration. During the 1940s, the Canadian government came under increasing pressure to phase out residential schooling. There now was a cry for “integration” of First Nations into mainstream Canada. The shift in policy to an integrated approach to Aboriginal education was a continued attempt at molding First Nations to be model Canadian citizens. By 1969, sixty-one percent of school-aged native children in Canada were attending public schools.

The transition to public schooling for the Secwepemc population perpetuated the negation of First Nations’ culture found in residential schools. No attempts were made to ensure a smooth transition from home-life to the new school culture. Within an environment devoid of Secwepemc language and culture, students were expected to embrace the new public school culture and be grateful for the opportunity to interact with white students. Communities with large native populations, such as the towns of Kamloops and Chase, saw public school populations change overnight. Racism and social stratification became immediately apparent.

The rapid movement away from connections to community and culture led to greater feelings of isolation and confusion within First Nations families. The message to forget the past and move on was reproduced at every level. From the late 1800s to
the late 1900s, Canada’s focus on obliterating First Nations’ connections to land, language, and community, had remained constant. The positioning of Euro-Canadian society as superior was systematically reproduced throughout the boarding school era, the day school era, and the residential school era. The final “prize” heralded by Canadians and First Nations alike, was the allowance of First Nations into the public school system. Bourdieu’s examination of cultural capital helps us to understand that this seemingly positive step towards equality for First Nations in Canada could also be interpreted as a backwards step for linguistic and cultural survival. He writes:

... by treating all pupils, however unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, the educational system is led to give its de facto sanction to initial cultural inequalities. The formal equality which governs pedagogical practice is in fact a cloak for and a justification of indifference to the real inequalities with regard to the body of knowledge taught or rather demanded. (1976, p.113)

Within the public school system, the absence of direct involvement of First Nations within policy planning, program development, and administration gave further evidence that assimilation remained the underlying goal. The message that was delivered was insidious: success requires that you leave your past behind and accept schooling as a gateway into Canada’s economy. The widespread acceptance of public schooling within First Nations’ communities not only was an indication of the growing cultural capital of Euro-Canada, but also what Bourdieu (1986) termed as the “domestic transmission of cultural capital” (p.244).
Within families, children were being told that schooling was the way to getting a job and securing a good future. The growing acceptance of the Canadian education system as the “best” or “only” alternative for schooling was an indicator of hegemonic beliefs within First Nation communities. Graham Smith (2003) uses Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” (1971) to demonstrate a trend in Indigenous communities of “colonizing self”:

Hegemony is a way of thinking – it occurs when oppressed groups take on dominant group thinking and ideas uncritically and as `common-sense’, even though those ideas may in fact be contributing to forming their own oppression. It is the ultimate way to colonize a people; you have the colonized colonizing themselves! (Smith, p. 3)

Mainstream education removed First Nations from a position of authority and effectively devalued Indigenous knowledges, languages, and beliefs. Children seen as “successes” of the public school system often would do so at the expense of their cultural identity. One Secwepemc woman, who is now a schoolteacher recalls,

... I didn’t feel like I had a voice in a big classroom with a bunch of non-native students. I don’t think I felt like I measured up. I was labelled as shy and a lot of times I was asked to answer something and I knew the answer but I chose not to answer. And I don’t know – it’s a fear of drawing attention to myself. I was different and I didn’t want to think about it. I was different and unique, and yet, I was maybe different in not a good way. And that’s how I felt, and that’s how I went to school everyday. (Michel, 2005, p.83)

The limited exposure of the Secwepemc language and the absence of Secwepemc teachings within the public school system can be seen as a strong influencing factor in language choice within families. Although there have been immense historical
pressures leveled against the Secwepemc language, its continued existence speaks of the strength and fortitude of the community and the culture.

To this day, public schooling remains the primary educational choice for First Nations in B.C., although there is little to indicate that the integration plan has been successful. A statement from the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) supports the findings of The Hawthorn Report that integration has fallen short of its goal:

They leave the school system without the requisite skills for employment [and] without the language and cultural knowledge of their people. Rather than nurturing the individual, the school experience typically erodes identity and self-worth. Those who continue in Canada’s formal education systems told us of regular encounters with racism, racism expressed not only in interpersonal exchanges but also through the denial of Aboriginal values, perspectives and cultures in the curriculum and the life of the institution. (1996, p. 434)

In response to such criticisms, the Ministry of Education in B.C. has made marginal changes aimed at encouraging cultural bridging in public schools. Bear-Nicholas (2009) criticizes these efforts as merely “window dressing” the ongoing agenda of assimilation. She states that:

…calls for Indigenizing the school, through the development of “culturally-appropriate” curriculum, the hiring of more First Nations people in the schools, the establishment of more core language and culture teaching, and more pressure on parents and communities to become involved in these efforts. As well-intentioned as these strategies may seem, it is now quite clear that while they are ostensibly offered in the interest of Indigenous children, they are not
only ineffective, but actually work to support assimilationist goals insofar as they serve to attract Indigenous children into what is essentially a destructive system for them. In other words, they are mere window-dressing that effectively conceals and promotes the real educational agenda of assimilation. (p.25)

Within Billy’s recent work (2009) we find a quote from a Secwepemc parent who shares in the view that no matter how it's packaged, the dominant culture’s education system is still aimed at absorbing Canada’s First Nations into the body politic:

I feel that the current education system that is in place here in British Columbia is just a continuation of the government run Indian Residential School system. Instead now parents are sending their children to school to get colonized by the colonizers. Our Secwepemc children are still taken away every day to attend the white Canadian public school system, the white ways, language, history and culture indoctrinated into our children’s minds, which inevitably influence their thoughts, actions and identity for the rest of their lives. The English language, the European history, the Canadian history that only focuses on white values are taught to our Secwepemc children. I feel that the current school system focus is on training the students to become ‘good upstanding Canadian citizens’ who will get an ‘education’, and get a good career so that they can work their way up into white European/Canadian society. (p. 202)

Although there is evidence within the Chase area schools that attempts have been made to involve the Secwepemc community through the implementation of Secwepemc language programs within the elementary schools and high school, and through the hiring of First Nations support workers, the core programs essentially have remained unchanged. The language programs are offered in addition to the
existing core provincial courses in the elementary school and as electives in the high
school. In both cases, they are unable to provide the hours of language exposure
necessary to develop true communicative abilities in the *Secwepemc* language or to
help reconnect *Secwepemc* youth to their culture.

**Coyote Finds Another Use for White Paper**

Although the widespread loss of First Nations languages in B.C. can primarily be
attributed to a national agenda of assimilative and integrative practices, events
occurring nationally and internationally in Canada helped bring attention to language
issues. During the 1960s, there were great pushes for social change largely
influenced by the American civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. Newly
elected Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau became a spokesman for the establishment
of a unified Canada. His appeal to the populace’s fears and existing stereotypes of
the French and First Nations helped fuel the story that “Canada must be unified;
Canada must be one; Canada must be progressive; and Canada must be a just
society” (Ramphal, 2010). Trudeau’s comments on the French language took a
Social Darwinism approach:

> If their language in some way suffered, this was the inevitable cost that had to
be paid for the improved standard of living and technological advancement.
(as cited in Weaver, 1981, p.53)

The underlying message was that in order for all to prosper, we had to first destroy
any sovereign claims to cultures, languages, and beliefs that endangered the goals
of a unified Canada.
To facilitate his agenda, Trudeau issued a policy paper in 1969, proposing to eliminate special status for Aboriginal Peoples of Canada. The policy, now commonly referred to as the “White Paper”, proved to be one of the most contentious First Nations policy statements in the history of Canada. The impact of the policy’s proposal was immediate. First Nations from all across Canada vehemently opposed the government’s plan, prompting its subsequent withdrawal. As a small token of apology, the government introduced its Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1971, protecting the rights of all ethnic minorities in Canada. First Nations responded to this negatively as well, calling it, ... a reiteration of the White Paper of 1969, insofar as it purported to promote equality for all by ignoring the treaty status of First Nations peoples and proposing integration into the middle-class Canadian way of life. (Bear-Nicholas, 2001, p. 15)

These two government initiatives awakened First Nations across Canada and unified them in promoting and protecting their rights as first peoples. This momentum influenced future developments in policy, including one allowing for a separate model for First Nations’ education to emerge.

**From Trickster to Transformer**

In this chapter, I uncovered the stories that helped shape Euro-Canada’s relationship with the Secwepemc, and that, ultimately, influenced Secwepemc perception of self and eroded the collective value of k’weseltktən̓ews. By tracing the history of language loss, I began to see how early literature on the Secwepemc written from colonial perspective helped shaped Secwepemc consciousness. By
telling the story of how the “Colonial Trickster” cunningly convinced generations of Secwepemc to raise their children without the language, I have highlighted the imperialistic agenda that systematically negated Secwepemc identity and connection to community. In the next chapter, Coyote changes shape once again to appear as Transformer, to guide us to empowering sites of Indigenous language revitalization and immersion education.
Chapter Three: Coyote Transformations

I remember this time when my sons were about six and nine years old. It was well past their bedtimes, but I could still hear them talking in their rooms. I snuck up the stairs to catch them awake before they had a chance to feign sleep. Standing outside their door listening, I began to get drawn into their conversation. My younger son, Tekawus, was saying that he thought the stories that Sle7e Larry told in class about Sek’lep couldn’t be true because they were too crazy to be real. Seth, my oldest son, quickly came to the defense of the traditional stories told by my uncle, “Of course they’re true! If they weren’t, how could we have these big mountains, how could we have snow, or who else could make daytime and nighttime? Only Sek’lep’s magic could do that!”

It’s these kinds of memories that help keep me focused on the path of Secwepemc education when things start looking hopeless. I cherish all of the memories that serve as reminders of the precious gifts that Chief Atahm School has offered to my family. My sons’ conversation bears witness that the language, the stories, and the teachings shared by the Elders live inside of them. It is so gratifying to see how far we’ve moved forward from the dark days of residential schooling. I am proud to see how our small community has built our own education model from the groundwork first laid by First Nations organizations in the early 1970s. Although I know that there is still a mountain ahead of us to climb, it is gratifying to see that we are actively pursuing the dream of a Secwepemc education in our ways, in our language.
I remember the early days when the dream of starting a school was in its infancy. In the early 1990s, we began looking for answers for what to do with our children after their language nest years. Now that some of our children were getting too old to be in our preschool immersion program, we were concerned that all the language they learned could be lost. We began to entertain the idea of continuing the immersion idea into kindergarten. As the idea began to grow and take a life of its own, it began to shape into reality. Although we were caught up in the passion of starting our own school, it seemed we still took turns struggling with conflicting emotions. Questions arose from within us and from concerned family members and community. If we did start a school in our language, would it be considered too different or too radical? Would it further divide our communities? Would we be hurting our children by separating them from the rest of society? Could we teach them what they needed to know to survive in today’s world? All of these questions kept being swirled around. We all had our doubts, yet we were unwilling to let go of all the positive results we saw with the success of the Secwepemc Ka Language Nest.

I had my own share of doubts, as well as a spouse who wasn’t too keen on an alternative educational path for our children. I began to question whether my choice was a selfish one. Maybe that, by living vicariously through them and wanting for them something missing in myself, I would be ruining their chances of living a “normal” life. I felt pressured to make a choice before my oldest son started kindergarten in the fall. Since we lived right across the street from the Chase primary school, I began to observe the children as they played in the schoolyard. Over the course of a few days, I began to see a recurring pattern in the playground.
Children would flow out of the school every recess in an indistinguishable mob. One by one, as they made their way into the playground, they began to form into racially distinct play groups, like Cowboys and Indians. So much for the heated attack by some band members, accusing us of going backwards by segregating the children. I only needed to look to the local public school to see segregation in action. I thought about how unfair it would be for my fair-skinned child to have to make a choice no child should have to make. Deep down, I knew that it would be obvious even to a five year old, that the “Cowboys” were on the winning team. I also knew that if I didn’t give him the opportunity to learn what being ‘Indian’ meant from our Elders, then he would grow up only hearing the stories through the colonizer’s eyes, as I did when I was a child.

Once the decision was made to start a school, all of the internal conflicts and confrontations with community members took a backseat to the practical matters needing attending to. It has only been recently that I’ve found time to reflect on what lay at the root of these conflicts. Through this research, I’ve been able to discover many stories from other Indigenous communities that tell of their journeys towards language revitalization. All of them, in one way or another, share the stories of how their communities had also fallen victim to the Colonial Trickster.

In Chapter Two, I looped back into the Coyote Timeline of the Secwepemc to see how Canadian political and social agendas influenced the decline of the Secwepemc language. In essence, the eras of the fur trade and early colonial settlement can be seen as a two-stage process wherein Euro-Canada not only laid claim to the external lands of the Secwepemc, but also assumed the right to “restory” the internal
landscape. The assertion of their claim to power through education policies and practices effectively denigrated Secwepemc identity and disconnected positive ties to community.

In this chapter, I turn to the transformative powers of Coyote to help in identifying some of the theories and practices that have supported the movement away from language apathy towards the development of grassroots Indigenous immersion models. In Part One of this chapter, I frame the discovery of key sites of transformation in Indigenous education using the “Restorying” Coyote Theoretical Approach as follows:

1) “Restorying” the self to the Great Coyote Story through knucwetsut.s

2) “Restorying” responsibility to community through k’wseltktnéws

3) “Restorying” the relationship between knucwetsuts. and k’wseltktnéws through Secwepemc immersion education

In Part Two, I take on the curiosity of Coyote and go on a little journey to explore the area of language revitalization and transformational sites of Indigenous immersion education in Canada and in other parts of the world. Within this brief survey, I explore Indigenous language and education initiatives to highlight the challenging landscape that schools like Chief Atahm School emerge from. In addition, I search for language and immersion education policies within and outside of Canada that guide us towards improving the structural support for First Nations immersion education.
Part One: Reawakening Coyote

…Fox was out walking when he happened to see something lying ahead on the trail. As he got closer, he realized that it was his brother, Coyote, lying in a pool of blood. The beautiful tail that Coyote had pleaded to get from Fox now lay amongst the oozing mass of innards. Yet, Fox felt pity for his brother lying in such a state. He stuffed Coyote’s innards back inside him and replaced his tail. Fox quickly jumped over his brother three times to bring him back to life. Coyote slowly sat up, stretched, and yawned, and said, “Oh, I must have been sleeping here.” (Adapted from traditional stsptekwle )

The best part of any story is always Coyote’s line at the end, “Ooo, ne7e-e-e-elye ke etitcwe!”, or “I must have been sleeping here!” It makes it so apparent that Coyote just does what he does without feeling any remorse. We love him even though he never seems to learn from his actions. He just keeps travelling forth in search of more adventures. In a sense, although he seems so foolish, we still admire his ability to bounce back, without any thoughts of the past. If only we could bottle up this part of his personality and send it to all of the Indigenous peoples of the world to help them move past the ugly days of colonial contact. But lucky for us, some of that Coyote spirit must have leaked out into the atmosphere, because more and more qelmucwuw’i, or the “real” people of the world, are starting to wake up and move forward on their own paths of adventure.

Within the Secwepemculecw, it has taken us awhile to wake up from our slumber. Throughout the first one hundred years of contact, Euro-Canadian society systematically applied policies and practices that negated the two foundational
values essential to language survival, *knucwestsut.s*, and *k’wseltktnéws*. The value of *knucwestsut.s* as interpreted culturally, means “help yourself” in the sense that everyone has the responsibility of learning to take care of themselves by strengthening their gifts in order to best assist the family as a whole. Implicit in this value is that you must always come prepared for work, share your strengths, and never be a burden to anyone else. With the reproduction and reinforcement of the ‘Colonial Story’ positioning Euro-Canadian ideologies as superior, we begin to see new interpretations for *knucwestsut.s* arise. Whereas, before contact, the value was strongly tied to supporting *k’wseltktnéws*, or family, now we are seeing a more literal translation of the word, as in, “help yourself to more money, food, cars, etc…” The shift away from a *Secwépemc* epistemological understanding of the universe as interconnected, towards a Western model promoting the individual accumulation of wealth, has greatly contributed to the erosion of the relationship between self and community, land, and language.

**The Value of Knucwestsut.s**

Just as the “Colonial Story” was told in stages wherein the *Secwépemc* were first introduced to the story, began accepting the story, and finally, began internalizing the story as truth, the task of “Restorying” the *Secwépemc* language into the present context requires that we loop back into the Timeline. To reconstruct the story of how Chief Atahm School began the process of mending the relationship between *Secwépemc* self and community through language, we need to revisit the sites of transformation that helped support the process. This discussion will begin by
framing the literature around the value of *knucwestsuts*.s, and continue on to the value of *kweseltknéws*, although no sequence or hierarchy is intended.

The value of *knucwestsuts*.s is borrowed from Chief Atahm School's vision, principles, and practices (Billy, Michel & Michel, 2007). These principles were developed overtime by parents and staff through numerous school meetings and consultations with *Secwepemc* Elders to help guide teaching practices and curriculum development within the school. *Knucwestsuts*.s is one of the six *Secwepemc* principles they have outlined that support the overarching principle of *etsxe*, or prepare yourself for life:

1. *K’weseltknéws* – we are all related
2. *Knucwestsuts*.s – take care of yourself; hone individual strength
3. *Slexlexs* – develop wisdom; “to think right about something”; knowledge
4. *Mellelc* – take time to relax; regenerate and enjoy
5. *Qweqwetsin* – humble yourself to all creation; give thanks/gratitude for life

Within *Secwepemc* culture, there is a great emphasis on honing individual strength in order to fortify the collective. For example, there are stories told that when a baby boy is born, the midwife takes him to a nearby creek or river. The baby is dipped into the creek to symbolically prepare the child for a life of struggle. This value of *knucwestsuts*.s was also a prominent feature within the *etsxe*, or vision quest. The development of individual strength was of practical necessity, as everyone had to work together to survive within a subsistence lifestyle.
“Restorying” Self to Power through Knucwestut.s

The value of knucwestut.s was reinforced throughout childhood as preparation for the challenges that lay ahead. When children were removed from their homes and raised in residential schools, this disrupted the traditional method of training children to find their personal power and place in society through etsxe. In a sense, the multi-leveled assault by colonial powers can be interpreted as a collective struggle for which the Secwepemc had little preparation. It is only within the last few decades that there has been a growing realization of the effects that colonizing processes have had on the Secwepemc language, culture, and sense of community. This process of ‘awakening’ was simultaneously occurring in other Indigenous nations around the globe. The pathways being forged by Indigenous “Transformers” stemmed from a rising consciousness of the need to prepare in different ways to gain back the ancient wisdom essential to the survival of Indigenous people.

The late 1970s and the 1980s showed a growing trend of Indigenous research from around the globe in such diverse areas of study as education, health, and law that reflected common themes of transformation and resistance to colonization. Linda Tuhawai Smith in, Decolonizing methodologies, speaks about this period as a revolution of representation that is “countering the dominant society’s image of Indigenous peoples, their lifestyles and belief systems” (2006, p.151). She encouraged researchers to become storytellers from inside Indigenous community to help counteract the colonial myths reproduced within scholarship and society. Within the universities, Indigenous scholars (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Rigney, 1997; Smith, 1999) began to take on the challenge of exposing the untruths reproduced
through the education system. In the Australian context, the term “Aboriginalism”, adapted from Said's concept of “Orientalism” (Said, 1979) came to be used to describe this body of text that perpetuated the misrepresentation and oversimplification of Indigenous identity “as a fixed, static, a-historical category, frozen in time, ‘authentic’ only if unchanging, and ignoring the socially constructed and dynamic nature of Aboriginality” (Attwood, 1992; Bradford, 2001).

Within the Secwepemc Nation, a few notable path makers took on the role of sharing the Secwepemc story to the outside world. Sharing his political perspective, Secwepemc Elder George Manuel, helped inspire many of the world’s Indigenous peoples to fight to retain their Indigenous rights (Manuel & Posluns, 1974). Elder Mary Thomas also worked tirelessly to share her understanding of traditional wisdom through presentations at schools and several publications and co-publications (Thomas, 2002; Canadian Broadcast Corporation, 2006). Although there were many other Secwepemc storytellers who helped open up new areas of discovery, they shared their stories in other ways, leaving us with few published sources of Secwepemc experience. The awakening of these “Transformers” helped to remind us of the importance of representing self and to share the stories that were silenced in the past to help put an end to the “Colonial Story” being the only story being told.

As Indigenous communities began to “take charge of the key decision making… that reflect their cultural, political, economic and social preferences”, (Smith, 2005, p.4) some groups utilized Freire’s work to help inspire and structure community change. Freire’s theory of “conscientization” (2006) proposed that a genuine shift in
education could only occur when individuals truly come to understand the nature of their reality and how they have arrived at their dehumanized state, “The world – no longer something to be described with deceptive words – becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization” (p. 86). Smith’s *Kaupapa Maori Praxis* merged the theory of conscientization with Maori history and traditional knowledges. He explains how the process of “conscientization” lay at the foundation of the language and cultural “revolution” in Aotearoa (New Zealand):

The `real' revolution of the 1980’s was a shift in mindset of large numbers of Maori people - a shift away from waiting for things to be done to them, to doing things for themselves; a shift away from an emphasis on reactive politics to and an emphasis on being more proactive; a shift from negative motivation to positive motivation. These shifts can be described as a move away from talking simplistically about `de-colonization' (which puts the colonizer at the center of attention) to talking about `conscientization' or `consciousness-raising' (which puts Maori at the center). These ways of thinking illustrate a reawakening of the Maori imagination that had been stifled and diminished by colonization processes. (2003, p.2)

Smith’s *Kaupapa Maori Praxis* and Freire’s theory of conscientization, empowers the repositioning of the “Coyote Story” as the voice of wisdom within Secwepemc community, thus replacing the stories told through the distorted lens of the colonizers. Through engaging in this research journey, I join other Indigenous scholars who write their stories from within community. Moreover, by jumping on Coyote’s back and travelling outside of self to link with Secwepemc history, I seek to
repair some of the disconnect that has been forged over a century of colonization.

Through engaging in an indigenist research pathway, I not only honour the foundational Secwepemc value of knucwestsut.s, but also work towards “Restorying” myself in the process.

**The Value of K’wseltktnéws**

The era of reflection and awareness within scholarship helped support the growth of educational practices seeking to reconnect the self to community through culturally preferred education models. In Canada, the collective response to the White Paper was followed by a reawakening within education with the publication of the National Indian Brotherhood’s ‘Indian Control of Indian Education’ (1972). From that point there has been an increasing sense of urgency to re-affirm and re-establish cultural knowledge, philosophy, and practices in education (Barman, Hebert & McAskill, 1986; Kirkness, 1992). This new sense of purpose fueled the development of empowering Aboriginal research and educational initiatives that created pathways for programs such as Chief Atahm School to arise.

Many communities saw the important role First Nations languages played in the transmission of culture. Scholarship that advocated for the strengthening of identity and connection to Indigenous culture developed an awareness of language issues (Armstrong, 1987; Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Kawagley, 2006; Hall, Rosenberg & Dei, 2000). They understood that the forces of colonial domination that deliberately and systematically undermined the cultural values of Indigenous people (Barman, 1986; Kirkness, 1992) would have to be fought just as passionately and persistently
as it was implemented. Increasingly, we are seeing Indigenous groups worldwide developing models of education from the “ground-up” based on Indigenous ontology, epistemology, and ideology that utilize an Indigenous language as the medium for communication (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2007; DeJong, 1998; Pease-Pretty On Top, 2003). Although, to date, fewer than 20 Aboriginal communities in Canada have pursued Indigenous immersion education as a pathway towards reclaiming language and Indigenous knowledge, we can look to other Indigenous immersion sites to inform us of transformative practices in language revitalization.

**Part Two: The Transformation of Indigenous Languages**

Within North America, documents indicate that Aboriginal language revitalization is of growing concern within First Nations. Earlier scholarship in Indigenous language revitalization largely stemmed from research from outside community, with much of the impetus coming from the field of linguistics. Hinton and Hale’s (2001) *Green book of language revitalization in practice* helped direct the focus on language issues within North America and globally. Contributions from educators, linguists, and community members provided a glimpse of the diversity existing within the field of Indigenous language revitalization. Sources that were particularly instrumental in developing awareness of the issues surrounding language came from the annual Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposia, originally hosted by the Northern Arizona University. Reyhner’s *Teaching Indigenous languages: Selected resources on Native American language renewal* summarizes the goals and contributions of the Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposia (SILS):
The annual Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposia (SILS) have sought since 1994 to bring together language activists and teachers to meet together and with experts on linguistics, language revitalization, and language teaching to support policies, educational reforms, language teaching methods, and community initiatives to maintain and revitalize American Indian, Alaska Native, and other Indigenous languages. Much of the relevant previous literature on the subject is cited in the various papers included in Gina Cantoni's edited book, Stabilizing Indigenous Languages, especially in Dr. Burnaby's paper in Section I, which emphasizes the Canadian experience. Since the 1996 publication of *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages*, eight other SILS monographs have been published, seven of which are on-line… (2011, para.1)

This initiative was originally funded through the United States Department of Education through the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (*Brief history of the stabilizing Indigenous languages symposium*, 2011). Three volumes of conference proceedings were published to help communicate language initiatives and issues occurring in communities and schools. This scholarship, along with the aforementioned publications, helped open up a forum for discussion of Indigenous language issues in which educators, linguists, and community members could participate.

One of the early facilitators involved with SILS was renowned social scientist and founder of the field of sociolinguistics, Joshua Fishman. A central theme in Fishman’s work was the critical role of family in establishing intergenerational mother tongue language transmission. His development of a language scale (Fishman, 1991) showing eight stages of language endangerment, coupled with his eight steps towards language reversal, helped guide community efforts in language
revitalization. Table 1 below summarizes his eight stages of language loss and the corresponding interventions:

Table 1: Fishman's Stages of Language Loss

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of Language Loss</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Language Reversal Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage Eight</td>
<td>Only a few elders speak the language</td>
<td>“Banking” of language, i.e. recording and archiving of elders; Hinton’s “master-apprentice” approach (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Seven</td>
<td>Only adults beyond childbearing years speak the language</td>
<td>Language Nests, early childhood language interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Six</td>
<td>Some intergenerational use of language</td>
<td>Develop protected areas in community for language; Encourage families to continue using language in homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Five</td>
<td>Language still vibrant and in use in homes and community</td>
<td>Promote language use in community; Offer literacy programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Four</td>
<td>Language in use in schools</td>
<td>Improve instructional methods using language; Teach core subjects in language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Three</td>
<td>Language is used for business purposes and in less specialized work areas</td>
<td>Develop new vocabulary so that language can adapt to changing world; Promote the use of language in everyday activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Two</td>
<td>Language is used in mass media and by the minority community</td>
<td>Maximize use of language within mass communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage One</td>
<td>Some language use in higher levels of government and by post-secondary institutions</td>
<td>Honour excellence in language at university level; Promote language use in government; Develop and acknowledge the arts in the language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fishman’s *Stages* helped create a working paradigm from which many communities could begin the work of language reversal. Although some communities have utilized these stages for community language planning, some Aboriginal communities have rejected such categorization of language. Romaine writes:

> Indigenous voices that have begun to make themselves heard in this arena are often angered at the suggestion that their language is dead, or that it is endangered and may die, and they resent such pronouncements and predictions from linguists, however well-intentioned… (2006, p. 468)

From my own observations of First Nations language projects throughout B.C., I have noted that a rating system that categorizes levels of language loss can sometimes be counterproductive. For example, a community that comes to the realization that they are at Stage Eight on Fishman’s scale (most endangered) often becomes overwhelmed by the magnitude of the situation. The resulting feelings of loss, anger, and hopelessness can actually prevent people from taking action. Within communities already suffering from a colonized mentality of inferiority and helplessness, a linear process of assessment such as Fishman’s stages may do more harm than good.

**Sharing Amongst Indigenous Nations**

Although scholarship was instrumental in developing pathways of communication for Indigenous language revitalization, within B.C. the greatest shift in community awareness stemmed from intercommunity networking. With a growing advocacy for language revitalization within Indigenous community, more opportunities for networking began to arise. As some communities with the necessary resources and
impetus developed stronger bases for their own language programs, there was an increase in sharing amongst Indigenous Nations. The Maoris, followed by their Polynesian neighbours the Hawaiians, were instrumental in establishing support networks and outreach to help other Indigenous Nations develop models for language regeneration. Within B.C. during the 1990s, Verna Kirkness, then First Nations House of Learning Director at UBC, invited Maori language teachers, Henrietta Maxwell and Kuini Reedy, from the Te Kohanga Reo Trust to share their expertise with various First Nations communities. These Maori Elders made a timely arrival at Chief Atahm School by sharing ideas for programming and instruction that was immediately put to use by the fledgling immersion program. To this day, members of the school community have many warm memories of their visits.

One Elder from Chief Atahm School shared how these early “language champions” helped support the development of the school:

They looked to the world for inspiration where some of the return to the tribal heart was real. One of the places was in New Zealand – the Maori people had started their immersion classes. Starting right from the young babies, right up to the high school level. What was proven by them was that the involvement in the immersion program enhance the learning of English – enhanced the learning of English. The group looked to the Mohawks who were also in the immersion programs. They too found that the immersion programs enhanced the learning of English. We were fortunate to have met some of the university graduates among the Maoris. Some of them were teaching in the universities as a professor. We were fortunate, too, to have the Mohawks come across the land to help us launch our own program here at Chief Atahm School. Dorothy Lazore was one of those very important people, very valuable resource to us. (IK Transcript, April 1, 2010)
These face-to-face encounters with knowledgeable Indigenous people who were “doing language” helped inspire and guide the Secwepemc immersion program during the 1980s and 1990s. The oral tradition of sharing between Nations was reactivated through a network of Indigenous language practitioners who openly shared their struggles and successes. These sharing sessions occurring within communities helped motivate and inspire many people working at the grassroots level.

**Indigenous Language Within Schools**

Early scholarship as well as the advocacy work of Indigenous practitioners helped advance the issues surrounding language revitalization and to inspire people in the fight to save Indigenous languages. Literature from Indigenous education sites seeking to define themselves in a culturally preferred way enhanced this Indigenous sharing network (Armstrong, 1987; Battiste (Ed.), 2000; Cajete, 1994; Kawagley, 2006; Hall, Rosenberg & Dei (Eds.), 1995). Further work in the field of Indigenous language education helped establish the viability of schools as a vehicle for language instruction. Several studies have focused on Indigenous language revitalization efforts occurring in school (Cantoni, 1996; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; Hinton & Hale, 2001; Hornberger, 2011; Ignace & First Nations Education Steering Committee, 1998; McCarty, 1998; McCarty, Romero & Zepeda, 2006; Reyhner, 2006). Much of the early scholarship advocated the importance of Indigenous language education and thereby focused on the benefits of language learning, such as, the educational achievements of students and enrichment of identity (Leavitt,
1995; Reyhner, 2010). Other recurrent themes centred on the dynamics of starting a language program, including the methodological approaches used and the challenges faced in program development (Greymorning, 1999; Hermes, 2007; McAlpine, 1994).

Although many of these studies supported and documented the viability of language education in schools, some cautioned against an overreliance on schools to save languages. In a journal article focusing on language education in Native American schools, McCarty (1998) warned:

… while school-based action alone will not ‘save’ threatened indigenous languages, schools and their personnel must be prominent in efforts to maintain and revitalise those languages. (p.28)

Husband and wife research team, Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998), commented on the irony of teaching Native Alaskan language in schools:

It is not easy to overcome this pain. Many potential language teachers have commented with bitterness, ‘They beat the languages out of us in school, and now the schools want to teach it’. (p. 65)

Although schools can be seen as a contentious site for the preservation of Indigenous languages, Anonby (1999), a researcher who worked on reviving the Kwak’wala language in B.C., recorded how the community itself kept the focus on the school for language revitalization:

Even though I frequently stated that the emphasis should be on families and community, most of my efforts at language revitalisation were channeled away from the community and into the school. (p.49)
Even though schools have become a major site for language revitalization in many communities, much of the research indicates that sustainable language shift cannot be produced solely through school initiatives.

**Community Language Development**

A consensus within language revitalization scholarship has been that language education in schools requires focused efforts in other areas of the community in order to achieve any sustained language growth. A key attribute found in successful language revitalization projects is the presence of strong leadership within family and community. Crawford (1996) found that programs where leadership originates from outside the community offered little chance of any sustained momentum and success. Where motivation and commitment to language issues are matched with effective language programming, communities have shown that great gains can be made in language use.

Crawford also noted that there is no key to understanding language shift because every case is as complex and diverse as the people and cultures themselves. Although there may be some shared historical factors that have influenced language shift within communities, it would be impossible to generalize people’s reactions and adaptations to similar events. For example, Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998), with their research in communities in Southeastern Alaska, made an interesting observation involving community motivation for language regeneration. They found that what was outwardly expressed by communities often did not correlate with internally held beliefs and attitudes:
... in most communities a broad gap and disparity have developed between verbally expressed goals on the one hand (generally advocating language and cultural preservation) and unstated but deeply felt emotions and anxieties on the other (generally advocating or contributing to abandonment). Instructional programs continue to be designed according to the expressed desires of the community, but are implemented according to these unstated anxieties and emotions. The result has been failure, but the reasons for the failure remain difficult to explain. (p.62)

Their research gives a particularly insightful view of how language ideologies can be seen as barriers to revitalization efforts. Nora Dauenhauer, of Tlingit ancestry, effectively brings an insider view of the challenges of working within communities where historical factors have contributed to anxieties, insecurities, and negative beliefs towards language. She notes that:

In reality, the Native student is experiencing “mixed messages” about the value of learning Tlingit: on the one hand, it is being taught, and people are saying that it is good to learn it; but on the other hand, the student is aware of the overwhelming anxiety and negative associations surrounding the language, whether spoken or unspoken. Such conflict is difficult to overcome and certainly diminished whatever enthusiasm or motivation the student may have. Given the deep-rooted anxieties and negative associations described above, it should come as no surprise to discover a *disparity between expressed ideals and actual support*. (p.67)

Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer cite several reasons for people’s negative attitudes towards language including:

- the difficulties in reconciling Christian beliefs with the language and culture;
- the unpleasant reminders of being punished for speaking the language;
• the shame of being culturally incompetent; and
• internalized beliefs of being academically incapable.

These deeply rooted emotional issues that have limited the success of language revitalization in Alaska, helps us see the complex challenges faced within Indigenous language revitalization.

Although there are many examples within Indigenous language scholarship that highlight challenges and barriers to revitalization, there are many that support the view that any effort, even unsuccessful attempts, is worthwhile. Dorian (1987) argues for language maintenance efforts even for languages that have little chance of being saved. Using Gaelic revitalization efforts in Ireland as examples, she cites some of the positive psychological benefits associated with language initiatives, including, identity building through an increased awareness of history and culture, and the development of self-confidence through increasing a language’s social status.

Many Indigenous language advocates have embraced the belief that revitalization efforts need to continue regardless of the “stage” their language is in. Some communities are making use of Fishman’s *Stages* and other research that assists with planning and developing language programs. Reyhner’s (1999) *Three m’s of Indigenous language education* summarizes the following as keys to language program success:

• Methods: Engaging teaching techniques that correspond to age levels and stages of language loss.
• Materials: Age and content appropriate learning resources, deal with what things will be available for teachers and learners to use, including audiotapes, videotapes, storybooks, dictionaries, grammars, textbooks, and computer software.

• Motivation: Elevate the status of your language through rewards, recognition, and incentives. Expand the usefulness of the Indigenous language in the community and make learning an Indigenous language a worthwhile pursuit. (p. xviii)

Other scholarship has also supported Indigenous communities seeking to revitalize their language by incorporating guides for planning, goal-setting, implementation, and evaluation of language programs (Brandt & Ayoungman, 1989; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; Hinton, 2002; Kirkness, 1998). With the growth in scholarship that focuses on strategies and procedures for community language revitalization there is increased support for Indigenous peoples worldwide.

**Indigenous Language Immersion Education**

Building from other Indigenous scholarship, literature documenting Indigenous education sites and Indigenous language initiatives helped open up new areas for discussion. Although there continues to be a lack of research in areas specific to *Secwepemc* language loss and *Secwepemc* immersion education, documentation of Indigenous immersion sites worldwide helped generate a knowledge pool from which Chief Atahm School could draw from.
Mohawk Language Immersion

The site of the first Indigenous immersion program was in Kahnawake, Quebec. This Mohawk immersion program was modeled after the French immersion program developed in Montreal, Quebec. The resurgence of French language and culture in Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s had pressured the monolingual English speaking population to find ways to quickly introduce French to their children (Reyhner, 2006, p. 89). The immersion model offered a way to cover all of the content areas required in the primary grades while providing sufficient exposure to a second language to produce competent speakers. Kahnawake, a non-French speaking Mohawk community near Montreal, countered the French-language Bill 101 with its own nationalistic zeal. In 1979, they began developing a Mohawk immersion program by instituting a year-long intensive language teacher training program for five certified teachers that were already fluent in the Mohawk language. The trained teachers were then placed in immersion classrooms in the band’s schools (Hoover, 1992). The immersion program in Kahnawake was quickly followed up with the establishment of another Mohawk immersion school in Akwesasne (Reyhner, 2006, p. 28).

Several studies documenting the Mohawk immersion initiatives (Burnaby & Richards, 2008; Genesee & Lambert, 1986; McAlpine, Eriks-brophy & Crago, 1996; McCarty, Watahomigie & Yamamoto, 1999; White, L. 2009) provide general overviews of the program including the benefits and challenges of immersion education. Although these sources have helped inform us of the groundbreaking work of the Mohawks, the Indigenous network of face-to-face sharing and
storytelling can be credited for initially introducing the immersion model to First Nations communities across Canada. Within B.C., Dorothy Lazore, a Mohawk immersion teacher who helped develop the Kahnawake program, generously shared her knowledge in language education through delivering workshops and courses in several communities throughout the 1990s. The immersion initiatives within the Mohawk Nation helped inspire the development of other Aboriginal immersion sites in Canada and worldwide.

The Growth of Indigenous Language Immersion

During the Mohawk immersion’s developmental stages, another Indigenous immersion program started to make waves. Across the Pacific, a Maori language initiative called *Te Kohanga Reo* began its growth into a New Zealand-wide movement. In 1981, Maori early childhood immersion environments were developed that were:

...bound by their underpinning philosophy that provides the nurturing and revitalizing of *Te Reo me ona tikanga* [Maori language, protocol and customary practice] and the *whanau* [extended family] approach that they employ. (Lee, Pihama, Smith & Taki, 2004, p.34)

The *Te Kohanga Reo* movement expanded in 1985 to include the *Kura Kaupapa Maori* immersion schools. By 1990, *Kura Kaupapa Maori* was included in New Zealand legislation as a state-schooling option. Scholars Smith (1997), Hohepa (2006), and Taki (1996) helped to illuminate the interconnecting relationships between Maori language, education, politics, and culture. Maori-centred education models helped influenced the birth of many Indigenous immersion programs
including the Secwepemc Ka Language Nest that began in 1987 on Adams Lake Reserve. The Maori movement also propelled their Polynesian neighbors into action. In 1984, language preschools were implemented in Hawaii, called Punano Leo. This initiative has blossomed to the point where there are now over 14,000 children attending Hawaiian early childhood immersion (Nettle & Romaine, 2000, p.180). The Hawaiian program has now expanded to include high school immersion, as well as offering post-secondary and advanced graduate degrees in the Hawaiian language (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2007). Indigenous immersion sites have since moved beyond the Mohawk, Maori, Hawaiian, and Secwepemc Nations to other Indigenous language groups on the continents of South America, North America, Australia, and Europe.

**Challenges Within Community for Indigenous Immersion Education**

As more Indigenous immersion sites were developed, scholarship in the area also grew. Several studies focusing on Indigenous immersion education document the challenges and barriers to successful programming (Aguilera & LeCompte; 2007; Greymorning, 1999; Hermes, 2007; Nikkel, 2006; Ryan, 2005). Other studies in Indigenous language immersion education provide descriptive accounts that include profiles on curriculum, staffing, and program goals (Gokee-Rindal, 2009; Gordon, 2009; Harrison, 1998; Pease-Pretty On Top, 2003). Aguilera and LeCompte’s (2007) case study of Indigenous immersion sites from Central Alaskan Yup’ik, Navajo Nation, and Hawaii helps inform this study of the factors that influence implementation of immersion programming. Their study combines quantitative and
qualitative research techniques to explore the benefits of language-medium education, including evidence of academic success. They list the major issues influencing the implementation of immersion schooling as:

- Leadership and Community Activism: Active and persistent Indigenous leadership;
- Autonomy and Local Control: Shift of authority to local community in order to “mitigate the hegemonic practice of mainstreaming Indigenous children in public schools where English was imposed and enforced” (p. );
- Language immersion support by the higher education system: partnerships with post-secondary institutions for training, research, and resource development.

They also listed the following challenges to implementing and sustaining immersion education:

- Disparity of esteem and derogation of Indigenous practices: The fear within Indigenous families and communities that learning an Indigenous language will hamper their child’s ability to succeed in today’s world. The belief that learning the language will interfere with academic success in English.
- Funding issues: The ongoing search for money and resources to maintain a program puts undue strain on staff and school leadership.
- Scarcity of Indigenous staff: Lack of fluent teachers coupled with State demands for special certification inhibits the growth of language classrooms.
The challenges to immersion programming of funding shortfalls, hegemonic beliefs, and the lack of fluent speakers, are consistent with the findings of Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) and Reyhner (1999). Their research, as well that of the Aguilera and LeCompte (2007) study, informs this research of the factors influencing the implementation and maintenance of Indigenous immersion sites within United States.

The works of Hermes (2007) and Greymorning (1999) also highlight immersion sites in America. These studies provide insider accounts of working within immersion settings. They focus on the challenges and complexities surrounding community language revitalization through immersion programming. Hermes’ (2007) insider account of developing an Ojibwe immersion school identifies the challenges of developing the necessary resources to run a program:

They had language proficiency and a great desire to do something about language shift in the community. In hindsight, I can say we really didn't know how much work starting an immersion school for an endangered Indigenous language would be. Starting a school means creating structure and curriculum, along with community support, facilities, and funding. In our case, we were creating the curriculum with nothing but a dictionary, a few grammar books, and a few elders. That is, the entire curriculum needed to be newly created. This alone doubled the workload for teachers, but we did not have double the staff to meet this need. (p. 59)

Hermes also reiterates the ideological challenges brought forth by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998):
In a small rural community, an immersion school in an Indigenous language is a radical break with this recent tradition of school as a means to learn English. This community paradigm shift requires a tremendous amount of change in a small amount of time. It requires community building on many fronts. People cannot be forced into change; trust, relationship building, and a shared commitment are all qualities that require time and patience. We remind ourselves at meetings and retreats that this work is hard on our relationships and takes time. (p.60)

She shares how persevering with the goals of immersion helped create a paradigm shift in the community. With persistence, the school was able to reach some of their goals for language revitalization and was able to demonstrate to the community positive changes within the students:

The most important way we count our success is by our students. They are motivated to learn the Ojibwe language beyond our dreams. They are hungry for it. They are not intimidated and never say, "This is too hard." They are inspiring us all to learn; they are inspiring a generation of learners. We have tapped into a deep desire to learn, and this desire spills over into every other academic area. We are creating a love of learning. (p.60)

Her findings show that although the work in developing an immersion program required an intense commitment to a vision and to resource development, she shares how working in an immersion school was a rewarding experience.

Cohen (2010) also shares his stories of the challenges of developing a community-based school that privileges Indigenous language and knowledge systems. His recent dissertation, *School failed Coyote, So Fox made a new school: Indigenous Okanagan knowledge transforms educational pedagogy*, is of particular relevance to
this study as it examines the birth of the *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxw*, a school that is centred on the Okanagan language and culture. The school is situated on the Okanagan Indian Band Reserve, an Interior Salishan community less than 50 kilometres from Chief Atahm School. Cohen explores the challenges of working within a community that has had a history of colonial disruptions to the minds, hearts, and spirits of the people. His insider account of the development of the school program begins from the context of a disconnected and fragmented community fueled by hostility and hegemony. He discovers that:

The need to gather old patterns of behaviours, knowledge and insights and breathe into them a new understanding for application in our social and cultural institutions, especially our schooling projects, is clear. If we maintain a sense of inferiority, and lack confidence in our ancestor’s knowledge and wisdom, then that is what we will pass on to our children. This shift in mindset does not happen across families and communities in any magical way, it takes leadership, self-determination, and commitment by a few, until the children demonstrate positive outcome. It is the children’s confidence, pride and proficiency in our language, and capability to achieve academic success in the larger institutions that resonates, shifts community patterns, and generates counterhegemonies. (p. 219)

Cohen also warns others to be mindful of how hegemony works within community and how it can potentially undermine the success of language initiatives. He brings into focus several “energy sappers” within First Nations communities that have the ability to destroy motivation and initiative:

I have witnessed many Indigenous leaders step back from band and community leadership roles because colonizing hegemonies, “dirty politics” and negative criticisms have sapped their energies. Second, it is very helpful
to understand that hegemonies are contradictory and serve to maintain and reproduce positions of Indigenous subordination by having us become our own colonizers. It is useful to remember arsikw, the turtle, and how his dream told him how to free the animal people. He remained committed and worked for his people even though those who were prisoners of hegemony scorned and ridiculed him for thinking that the animal people could be free. (p. 221)

Cohen’s applies Sqilxw (Okanagan) knowledge and philosophy as found through captikwl (Okanagan storytelling tradition) to assist with translating the past into the present. This methodological approach validates the use of Secwepemc stsptekwle in this study. He writes:

> Although there are many research theories and methodologies in the university, I was finding that these “tools” were not suited to the task at hand and I had to reconnect to Sqilxw knowledge, values and ways, through the role of Fox, in order to acquire the tools. The frameworks to gather knowledge, intuitions and insights that our ancestors practiced through evolving knowledge relationships within their territorial ecologies have been there for millennia. (p. 226)

Hermes’ and Cohen’s work helps to frame this study of the development of an immersion school within the context of Indigenous communities haunted by their own histories. Although these studies are not Secwepemc specific, they help provide focus on the complex challenges and catalysts to Indigenous immersion education. In addition, Cohen’s utilization of the oral tradition helps empower the use of the oral tradition to engage and transform ideas into action.
“Restorying” Relationship through Immersion Education

Although there are only a limited number of studies focusing on the motivational factors of individuals involved in developing Indigenous immersion sites and only a few that relate these factors to sustaining interest and involvement in immersion (Cohen, 2010; Pulkinen, 2008; Smith, 1997), most of the literature on Indigenous language immersion contains some reference to social disruption and disconnection in community. Just as Chief Atahm School was born of the desire to reconnect family to language and traditional teachings, many immersion sites have also looked to immersion education to help heal community. Reyhner discusses the important role immersion sites play in restoring communities:

Native language immersion schools have become a key part of the post-colonial healing process that aims to restore and strengthen Native families and communities. These programs seek to redress the abuse of Indigenous languages historically carried out by assimilationist schooling while using the power of the language to convey tribal values. (2010, p.139)

Smith (2003) stresses how Kaupapa Maori schooling developed as a conscious resistance to Western dominated schooling “by individuals and communities who were prepared to take action for themselves and were willing to go outside the constraints of the system to achieve it” (p.7). He identifies six critical change factors that were present throughout the process of transforming from a deficit-based model of Maori education to a culturally preferred immersion model:

1. rangatiratanga – self-determination or relative autonomy;
2. *taonga tuku iho* – validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity;

3. *ako Maori* – incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy;

4. *kia piki ake i nga raruraru o te kainga* – mediation of socioeconomic and home difficulties;

5. *whanau* – emphasizes the collective rather than the individual;

6. *kaupapa* – shared collective vision and philosophy. (Smith, 2003, pp.6-10)

Within these six key areas, there exists an underlying expectation that these principles link to Maori history, epistemology, and ontology and be responsible and responsive, to the collective community.

Smith defines *Kaupapa Maori Transformative Praxis* as an intervention strategy whereby the processes of conscientization, transformative action, and resistance are all equally important and equally occurring, as demonstrated in his diagram (Smith, 2003, p.13):

**Figure 1: Processes of Conscientization.**
With arrows in the diagram going in both directions, he reinforces that these processes may occur simultaneously. In addition, he emphasizes, “individuals and groups enter the cycle from any position and do not necessarily (in reflecting on Kaupapa Maori interventions) have to start at the point of conscientization” (p. 51).

This point helps explain how the Maori were so successful in activating many of their people in language regeneration. Individuals were invited to participate regardless of where they were in the process of transformation. Smith says:

…that it was often the case that individuals were ‘caught up’ in transformative praxis unintentionally. For example, the case of a parent taking their children to Kohanga 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. (p.13)

Studies from other Indigenous immersion sites support the findings that there are varied reasons why people become involved in immersion programming and that some participants continue to develop a stronger level of commitment and sense of responsibility over time (Cohen, 2010; McIvor, 2006; Pulkinen, 2008).

Cohen’s Sqilxwlcawt: Extended family pedagogy (2010) builds from Smith’s Transformative Praxis by bringing in elements from Okanagan pedagogy and captikwil to help identify the sustaining elements within their school program. He uses a spider’s web as a conceptual framework to demonstrate how “putting the children back into the centre” of a web of learning, with parents, elders, teachers and administrators surrounding the children, will reinstate the collectively responsibility of community to nurture and connect each child to their “place” (p. 246) within the
universe. The following is a summary of “Bill’s notes”, or his “condensed version of experiential knowledge and advice from Okanagan elders, Coyote and Fox, the Four Food Chiefs, Turtle, and our Okanagan, Maori, Secwepemc, and Indigenous friends and mentors” (p. 280) that articulates his insights on developing a cultural immersion school:

• Make it your own and stick with it.
• Surround the children with extended family and community.
• Be alert to hegemonies and the politics of distraction. Be resilient and don’t be afraid to make mistakes.
• Utilize and expand your community’s cultural resources. Know and grow your cultural capital.
• Keep learning and reaching out to others. Establish networks and resources.
• Keep trying new ways and work towards developing your own methods. Evaluate and assess the program continuously.
• Be a leader. Everyone has the potential for leadership. Do what you can.
• Be proactive, be humble, give thanks, and the people and things you need will emerge.

Smith’s *Kaupapa Maori* model and Cohen’s *Sqilxw* model highlight the importance of planning and preparation within immersion programming in order to withstand the hegemonic pressures that work to disconnect self from community.

Although Smith and Cohen’s work expands our understanding of ideological shift in individuals and communities this area of research will need to develop to include
documentation from other Indigenous immersion sites. By documenting and sharing community success stories in immersion programming, we develop better strategies to overcome the ideological barriers that prevent the growth of immersion education, and that threaten the survival of existing programs. With a greater understanding of how hegemony influences the beginnings, middles, and ends of language initiatives, we can work towards achieving sustained language shift. In order to help fill this gap, this research builds on Smith and Cohen’s work by sharing the stories of agency and perseverance from key founding members of the Chief Atahm School immersion program.

**Challenges Outside Community for Indigenous Immersion Education**

As highlighted by Smith and Cohen, transformative actions in Indigenous immersion must take into account the challenges and barriers faced within Indigenous community. Smith also reminds us that the underlying hegemonic beliefs within our communities that undermine the progress of Indigenous education are continuously being reproduced and supported throughout dominant society. Indigenous immersion sites must be aware of the negative external pressures that can threaten to unravel a community’s vision for their language. To demonstrate the influence wider politics has on immersion education, Smith (1991) positions the Maori language initiatives within the wider social, political, and economic environment of New Zealand. He shares how:

… Maori cultural struggle (oppression) is not separable from the economic struggle (exploitation) and that there needs to be an acknowledgement of the dialectic between these two positions. There is also a need to develop
appropriate strategies and responses in respect of Maori cultural aspirations on the one hand and mainly working class (and underclass) social positioning on the other. (p.6)

Smith discusses how shifts in global economy ultimately influences changes within education. Using the economic crisis occurring within New Zealand during the early 1990s as an example, he demonstrates how shifts in educational policy impeded the progress of Maori language education. He shares how the *Kura Kaupapa Maori* immersion initiatives were originally built from the ground up by communities filled with a shared vision and commitment to language regeneration. As the programs began to be “legitimated” and rebranded as public education, much of the original autonomy and sense of shared responsibility was diminished. He then demonstrates how the power and voice of Maori community was further removed through New Zealand’s educational reforms called “Tomorrow’s Schools”. He describes the shifts in authority and power as being interconnected with economic changes within the State:

Schools, and therefore parents and communities, have assumed increased responsibility for the delivery of education, although the real power associated with policy formulation and decision-making has remained within a smaller, more streamlined centralized state structure. The shift of responsibility to parents and community has been skillfully facilitated through the development of common sense beliefs related to the creation of schooling crisis; thus ideologies such as ‘falling standards’, ‘interest group capture’, ‘teacher incompetency’, ‘overly liberal curriculum, and ‘greater parental input needed’ have been freely ‘sold and bought’ in this context of state self preservation. (pp.8-9)
Using the Maori example, we can see how even successful language initiatives are vulnerable to the continuing forces of colonization. As the Maori language education programs are seen as leaders in the field, it is important to heed their warnings of the potential influences governmental reform and policy shifts can have on language.

Smith offers insight into how immersion education is situated within the larger political arena, however, we must be mindful that the Maori situation is not representative of immersion initiatives within countries that have multiple Indigenous language groups. For example, the continents of Australia, North America, and South America have hundreds of diverse Indigenous languages and language groups that struggle for any type of government recognition. Lester-Irabinna Rigney, an Aboriginal scholar from South Australia’s Narungga Nation, discusses how the lack of government action contributes to language death:

The good work to stabilising threatened Indigenous languages operates in a crippling atmosphere of non-legal, political and constitutional recognition. Successful language planning for the maintenance, as well as the revitalisation and reclamation of Australia's Indigenous language heritage, will continue to be weakened in absence of legal and constitutional protection. (Rigney, 2002, para. 32)

Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) states that education policy favouring majority language(s) can be viewed as systematic linguicide of minority heritage languages. Within Canada, there is no explicit legislative protection of Aboriginal languages. Lawyer David Leitch presents a legal argument for government sponsored language education based on the issue of human rights:
No other Canadian minority has been subjected to a state-sponsored attempt to eradicate its language... residential schools were again dramatically different. They did more than teach native children English or French; they isolated those children from their families and communities for the express purpose of destroying their knowledge of their own languages and cultures...

First Nation communities should now be given the legislated right to educate their children in their own languages at public expense. (Leitch, 2005, pp.7-8)

In 1993, a United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirming the rights of Indigenous peoples to Indigenous immersion education was developed:

All Indigenous peoples also 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. (United Nations, 1993)

Although the Canadian government was one of four Nations that opposed the Declaration when it was first adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, it finally endorsed it in 2010 (Amnesty International, 2010). Unfortunately, this affirmation of Indigenous rights to Indigenous education models has yet to translate to any changes in policy and practices to help support existing First Nations immersion schools or to help establish new ones. First Nations language immersion schools in Canada have the challenge of working within a country largely unconcerned about the language crisis.

The failure of dominant society to respond to language issues across Canada is coupled with a growing resentment for "special status" awarded to First Nations. This has influenced a shift in governmental attitudes towards band-controlled schooling. The latest wave of standardization within public schooling, that mirrors
the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States, has now infiltrated intergovernmental talks on band-operated schools. These changes could potentially dismantle the groundbreaking work done by over 25 Aboriginal immersion education programs across the country (Bear-Nicholas, 2005). Not only would immersion sites have to work through the negative thinking and internalized oppression within their own communities, but they would also have to respond to the unrealistic demands of a colonizing society still focused on assimilation.

To date, there have not been any targeted funds aimed at supporting the development and maintenance of First Nations’ immersion programs. Although within Canada, funding precedence for heritage languages has already been set with the support and infrastructural development afforded to French immersion. The Canadian Parents for French-B.C. and Yukon Branch website shares some of the funding incentives available for French language programs in B.C.:

Through an agreement with the federal government, French language programs are funded significantly through Federal Official Languages in Education Protocol (OLEP) funds. French Immersion and Core French programs bring over $9 million annually in federal funding to school districts across BC. (Ankenman, Gadjecki & Gregory, 2008)

In comparison to the support available for French immersion in Canada, First Nations immersion schools are challenged to operate within a Department of Indian and Northern Affairs funding formula that is based on the delivery of an English only program. To make matters worse, the funding for band-operated schools already pales in comparison to what the provincial school system receives per capita for Aboriginal students (M. Matthew, 2000). The slow development of Aboriginal
immersion sites in Canada will continue for as long as community and local governmental efforts are not supported by a sustained source of funding for immersion program planning, resource development, delivery, and assessment.

Despite the challenges in developing and sustaining Aboriginal immersion programs in Canada, there are still communities that remain committed to the model. Bear-Nicholas (2009) reports that the continued existence of mother tongue medium (MTM) education sites in First Nations communities across Canada demonstrates a resiliency of spirit:

In spite of the many assimilationist pressures on First Nations, and in large part because of them, some Indigenous communities in Canada have gone ahead, and, without benefit of positive language laws, cobbled together their own MTM schools, mostly without help from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Indeed, the most effective MTM programs in Canada have been those in which parents have simply established MTM program for those who wanted it, without imposing them on anyone. And most of these programs have met with considerable educational success, notably in schools in the Arctic, at Kahnawake in Quebec, at Six Nations in Ontario, at Eskasoni in Nova Scotia, at Atahm’s Lake in British Columbia, and among the Cree in Quebec. That governments and government agencies responsible for Indigenous languages and education appear unable to support and promote these monumental efforts is very telling. The results from these schools have already been overwhelmingly consistent with the international research that has found significant educational and linguistic benefit in MTM programs for minority and Indigenous children worldwide. (p.20)

Through the ongoing commitment of communities that remain steadfast in the pursuit of immersion education, we have seen transformative action take place
within Indigenous language revitalization. Within B.C., the documentation of the journeys of Chief Atahm School and the *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn Kl Sqilxw*, help fuel the fire towards language regeneration. Through channeling Coyote’s powers of transformation, these two Salishan schools continue to adapt to internal and external hegemonic pressures, sometimes by moving forward, and sometimes by looping back, to ultimately reconnect the self to community.
Chapter Four: The Curiosity of Coyote

In the previous chapter, Coyote Stories helped guide the exploration of the literary landscape to contextualize the general areas of influences surrounding Secwepemc language revitalization through immersion education. In this chapter, I apply the curiosity of Coyote to the methodological process of research and its constant search for answers. As Coyote travels an immense territory in search of adventure, qualitative researchers can be seen as travelling to diverse communities in search of ways to illuminate the human experience. Like a continuous Coyote journey, this research began by “jumping into” the introduction of the research site, Chief Atahm School, with an expectation that the reader had some prior understanding of the context surrounding Aboriginal language revitalization. By using Coyote stories to exemplify journeying back and forth through time and events surrounding the development of Chief Atahm School, I symbolically connect to a continuous Secwepemc history. In using this traditional form, I not only assert my right as an Indigenous researcher to frame my work from within Indigenous community, but also accept the responsibility of upholding the Secwepemc values that are implicit in the oral tradition.

“Restorying” Coyote Theoretical and Research Approach

The “Restorying” Coyote Theoretical and Research Approach that helped frame the discovery of transformative practices in Chapter Three also guided the design, delivery, and intent of this research. In the first part of this chapter, I use the value of knucwestsuts. to position my role within the research as a process of “Restorying”
self to the Great Coyote Story. In part two, the value of *k’wseltktnéws* leads the path of discovery of the interconnecting stories from key players in the development of a *Secwépemc* immersion school.

**Knucwestusut.s: “Restorying” Self to the Great Coyote Story**

In traditional *stsptekwle*, Coyote’s focused curiosity often leads him into perilous situations. Yet, for qualitative researchers who travel within the subjective world of oral narrative, the perils of the journey often lie within the reflective nature of the research itself. The task of interpreting the complex layers of personal, social, emotional, political, historical, and cultural influences of human story through the lens of an individual researcher is a complex one that requires a certain amount of soul-searching to find the appropriate “voice” or “voices” to communicate through.

As a *Secwépemc* woman who has been instrumental in the development and delivery of the Chief Atahm School program, I draw upon my position of ‘insider’ to uncover stories from the school community. The process of finding my “voice” to share my own stories within this research project proved to be challenging. At the onset, I was aware that my choice to research my own workplace presented me with many options, including where, when, and how I would place myself within the study. My prominent role in the school’s development and my shared cultural, social, and political histories with the research participants called for presenting myself as an active character in the research. This decision to make space within the research for my story to be heard, in itself, brought with it many more choices and decisions. How and when was I going to insert my own story into the research? Would I,
should I, could I interpret my own voice? Ultimately, the path I chose to take
became much more personal than anything I originally considered.

To help establish my position within the research I utilized autoethnographical
techniques through imbedding personal stories throughout the chapters.
Autoethnography offered a way in which I could introduce and validate “my story” as
a separate, yet connected, part of the Chief Atahm School story. I wished to share
my story, just as Indigenous researcher, Margaret Kovach (2009) utilized Graveline’s
(2000) process of “self-in-relations”, to “show the holistic, personal journey, not solely
its cognitive component, and how it resonated with all parts of my being” (p. 16).
Ellis and Bochner (2000) articulate autoethnography as embedded texts within the
research that are written in the first person that convey related personal experience
and self-consciousness. Tierney (1998) expands on this by stating that:
“autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an
attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that
have marginalized those of us at the borders” (p. 66). In this sense, I chose to use
autoethnographical techniques to honour my own voice as Indigenist researcher
working from within community.

By choosing to “write” myself into the research, I was challenged with how, when,
and where, to share my story. One writer describes the complex interplays involved
when the researcher appears as:

…the first person when presenting their work, thereby emphasizing their own
narrative action. As narrators, then, researchers develop meaning out of, and
some sense of order in, the material they studied; they develop their own
voice(s) as they construct others’ voices and realities; they narrate “results” in ways that are both enabled and constrained by the social resources and circumstances embedded in their disciplines, cultures, and historical moments… (Chase, 2005, p.257)

An example of this complexity was the difficulty I had in deciding whether to include my very personal accounts of my grief. Although I felt compelled to write about how my father’s passing affected my progress in my doctoral studies, it was not my original intention to include them in my dissertation. However, as my writing progressed, I began to see how my stories of loss connected to the overall subject of Indigenous language revitalization. Eventually, I decided to honour my father’s generous and humble spirit by sharing my personal stories in order to help relate how social and emotional Indigenous language revitalization issues are.

As a Secwepemc researcher studying within a Secwepemc community, I was also challenged with the responsibility of representing the voices of others. It was important for me to look in many directions for information on Secwepemc language revitalization to help relate how the behaviours and our beliefs within our school community connected to larger external forces. In seeking to expose the relationship of colonial practices to language loss, I joined a growing tide of indigenist researchers that “gives voice to Indigenous people” and “whose goals are to serve and inform Indigenous struggle for self-determination” (Rigney, 1997, p.119). Shawn Wilson describes that the foundation of Indigenous research

… lies within the reality of the lived Indigenous experience. Indigenous researchers ground their research knowingly in the lives of real persons as individuals and social beings, not on the world of ideas. (2008, p. 60)
The *Kaupapa Maori* theory of transformative praxis also provided guidance in integrating cultural ethics, reflexivity, and critical engagement. In *Kaupapa Maori* theory, the concept of *whakawhanaungatange* requires that the researcher locate himself/herself within the past, present and future, thereby establishing an important link to the culture (Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Walker, Eketore & Gibbs, 2007). The responsibility of properly representing the people resides within the researcher. The question of where you position yourself as a researcher requires reflexivity. Borrowing from this energy, I moved forward on a research agenda that intertwines themes of language, community, and identity into transformative pathways towards Secwepemc education.

Throughout the research, I was conscious of the dilemma of having to “serve two masters”: one the Secwepemc community, and the other, the academic community. These dual responsibilities sometimes had me feeling like I was being pulled in opposite directions. The very nature of academic writing presupposes a linear approach based on following a predicable path of reasoning while leaving plenty of crumbs for the reader to follow along the way. Although my community shares in this expectation of clear representation, the main source of pressure I felt came from the implicit cultural values expected of me. I was conscious of the need to “keep it real” by remembering to connect to the places in myself that needed to be challenged or supported. Kovach (2009) speaks of this reflexivity as a component of self-location within Indigenous research methodologies:

> Keeping one’s location front and centre is a way that individuals can consciously assert from where their strength comes, and ensure that their
integrity will not become compromised by the trials of academic research.

(p.112)

Within Secwepemc culture, this concept of self-location is akin to honouring the value of knucwestsut.s through challenging yourself to be the best that you can be in order to support the collective. Therefore, there is a general expectation that you accomplish what you set out to do and that the task you do is of some practical use to the community. In traditional times, this expectation was easily assessed. A hunter and a fisherman were valued for bringing food to the community or a basket maker was for the quality of the product produced. Yet, now that we live a dramatically different existence, this value needs to be translated and adapted to a host of new skills. Throughout this research, I grappled with the question of whether what I was doing was going to be useful enough. I realized that in order for me to proceed with my integrity, and my sanity intact, I would need to give myself permission to relax and not expect myself to find the solution to Secwepemc language loss. In the end, I felt an adaptation of the Chief Atahm School creation story, using Secwepemc methods of inquiry passed down through the oral tradition, would be the best way to honour our language vision and inspire others to commit to immersion education.

In order for this research to be accessible to other First Nations, I realized I would have to write it in a language that was commonly understood. I can only hope that my choice to use English as a vehicle to communicate our dreams for the Secwepemc language is seen as a compromise and not an endorsement for using the English language in Indigenous research. In addition, I also need to apologize
for my use of English to communicate Secwepemc stories and other cultural motifs.

Once again, I’ve wrestled with conflicting feelings about taking cultural teachings and traditional knowledge out of their natural context. By choosing Coyote as my guide, my intentions were to help bring greater awareness and receptiveness to Secwepemc language education and not to diminish in anyway the integrity of the oral tradition.

Research Design

Through the value of k’weseltktnéws, or “we are all related”, the Great Coyote History is linked to the present. As a Secwepemc woman, my land, my Nation, and my family influence me, and these influences inform my writing. I borrow references from traditional Coyote stories to guide my journey of discovery of the motivating and sustaining factors of a Secwepemc language immersion program. This study uses an Indigenous methodology in that Secwepemc values, history, modes of analysis, and inquiry were employed to make meaning of the subject of language revitalization. Kovach (2008) uses the term Indigenous methodologies “to describe the theory and method of conducting research that flows from an Indigenous epistemology” (p. 20). Although Indigenous modes of inquiry are integrated throughout the research, the general goals of qualitative research were still applied. A qualitative approach in this research helped to interpret the full range of human experience within the development of a Secwepemc-based education program. The interpretive features of qualitative research were further expanded on using elements from narrative inquiry to assist with analysis. Also included in the
“Restorying” Coyote Research and Theoretical Framework is an exploration of the key roles played by Indigenous research models that privilege Indigenous knowledges. Some of the sites that have been instrumental in giving agency to this research include the Maori Transformative Action Agenda and Friere’s concepts of conscientization and empowerment. Kaupapa Maori offers a theory for research that asserts Indigenous voice and acknowledges the strength of a collective agenda. I also draw on relevant Salishan Indigenous research models (Archibald, 2008; Ignace, 2008) that integrate narrative traditions in research. Storywork (Archibald, 2008) helps support the connection between the community and the researcher and creates space for stories to guide and to teach. The “Restorying” Research Model, along with supportive practices from qualitative research and Indigenous research, guides the research towards connecting self to community through story.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research approach was used to assist in the discovery of perspectives on language immersion engagement and resiliency. It provides a vantage point from which we can explore human phenomena. Lichtman (2006) writes,

> When we speak about human interaction we often think of how humans interact with each other, especially in terms of their culture. When we speak about human discourse we think of humans communicating with each other or communicating ideas. (p.8)

The qualitative approach seemed the natural choice for my research as it shares many similarities with the Secwepemc oral tradition. I found that some of the
fundamental characteristics of qualitative research as shared by Creswell (1998, p.21) paralleled those found in Secwepemc storytelling:

Table 2: Characteristics of Qualitative Research and Oral Tradition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creswell’s Characteristics of Qualitative Research</th>
<th>Features Within the Secwepemc Oral Tradition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evolving design</td>
<td>Characters with transformative powers: shape-shifting, and organic movement through time and space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of multiple realities</td>
<td>Multiple worlds: Travel through various worlds (animal/human/water/space/underworld)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher as instrument of data collection</td>
<td>Storytellers have the flexibility of adapting story to each audience. Audiences develop their own meanings and interpretations of the stories, which may shift overtime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on participants’ views</td>
<td>Each character represents multiple facets of an archetypal personality; each story explores the interplay of multiple characters responding to a shared phenomena</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research uses a phenomenological approach in order to focus the study on the meaning of people’s experiences in developing a language immersion program. I appreciated the potential of a phenomenological inquiry to highlight “the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward experience and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning” (Creswell, 1998). I felt it important to expose the essence of the experience of establishing an immersion program to help expand our knowledge of intrinsic factors key to the establishment of future language programs. The development of the guiding questions below
helped to focus the discovery on what propelled and sustained individual and community desire to pursue immersion:

1. What are the experiences of staff and students at Chief Atahm School that can assist in Secwepemc language and knowledge transfer?

2. What motivates people to become involved and stay involved in Aboriginal immersion education?

The exploration of the experiences of community members at the early stages of the school’s development would give us essential information in motivational and emotional factors surrounding language revival. As language retention and revitalization efforts in Aboriginal communities are inextricably linked to a community’s shared experiences, including the emotional responses attached to those experiences, it was thereby important to discover the underlying intrinsic factors that created barriers to, or enhanced language program delivery.

**On Using Story**

As I come from a long line of storytellers, the world of story is familiar to me. I am fortunate to have had many family members who have shared their knowledge of the universe through the lineage of Coyote. There are stories that teach, stories that make you laugh, and stories for just about any occasion you can imagine. I am both audience and participant in the Secwepemc world of story. Therefore, it is understandable that I am attracted to any mode of analysis that involves the telling of a good story. I was drawn to the open invitation that narrative inquiry extends to the subjective. It acknowledges that the concepts of time and space alter our
position in an ever-changing world that is brimming with external influences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Seale, 2004). Kovach (2009) notes the similarities that narrative inquiry and other methodologies that utilize contextualized knowledge have to Indigenous forms of analysis using story. However, she points out that, the application of Indigenous orality in research also connects the research to the relationships implicit within that tradition. She writes:

> Story as a method, is used differently from culture to culture, and so its application falters without full appreciation of the underlying epistemological assumptions that motivate its use. Indigenous people versed in their culture know that sharing a story in research situates it within a collective memory. (pp.96-97)

Through integrating the Chief Atahm School stories within the world of Secwepemc story, I felt I could accommodate the multiple, shifting layers of the “Great Coyote Story”, while still acknowledging my role as researcher and participant in the experience.

Dr. Archibald’s *Indigenous storywork* (2008) has helped deepen my understanding of how Indigenous values, such as relationship, can interconnect, and sometimes depart, from academic narrative research. Archibald empowers the powerful processes of learning that traditional stories evoke. The *Storywork* principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy embody the complex teachings present within Coyote stories and the spiraling nature of communal storytelling.
The *Storywork* approach utilizes an intuitive, organic process that helps make connections in research that are akin to the interpretive expectations of the Secwepemc oral tradition. Archibald’s shares a Coyote story by Terry Tafoya (p.8-10) to illustrate how we position ourselves within the research. The story is similar to a Secwepemc version I’ve heard about the time Coyote was showing off to everyone how he could juggle his eyes. Inevitably, when he loses his eyes, he has to rely on others for assistance. Coyote proceeds to beg, borrow, and steal different sets of eyeballs, although none of them allow him to see as well as his own. Coyote stumbles through his adventure while seeing life through the eyes of different animal brothers and sisters. In the end, Coyote gets back his own eyes and is able to see clearly again. This humourous story presents some obvious parallels to the challenges in research of positioning and representation. In narrative research, we have the opportunity to “borrow” the eyes of our participants through interpreting their stories, yet, what we see will always be filtered by our own experiences. Moreover, any retellings of our lives through story are transitory in nature, as they are dynamically being shaded and transformed throughout our lifetimes. Like Coyote, we find that even through looking through our own set of eyes we are not guaranteed a clear view of our own past, present, and future.

**Looking Within Through Story**

A characteristic of narrative inquiry is the positioning of the researcher strongly within the research. There is always an element of the autobiographical in narrative as, “Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape
our narrative inquiry plotlines” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.121). This quality of narrative inquiry lends itself to the practice of autoethnography, whereby the use of subjective experience assists in discovering alternate perspectives relating to the study. Autoethnography makes no claim to the nature of reality but relies rather on personal experiences to share a story within the context of an individual’s world (Reed-Danahay, 1997). This exercise, of looking from the inside first before creating linkages to the external world, is an attempt to share an experience with audiences in hopes of evoking a response or connection (Denzin, 1997).

In this study, I share my story to evoke a response to a subject with which I have deep connection to. Borrowing from the words of Indigenous researcher Margaret Kovach (2009), I express that “This writing comes from the heart, it comes from who I am and all that I am – nothing more, or less for that matter” (p. 7). Although as humans we all share a connection to language, there are people like me that are quite passionate about the subject. Through this study, I explore language, as a universally used human construct, that helps people to communicate their experiences to others and to negotiate meaning within society. Language is a vehicle through which we expand our awareness of self in relation to community:

The use of language has become deeply entrenched in human culture and, apart from being used to communicate and share information, it also has social and cultural uses, such as signifying group identity, social stratification and for social grooming and entertainment. (“Language”, 2004, para. 2)

As language provides an essential link connecting the personal to the social, then it follows that a study of a community’s language loss will provoke deeply personal
memories. In anticipation of encountering a wide variety of emotions in relationship to language loss, I have chosen to share some of my own stories and personal reactions and memories to help shed some light on the complex emotional layers involved in the discussion of Indigenous language loss.

**Finding the Stories**

The development of the Secwepemc Ka Language Nest in 1987, and the subsequent development of Chief Atahm School in 1991, has been credited with helping launch other mother tongue Indigenous education sites. Dr. Bill Cohen describes the nurturing and advisory role Chief Atahm School (CAS) has played in terms of kinship:

> There are past, current, and (no doubt) future, extensive webs of kinship connecting the Okanagan and Secwepemc, and that has characterized the relationship that has developed between the two projects. NSS [Nkmapłqs l Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet, Okanagan Indian Band School] was created in 2006. CAS was created in 1991, so CAS is like our older sister. CAS has assisted in guiding, nurturing, and supporting the development of her younger sibling, the NSS project. (2010, p. 173)

From its humble beginnings, when two determined mothers set out to create a program for their children to learn the language, the program has persevered within a community often skeptical and fearful of change. Although a few research projects and media publications have focused on the language programs on Adams Lake Reserve, none have specifically address the formational years of Chief Atahm School. This research provides an examination of the school experiences that will
inform the school community and other Indigenous communities as well. As Smith (2006) states,

The act of reclaiming, reformulating, and reconstituting Indigenous cultures and languages have required the mounting of an ambitious research programme, one that is very strategic in its purpose and activities and relentless in pursuit of social justice”. (p. 142)

This body of research, by inviting the outside world to witness the development of Chief Atahm School through the eyes of the founding school community, also seeks to draw attention to the viability of Indigenous immersion education.

**The Setting**

All research was conducted either on the Adams Lake Band Reserve #4 (Sexqeltqin) or within a 25 km radius from the town of Chase, B.C. The resident population of the reserve is approximately 450 people. Chief Atahm School is situated on this reserve, although the school’s catchment area extends to four other Secwepemc bands within an hour’s drive away. To respect Adams Lake Band governmental protocol, I submitted my research proposal in person during a regularly scheduled Chief and Council meeting. Before beginning any research on the Adams Lake Reserve I required approval via a Band Council Resolution. During the meeting, the Council asked a few questions concerning the final product of my research and how will it be made accessible to the community. I shared some ideas, including offering to do a public presentation with a summarized document. I welcomed any suggestions from the Council and/or community and encouraged
them to contact me at anytime during the research. The meeting was a positive one and I was assured that I had their support.

Following the presentation to Council, I then presented to the school community at a meeting of the school’s governing body, the *Tek’wemiple*. The *Tek’wemiple* is a school governing board with non-elected seats that is, open to, and operated by, all parents of children in attendance at the school. The proposal to the *Tek’wemiple* included a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the research. Copies of the written proposal were made available to participants. At the meeting, I requested permission to access key members from the school community to arrange for group and individual meetings to participate in the study. During a question and answer period, the *Tek’wemiple* was invited to address any concerns and requirements and to make suggestions for reporting back to the school community. Some questions surrounded the availability of the document were answered by clarifying that the final document would be a public document and therefore would be accessible to everyone. I assured the group that digital copies will be made available on our school website and in paper form at the school library and curriculum room. The *Tek’wemiple* made the following suggestions for reporting back:

- Host a dinner and do a presentation to community;
- Do a follow-up presentation for the *Tek’wemiple*;
- Present at the annual Chief Atahm School *Melq’wilc* (visioning retreat).

The two meetings that formally initiated the research process ensured a positive relationship was established and opened the doors for two-way communication.
The Characters

As the research primarily focuses on the developmental years of Chief Atahm School, the selection of participants was limited to the personnel, parents, and students involved during this period. A purposeful sample was drawn from a list of potential research participants involved in the school during the first five years, 1991-1996. The initial count listed close to 50 people fitting the criteria for the study. From this initial list, I divided them into groups based on the nature of their involvement at the school: parent, Elder/teacher, parent/teacher, and staff member. Looking for a good cross section of participants, I decided to contact up to five people from each group. For practical reasons, I chose to limit my choices to those who still resided within the local area and who were involved with the school for more than three years. From this list, I started on the process of inviting voluntary participation via mailed personal correspondence, phone calls, or face-to-face communication (see Appendix A).

As some of the potential participants were still active staff members at the school and therefore, colleagues of mine, I added a statement in the consent form that the research would not, in anyway, affect their position at Chief Atahm School (Appendix B). Their participation or non-participation in this research had no connection or relationship to their employment or position at the school. In addition, as the study involves students enrolled in the school during the early 1990s who are now adults, there was no need to have minor children included in this research. Within the letters inviting participation, it was made clear that all participants could stop participating in the study at any time or could refuse to participate in any given
activity. It also stipulated that confidentiality and consent of all information supplied by the participants would be respected. These two items were reiterated before all interview and focus group sessions. In addition, I returned to some participants later to discuss the use of a pseudonym that reflected the theme of the oral tradition. Those that were in agreement initialed and dated the box giving consent to use a pseudonym that was in their original consent form.

The final cross-section of research participants who responded to the research invitations and who were included in the study includes the following:

- Five Secwepemc Elders who work or have worked at the school from the early developmental years of the program;
- One teacher who taught in the immersion program for more than eight years;
- Two teachers who were also parents of children in attendance during the period of 1991-1996, and either were immersion teachers, or who later became immersion teachers;
- Three former students from the immersion program (who have reached the age of majority);
- Two parents and/or school community members with a longstanding affiliation with the school program.

**The Sharing of Stories**

As this research sought to uncover stories of the creation of Chief Atahm School, several interview approaches were considered. As data collection in narrative
inquiry essentially presents a relationship and a collaborative action between people, I understood that my research pathways needed to remain flexible. To create an environment conducive to storytelling, you need a listener who is a willing to engage in the story, and a storyteller who is willing to invite you into their world of story. Archibald (1997) relates the importance of the role of establishing relationships within the research context:

Learning to listen with patience, learning about cultural responsibility toward the oral tradition, learning to make self-understandings, continuing the cycle of reciprocity about cultural knowledge, and practicing reverence are some of the lessons I experienced with Chief Simon Baker and Elder Vincent Stogan. (p.90)

This role of relationship building within qualitative research is supported by many as a foundational step towards gaining a deeper understanding of the study area (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 1998; Mishler, 1986; Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

As I was familiar with all of the research participants through my involvement with the school, family, and community the process of relationship building was an easier task. There were some difficulties in creating a natural, conversational tone to the interviews after the initial introduction of the academic layers of ethics and research policy created some awkwardness. After my first two interviews, I realized I needed some natural conversational “icebreakers” to help establish a more relaxed setting for discussion. With some of the more reticent participants, I found I needed to get creative and travel to several “off-topic” areas before relaxing into a natural flow of conversation. Sometimes I would resort to diversionary tactics to take their focus off
the recording equipment by starting things off with a joke. At other times, when there was a particularly noticeable lull in the room, I would jumpstart the conversation by sharing some of my own memories of the early school days. Often, this would provide enough prompting to get the participants sharing stories of their own.

Throughout the period of study two focus groups were developed, one consisting of teaching staff and parents, and one with Elders. These groups were gathered to help guide the research questions and method of inquiry, and subsequently, to help give a collective view of the study area. A video camera was used to record all research interviews and focus groups. Participants were given the choice to be videotaped or just have their voices recorded. All participants preferred to have the lens of the video camera covered, allowing for audio recording only. Audio recording and transcripts of the interviews and focus groups were relied on as a record of the story sessions, as well as reflective notes written afterwards. Copies of transcripts were given back to each participant to review and comment on. It was agreed that all data, including text, digital, audio, and video files would be stored at UBC in digital format in a locked cabinet with access restricted to researcher and the research supervisor only for a period of five years. At the end of the five-year period, the digital information will be demagnetized.

The reflective notes that I wrote before, during, and after the research represents a journaling of sorts. All of my doodles, random quotes, and writings that I created throughout all of the stages of the research has helped tie the pieces of ‘me’ together so that I could present my story and come to a better understanding of the
whole. This journaling process allowed me the freedom to represent my experiences from a variety of sources. Little did I know that this process of ‘storying self’ would become the gateway that helped me to see this project to the end.

**The Questions**

In-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were used to gather the personal stories of involvement in the program (Appendix C). A general list of topic areas and sample questions was drawn up to help guide the interviews. Staff, Elders, and students were asked similar questions. Topic areas were:

- Level and nature of involvement in the development of the Chief Atahm School immersion program;
- Reasons for involvement;
- Roles and responsibilities in the development of Chief Atahm School;
- Effects on themselves, family;
- Their perception of the role Chief Atahm School has played in the community, the Secwepemc language;
- Their experiences before and after becoming involved;
- Reasons for their continued involvement;
- Strengths of the program; Challenges to immersion education; and
- Visions for the future.

Focus groups consisting of teaching staff, parents, and former students were used to help gather the group stories that are often organically constructed through sharing experiences and memories (see Appendix D). Although the focus groups did not
offer the detailed information that the one-on-one interviews provided, the common memories that emerged helped highlight general themes. Lindlof and Taylor term this a group effect where members engage in “a kind of ‘chaining’ or ‘cascading’ effect; talk links to, or tumbles out of, the topics and expressions preceding it” (2002, p. 182). The language used to describe the experiences of starting an Indigenous immersion school helped identify the memorable events and recurring themes. Although the group discussions proved to be anything but focused at times, the information shared by the participants helped to shape the research analysis.

Validating Data

Multiple sources of information were used to help support the findings of this research (Merriam, 1998). Data from the interviews and focus groups was further supported through a review of the school’s records of meetings and historical documents relevant to the study. Multimedia sources, such as photographs, videotapes, and audiotapes, were also used to add another dimension to the experiences of the participants.

As inspired by the self-determining Kaupapa Maori theory, I addressed key research questions within a framework based on core Secwepemc values that exist within Secwepemc stories and teachings. Although the research is situated within the general expectations of the academic community and is responsible to the guiding ethics of such, the overarching research paradigm is Secwepemc specific. Although preliminary analysis included the sorting and coding of transcripts according to themes and patterns as per Creswell’s suggestions (1998), I relied heavily on critical
theory and the oral tradition to help me make meaning of the data. Through the
“Restorying” Coyote Research Model, I sought to connect the data to wider
community factors that directly influenced the lives of the participants. This process
helped support the development of Freire’s “conscientization” that is necessary for
true transformation to occur. As Smith (2006) states:

Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of
decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges.
The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that
they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our
colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires
us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. This in turn requires
a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand and then act
upon history. (p. 34)

Data was viewed within the portal of the Great Coyote Timeline so that historical,
emotional, spiritual, and cultural experiences could be accessed and “restoryied”. In
a sense, I was able to juggle Coyote eyes, to help me see the other stories behind
Secwepemc language loss and redemption.

Looping Back to the Great Coyote Story

An important component of the “Restorying” Coyote Research Model is the concept
of k’wseltktnéws, or family. This is represented in the need for reporting back to
community in order to properly commit to the collective and provide accountability to
the research (Smith, 2002, p. 243). This concept is further supported by Barnhardt
& Kirkness’ 4R’s (Respect, Relevance, Responsibility, and Reciprocity, 1991),
wherein the process of reciprocity is critical in establishing and maintaining ethical
ties between the researcher and the Indigenous community. Archibald (2008) expands on this concept of reciprocity in her “hands back, hands forward” teaching that she received from Sto:lo Elders. Within her Storywork research approach she emphasizes the need for establishing deep reciprocal relationships with those researched in order to truly come to a place of wisdom. This approach connects the concept of reciprocity within a Salishan reverence for patience, silence, and support through the oral tradition of stories. This interpretation of values implicit within knowledge gathering closely aligns to Secwepemc beliefs and has been used to guide this research.

The concept of Etsxe, as a challenge to hone individual strength, figures prominently within this research process. The thesis, as a culmination of the academic journey, requires the researcher to do a lot of soul searching. The many hours that I spent alone in my thoughts and my writing often felt like I was on a solo journey into the wilderness. Early on in the research, I decided to employ autoethnographical methods that would help to create another layer of emotional experience and connection through organically expressing ‘self’ throughout the text as encouraged by Ellis & Bochner (2000). I did not feel it was necessary to try to legitimate my stories by treating them as data requiring evaluation as was recommended by some autoethnographical researchers (Duncan, 2004; Holt, 2003; Muncey, 2005). I felt that the strategy that would work best for me was to “let my stories do the talking” by allowing the flexibility to incorporate personal stories throughout the text at different times and for different reasons. I predicted that there would be times I would need to “fill in” gaps in the research with personal narratives as was relevant based on my
years of experience at the school and my positioning as co-founder of the school. More often than not, however, my personal narrative emerged spontaneously as reactions and reflections to the emotionally charged subject of language loss.

This academic etsxe required that I return home to bring the dreams, visions, and theories back to the community. The responsibility of translating knowledge into action is the key towards giving agency to the research. I worked to combine the research with the tools I found in my “kit bag” to come up with practical strategies that honoured the community needs. As I am grounded in my culture and community, my research was conducted in such a way as to triangulate with the Indigenous community as well as the academic community. Also, as the value of etsxe is tied to the foundational concept of k’wseltktnéws (we are all family), the research has an ultimate goal of providing agency to Indigenous community and to transforming the state of Indigenous language education.

Through story, we are guided through ancient teachings in a joyous journey through Coyote’s adventures. The prominence of humour within stories and within Secwepemc everyday life highlights the importance of balancing work and play. Within the “Restorying” framework, I respect this principle through sharing the stories of the Chief Atahm School community within a register of celebration and renewal. I have found inspiration in Appreciative Inquiry in that it focuses attention on the positive potential of the organization through understanding:

…what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. This approach to personal change and organization change is based on the assumption that questions and dialogue about strengths, successes, values,
hopes and dreams are themselves transformational. (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, p.1)

To add to the spirit of renewal, I plan to host several gatherings to celebrate the research completion with the school community and the Secwepemc Nation. I find that it is when we all come together to feast and laugh that the strength and commitment to the value of k’wsetktnéws is most apparent.
Chapter Five: We Are Coyote’s Family

The Secwepemc term for family or kinship, k’wselktnews, is an overarching value relating to the interconnectedness of all beings (Billy, Michel & Michel, 2007; Billy, 2009; Ignace, 2008). This value is commonly referred to in Indigenous epistemologies. Several Indigenous education theories expand on the value of interrelationship. The Medicine Wheel has been widely applied as an educational framework. The wheel construct can be seen as a “sacred circle” representing unity, interconnectedness, and harmony between all beings (Bopp & Bopp, Brown, Lane, 1984; Black Elk, 1982; Calliou, 1995). Cohen’s (2001) Spider Web Model, based on Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockem’s (2002) The circle of courage, is a conceptual model of child development that connects circles within a dissipative structure that metaphorically represents a continual process of change. These models share the value of relationship and movement between the individual, the collective, and the natural world.

Within Secwepemc stsptekwle, the value of k’wselktnews is demonstrated through Coyote’s world, where everything and everyone is family. Although there are some characters that frequently appear in Coyote stories, it is apparent that Coyote’s frame of reference extends far beyond the human and animal world. Coyote lives in a world without boundaries: one story may depict him in a battle with his Brother Bear over day and night, while another story may have him lusting after Cloud Woman. The reinforcement of the value of k’wselktnews in Coyote stories reminds...
us to look at the relationships in our world. This value helped me look for
interconnecting relationships within the stories told by the Chief Atahm School
family.

The Chief Atahm School Family

I have always thought of the Chief Atahm School community as my family, and not
only because I’m related to most of the staff and students in some way or another.
Aside from the blood ties, I also feel strongly connected to the vision, the people,
and our shared memories together. In many ways, the school has helped me
develop as a person. I was a naïve 23 year old looking to change the world when I
first arrived on the rez. I chuckle when I think about my first attempts to get a
language nest started. I was so eager to share the idea of a language nest with the
community. I recall my “recruiting missions” when I would go door to door to houses
on the reserve to hand out my hand drawn pamphlets advertising the new program.
I remember that most people were very polite, and even fed me cookies and tea, as
I rambled off the benefits of early childhood language immersion. I realize now that
they listened to my sales pitch out of respect for my parents and probably didn’t
have a clue of what I was trying to say. Nevertheless, those early days were
certainly filled with passion and promise. I fed off that energy for years as me and
my two oldest sons became permanent fixtures at the language nest. From the time
I formed a bond with Janice Dick-Billy over a cup of tea at her kitchen table, the
dream of language immersion has grown to touch the lives of many.
Journalling Joe Michel Style: Knucwestsut.s: Search for Meaning/Place

During the research interviews, I was able to reconnect with family “over tea at the kitchen table”. Although many of the interviews took place at Chief Atahm School, I felt as relaxed and comfortable as if I were at home. Each conversation brought back many fond memories of the early days of starting the school, many of which I had forgotten. Although I struggled for a time to reconnect with the interview data after my father’s death, when I did return to them, I was buoyed by their powerful messages. At that time, I used the process of reviewing the transcripts as an emotional salve and didn’t concern myself with trying to make meaning from the stories.

Originally, I had planned to make regular, dated entries into a research journal so that I could have a resource from which I could reflect on later to capture any perspectives or insights during the research process. Although I had good intentions, I was unable to make any consistent entries into it. Eventually, I had to rely on a habit I inherited from my father of documenting any random thought, worry, or “Aha” moment on whatever piece of paper I could find. I reasoned that if I could remember to throw these paper treasures in a file box to dig through later then I would have created an effective “Joe Michel Filing System”. I could attest to the effectiveness of this system after having overseen the archiving of over 20 file boxes of my father’s “notes” on Secwepemc language, history, and philosophy.

Essentially, this “system” of recording falls within the practice of reflective writing, although I must admit its randomness made it difficult to organize later. To
demonstrate the arbitrary nature of my internal wanderings, I asked my daughter, Sekwaw’, to create a collage from selections from my “Joe Michel Filing System”.

Figure 3: The Joe Michel Filing System. © 2012 by Sekwaw Matthew. Reprinted with Permission.

Although I had also created a database in Filemaker Pro to analyze the data’s recurring and dominant themes, I found that my doodling, graphing, and notetaking
when it felt like I was being “stalked by story” became my primary method of making meaning.

Eventually, I was able to organize the notes from my “Joe Michel Filing System” and relate the themes to the coding completed in the database. The recurring themes and patterns found in the research helped inspire the development of the “Restorying” Coyote framework that was guided by Secwepemc stsptekwle. The process of “Restorying” the creation stories of Chief Atahm School involved following Coyote’s path from Trickster to Transformer. I reasoned that if Coyote stories can be seen as a reflection of the Secwepemc universe, then, Coyote must exist in all of us. I’ve used this theory to help frame the stories of key characters in the Chief Atahm School story using elements of Coyote’s personality and themes reminiscent of stsptekwle. Where appropriate, some names have been replaced with pseudonyms based on characters from traditional stories. Through using Coyote’s magical ability of travelling through time and crossing the boundaries between internal and external worlds, I restory the landscape by interweaving the stories of language regeneration with the historical and mythic past.

**Setting the Scene for the Chief Atahm School Story**

In many ways, the story of Chief Atahm School’s fight against the language monster could have been set in any First Nations community in B.C. Before the development of Chief Atahm School, the Adams Lake reserve looked like any other small, rural reserve in the early 1990s that was fighting a losing battle to save their language. If it weren’t for a few that kept trying to bring the language back to life, it might have
been lost forever. They waged small campaigns against the dreaded language monster that including joining forces with the local public school and inserting the Secwepemc language into strategic spots within the school day. One of the school Elders remembers that having to teach within that setting was difficult:

I didn’t like the classes over there, they were mostly non-Native. Then I found out that the non-Natives were picking up the language quicker than our own people, which I didn’t really think was right. Then it wasn’t really structured. And we didn’t have much time – one hour here, ½ an hour there. And you weren’t sure whether one year to the other they were going to continue in the language. (TP, April 17, 2010 transcript)

Unfortunately, the public school strategy that began in the early 1980s was unable to create any measurable changes to Secwepemc fluency.

However, it seemed by that time, so many people had already given up on the language. In fact, some even were adamantly opposed to hanging on to the old ways. One Elder remembers that, “Some thought that what was being taught was obsolete – it’s gone. Our old people did it. That was good for them, but not in this modern day” (IK, May 1, 2010 transcript). Another Elder remembers hearing some say, “Why are they doing this? Don’t you know our language is going out of the door?” (TP, April 17, 2010 transcript). These discouraging comments created even greater challenges in the war against the language monster. Not only had many lost sight of the importance of the language, they were also beginning to assist the language monster by turning on the few still willing to fight.
For many years, it seemed as if there was little hope of defeating the language monster. Until, one day in the early summer of 1987, a stranger arrived on the reserve with a mission. Although this stranger was an Adams Lake Band member, she had lived in the city all her life. Her attire must have made her stand out because one of the first things said to her when she arrived on reserve was, “I bet you’re the only person who could look like a tourist in their own band office.” Having been raised in a large family with five older brothers helped her to ignore all of the heckling and to quickly get down to the business of saving a language. She began to lay out her plans to start a language nest. The first goal was to lay a guilt trip on her parents for not teaching her the language so that she could coerce them into helping her. She knew that if that didn’t work, she wasn’t above resorting to pleading and bribery. Once her plan was in place she began going door to door to all the houses on the reserve to see who was interested in becoming involved with a preschool language immersion program.

House after house she was met with polite indifference. Finally, one woman took pity on her and pointed her towards someone who “did language”. It was on that day that Fox must have jumped over Coyote to bring life back to the dying language. This joining of forces with another young mother who “did language” sparked the beginnings of a new era of language regeneration. One of the school’s staff members recounts this time, “I always believed that two mothers had a dream. They both had the desire and the dream together. It was the Fox and the Coyote that had the dream and kept us going” … (CC, December 1, 2009 transcript). Soon these two women arranged with Adams Lake Band to use a log building that was slated to
be used as a cultural museum. Bingos and raffles took place to help hire a fluent speaking Elder to work alongside a parent volunteer. One of the mothers that became involved during these early years recalls that her initial motivation was socialization for her children:

I wanted them involved somewhere other than at home because I was a stay-at-home Mom then and it seemed like we were home frequently and I just wanted them out into the world a little bit more. So, the opportunity to work at the Secwepemc Ka day care came up and I took the opportunity to enroll my children in the day care to be around other children. (NW, December 14, 2009, transcript)

Although later she thought more about the language goals of the nest, “Well, they are Secwepemc kids, so if they learn the Secwepemc language, then great. I thought that was a good part of being a part of that day care” (ibid). The early days of the language nest started slowly with many of the community members still unaware of what was happening in their midst.

For the first few months, they only cared for a handful of children. One mother who helped take care of the children recalled how they started out with just one big room. When the Elder asked what the plan was for the children all day, she answered that maybe the Elder should do what they remembered doing as a child. Without toys and an established daily structure, the Elder was free to invent activities and to use the natural world as inspiration. From that point, the daily activities often seemed organically guided by the language teacher’s interests and the children’s need for adventure. The Elders quickly helped set up a home-like environment that was nurturing and child-friendly. One of the former students who had attended the
language nest from the time he was just ten days old recalled “being rocked to sleep in one of those big blanket things [traditional baby swing]” (TM, January 12, 2010 transcript) beside the other baby born just a few weeks before him.

As the language nest grew there was a need to recruit fluent speakers to work as language teachers. Often these new recruits came into the role with some trepidation. One of the Elders recalls his early days at the language nest:

I think I was reluctant to go there to the log house. Me – speak my language in front of people. I was so self-conscious about how I am going to pronounce things, what am I going to say. Scared, scared, really scared. In the 80s was the first beginning. But the beginning was not the time I started working; it was the beginning of my relearning my language. I was already starting to retire as a carpenter. This was something – I can’t think of how scared I was. It was like getting on a roller-coaster. I gradually, gradually got a little bit relaxed about saying things. Oh, I did say a lot of different things, a lot of bad things, but not in public. We’d take that in back alleys where we’d go for a few drinks. We murder our language a little bit. Have fun with it. But direct, straight, teach somebody – take the breath away. It was funny how a young Elder like me getting scared. I believe now that is how a lot of our young Elders are – scared. I guess I have to encourage some of them to say that I was a scared guy too. It’s something like my program – AA – you have to share your experiences with one another in order to get better. Maybe that’s how I have to tell the young Elder that has a little knowledge of their language to speak it, speak it as much as possible and as often as possible. The involvement there started beginning somewhere in there. (FN, April 28, 2009 transcript)

Although many of the Elders had to work through their own personal challenges, it was through their leadership that the language nest was able to create a positive
environment for the language to flourish. One staff member shares one of their teachings:

… slow down the pace and to go back to what the Elders say, ‘Make sure they’re fed. Make sure they’re warm. Make sure they’re cuddled. Make sure you listen to their ‘owwie’ stories. Make sure you take that time. They really need us to reach out’. (CC, December 1, 2009 transcript)

These early years of language immersion on the Adams Lake Reserve helped to generate the energies needed to expand the program further into immersion schooling.

The Campaign to Start Chief Atahm School

The initial talk of starting an immersion school began when some of the children were beginning to reach school age. Now that Coyote had awakened from her slumber, she was quick to jump into the new adventure of starting a school. Luckily, for the group, she also had experience teaching primary school. She offered to teach alongside an Elder if they were successful in getting band-operated school funding from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Everything seemed to fall into place quickly. The war party, consisting of Secwepemc Elders and parents from the three First Nations communities surrounding Chase, B.C., were successful in lobbying Adams Lake Band to take over the preschool program currently operating on the reserve to convert it to an immersion program.

Some community members were appalled that the existing preschool program that was well attended by non-Natives from Chase and First Nations children from the
three reserves, would be shut down in favour of one that privileged the Secwepemc language and culture. One of the school Elders felt that some responded angrily because:

… they didn’t know the language. They didn’t think this was going to be a success. Some of the Elders even didn’t think [it would work] – they said, ‘Why are they doing this?’ ‘Don’t you know our language is going out of the door. They’re trying to bring it back.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because …’ They didn’t think…They are the ones saying that the school wasn’t going to succeed.

(TP, April 17, 2009 transcript)

Another Elder expressed how many of the people’s thoughts seemed to have been taken over by the language monster. They no longer felt the Secwepemc language had a place in their life and they felt their role was to keep others away from it too. During this time of transition, he recalls that there were many negative feelings swirling around:

I noticed that on the whole, when it come down to a few items that we needed to continue or to add to our program, the community was reluctant, ‘Oh, that’s not what we want’. There was sort of a negative feeling. You could feel it, see it. That’s why we were so sensitive because we’re learning our language. And once you’re in your language you’re sensitivity is sharpened by other people around you who are a bit negative. Especially Elders can feel it lots and hurt from feelings. We can’t change overnight, I guess. We can’t change that feeling and attitude. That’s so hurtful at times and the people who are the loudest are the ones that need the program the most – the language, the culture. There’s lots of talk behind closed doors that what we’re doing is wrong for our people at this time of year or this time of the season or whatever time it’s supposed to be for them. I feel it. People feel it. Elders sort of plod our way through – the ones that are involved in our language.
Language was what made us people, but I guess you chalk that up to residential school. Victories in a lot of ways about assimilation. They’re still going, and we’re still here. I guess they think well we’re going to be here one year or two years and then be gone. (FN, April 28, 2009 transcript)

Another Elder also “heard a few negative feelings about the school when they heard it was immersion. Some of them said, ‘Oh, I don’t want to send my kids there, they’re not going to learn English. When they go to town school they won’t know their English and they will fail’” (AB, May 21, 2009 transcript). Most of the negative comments about starting an immersion school came from within the First Nation community, although some said that they heard grumblings from the non-Native population in Chase too.

The Circle Grows

The Chief Atahm School parents kept moving forward despite the rough transition from an all-English preschool program into an all-Secwépemcetsin nursery/kindergarten program. The small circle of parents continued to grow. It seemed that parents had their own reasons for becoming involved in the immersion program. One parent talked about how her initial role was as an employee:

Initially I started as a curriculum developer assistant I was in the curriculum department making books in the language. It was all a foreign language to me because I was not a fluent speaker back then I didn’t know how to read or write Secwépemcetsin. That was my first job was just typing the books out in the language. Unbeknownst to me it started making sense. My son, Kam, was turning five and I was wondering where to send him to school. I thought I could send him here. He could learn the language; I was working there so I
just brought him with me for Kindergarten. (SP, December 10, 2009 transcript)

When her interest in the program grew, she felt that the school could offer her child something that she had missed out when they she was young:

I wasn’t a speaker when I was growing up. That was something I didn’t have. We’d go visit our grandparents in Lillooet and they would be nattering away to each other and it was just so awesome, and I couldn’t understand them. I thought if I could only learn their language – not realizing it was my language too – but that wasn’t meant to be, that part. But I thought I could give it to my son. He can learn the language and have his culture and be that much stronger. And he is. (WP, December 10, 2009 transcript)

And, even through she felt pressured from family and community to not send her child to Chief Atahm School, she maintained her commitment:

Why are you sending your kids to THAT school?” It’s school. They’re learning, they’re developing, they’re learning about their language and culture. It’s important. It’s where we decided our children were going to go. He [her husband] had lots of issues with that. He’s come around to saying, “Yes, I believe it’s important that they learn the language and culture.” He’s continuously defending that issue. He went to public school. Both he and I were average students and we survived in that system. We were looking back. It wasn’t a fun experience. It was a challenge. We didn’t really fit in. We didn’t want that for our kids. (SP, December 10, 2009 transcript)

One parent also expressed how her decision to enroll her children in the school was met with some resistance from her husband:

I made that decision to send my children to Chief Atahm. I did have opposition from my husband. He was quite adamant at times, asking me the
same questions that other people that don’t understand, “What about their English? What about this, what about that?” I said, “We’re going to stick with it. They’re going to stay there.” Once he started to see that they were actually OK, that they were actually learning to read and write, then he just let it go. These days he doesn’t remember those times when he really opposed what I was doing. It was me – I made that decision. I didn’t go along with what he had to say at all. I don’t think we just about broke up or anything. He mostly just let me lead the show. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

Another parent, who worked in the immersion program, related how the school helped her to fill a void she felt from her parents not sharing their language and cultural practices with her. She recalled how seeing her mother taught the children often emphasized what she had missed out on:

Mom picked up a drum and started singing this song and I was doing dishes at the sink. So it was a small classroom too, because it was an old building, old room and small class. She started singing this song and I got so emotional because I thought, “There’s my Mom singing to these children and I don’t remember her doing that to me as a child.” I remember thinking these kids are so lucky that they have a grandmother in their classroom, during the day, singing to them. And it was so natural to them. It was supposed to be what it was. (JB, December 1, 2009 transcript)

Although, their initial reasons for involvement varied, all of the parents expressed that they felt that the school offered something they felt was missing in their childhood, connection to language, culture, and community.
Developing Collective Goals

Once a commitment to the program was made, many parents held tight to the collective vision of Secwepemc language immersion. One parent recalls that in the early days of running the school, maintaining a collective vision was hard, because they still hadn’t learned how to make decisions as a group:

Nobody seemed to know how to conduct a meeting or how to call a meeting. Somebody just said we were going to have a meeting so we all came together and no one knew how to start it. People would be going way off topic and people would be standing up crying. We didn’t know how to keep things in order or how to make decisions about money. I called KG in one meeting and he said, “OK. Do this, this and this.” I remember there was a lot of ignorance because we just didn’t know. We had this school that we wanted to run and conduct and make decisions about. We were just feeling our way, it seemed. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

Yet, they persisted on learning how to work together and were able to move forward on making collective decisions. One parent felt empowered by the responsibility of making educational decisions for her own children:

I feel I have a voice because every parent attends the Tek’wemiple [the parent-run school board] and has a say in what kind of decisions are going to be made and has input and everyone’s voice is validated. We say, “No sugar? Well, let’s change it then. Let’s try to change our children’s health by having a no sugar policy.” What does that look like? We got a committee together, and “This is the guideline.” We’re still going to meet and discuss what is a healthy lunch and try to make our kids better. We have a voice on where we are going and how we are going to get there. (SP, December 10, 2009 transcript)
Another parent stated that she felt that giving parents a voice has been one of the school’s strongest attributes:

In the Tek’wemiple meeting we just had, going there as a parent – it’s not an empty room. Hearing a young parent vocalize her wishes – wow! Have we seen that before? You think about that too, if she had her children in the primary school, would she be part of the pack and verbalizing? She feels empowered. There is a young individual with a young family empowered to voice how she wants to see her children educated. (CC, December 1, 2009 transcript)

The development of a collective decision making model took time. However, one staff member recalled feeling the power of the Tek’wemiple when called on to help with administrative planning:

They were discussing a number of things. I was trying to catch up. It all seemed quite huge and different. And so I was called in. The question was put, “How much will it cost to implement some of the vision?” And the vision was language, it was bringing in Elders, there was no money for them. “So, if we wanted five of them, five Elders, and curriculum, because there is nothing written in our language, how much will it cost? We want to do our own. How much would it be for the hardware and software that we’ll need that we don’t have. What will it cost? “ All these questions were put to me, “How much will it cost?”, and they gave me the program.

I looked at it and I immediately said, “You can’t do this”. Just looking at the money part and coming from a situation where the administration and the money runs everything I just thought, “well, that will be the end of that idea”. Maybe, it’s hairbrained or something. And, the place went quiet. I was then completely and roundly attacked. “We didn’t ask you if we could do this, we asked you how much it was going to cost to do this.” And I knew right away
that there was something bigger happening here. That the group of people there had come together and I think, collectively their energy and the vision and the talents in the room, made it a reality. After that I never questioned it. It was a matter of “we’re going to do it one way or another”. (CR, January 23, 2010 transcript)

It seemed that the development of a collective vision and group decision-making process helped to bond the group together so that they could persevere through many of the early challenges in starting a school.

**Commitment**

The school’s ability to work together and work through their individual differences was often stated as a reason the small group was able to keep the immersion dream alive:

…”we all had this collective belief, so that is why we never faltered from that. The way we were getting there, we may have stumbled but that is part of the process – that stumbling. Well, we didn’t stumble, we fell face first, nothing to break the fall (laughing). I don’t think we wavered from the belief. (NW, January 19, 2010 transcript)

Also, at times, when the vision faltered, the Fox would return to “jump over” lagging spirits to help redirect the group towards their collective pursuit of the vision:

You have to have somebody or some bodies who believe. Your whole heart, your whole soul, and your ‘whole’, need to be involved in what you’re doing. If not, you are probably sunk. I do believe that the Fox was the driving force behind us. The Fox was the one who kept us going. We did flounder, lots of us did. Whoever the person or group of people is, you have to really believe in yourself and that what you are doing is OK. What you are doing for your
people is OK. You have to be far-seeing, not shortsighted. You have to believe in yourself that the decisions that you make are going to be OK. I’m looking at my kids – they’re fine. If you are working for money, forget it. When we started we worked for nothing or we worked for minimum wage. We kept each other going. There were a lot of meetings where we just met and we seemed to feed each other, “We’re all right. We’re doing OK.” It seemed like a group of people holding hands or linking arms. We don’t seem to need each other quite as much, but maybe we do. I think there has been a change inside myself. I used to be quite fearful lots of times. Yet, the Fox keeps putting one foot in front of the other. (NW, January 19, 2010 transcript).

Even though the group was getting stronger, from time to time, some members shared how an extra motivational boost from those who held fast to the vision was important to maintaining momentum.

**Taking Responsibility**

Even though the Fox was sometimes able to revive lagging spirits, it was apparent to some of the parents that they needed to be more proactive in order for the program to succeed:

I always saw it as everybody, no matter what they could do, giving what they could. That’s something that maybe some communities missed out on. You have to spread the work around, but the burden of decision-making around too because if you are not all on board, then you actually don’t have anything at all. Everybody needs to believe, but don’t point fingers at two people doing all the work. I remember in the early years, people rolling up their sleeves and fund-raising and doing all kinds of things. Still it is an amazing turnout that we get for things. I have fond memories about those things. It’s built upon a strong base in that way. (ME, December 1, 2009 transcript)
Parents and staff needed to learn to work through adversity and to “develop a thick skin”. One parent shares what she feels is needed to get through challenges:

All the negative stuff, well – it’s going to just slide off. There will be negative from your own families; there will be negative from your own Chief and Council; there will be negative from the school across the river. There will be negative everywhere. You just have to keep your vision there. And not just one person’s vision – a whole bunch of people have to have that vision and keep looking at it. This is what we see and this is what we want. Not what you want for us. It has to be a want inside yourself. You just have to keep on looking at it. It has to be a want inside your self. If you’re working for money, I don’t know how you are going to do it if all you’re looking for is money. That’s helped us a lot, starting at the very, very bottom with no money, or as a volunteer. If you can work through that, you’ll probably do OK. But if you’re there looking for a big wage, then you need to move on. There’s no big money. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

**Knucwestsuts: Strengthening Self**

A few dedicated members of the school community even went so far as to upgrade their skills in order to help with the school’s program delivery. Their self-motivation and willingness to help fill staffing needs was key to maintaining the immersion program in its early years. One parent shared how self-determination was needed to learn the language in order to help teach in the immersion classroom:

Oh, that’s got to come from you, that learning the language. You’ve got to make up your own mind to put whatever thinking is in there. You’ve gotta struggle, you’ve gotta cry. And then you’ll finally have it. It’s not just three weekends. It was hard. There were some times it was just so very, very difficult. It’s got to be that heart and that soul. Are you going to quit no matter
what? And, not seeing, and that fear that crept in a few times. Am I really doing the right thing? (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

One parent described how she felt she had a personal responsibility to keep moving through the challenges, “I don’t know. I just kept going. I know what I wanted to do. I always had it in the back of my mind. Nobody’s going to do it for you” (SP, December 10, 2009 transcript). She later made the commitment to upgrade her education so that she could teach in the program:

I decided to pursue and learn the language and become a language instructor. So I went back to school - went to SFU taking the linguistics courses. I thought I would be a speaker after taking those courses, but of course it doesn’t work that way. Just about finished the linguistic program and I thought, “They need more teachers. These Elders are getting older. There are not a lot of Shuswap-fluent speakers who are teachers.” I thought I could do that.” I continued on and got my degree. It was just a General Studies. The next step in order to become a certified teacher you needed to take the PDP program. They weren’t going to offer it in Kamloops, but sure enough, it came to be. Still down that path – learning the language, becoming a teacher. I finished the program and I thought, “Yes I want to teach at Chief Atahm School.” Everyone said, “Boy, you are sure adamant about where you are going.” “Yes, I want to learn the language, I want to get my teaching certificate and I want to teach at Chief Atahm School.” And here I am. (SP, December 10, 2009 transcript)

Committed parents such as these helped to bring the school’s collective vision into reality. A former student recalls that parent involvement was key to the school’s development:
We’d be going up to the mountain all of the time for school. We’d go build a *sq’ilye* [sweatlodge], or we were always just moving. All of the parents were always, they were always volunteering. That’s the only reason we could do all of those things, because there were a number of parents that would volunteer and help to drive and to watch kids. It’s not easy taking thirty, forty kids up into the mountain. So, you had to have the parents that were involved, so that they could help out and watch everything. But, I guess, I always knew that we had something different at Chief Atahm. That it was something special, that parents were a lot more hands-on, they were involved. Because it’s like the *Secwepemc* way, it’s a community thing, it’s a community. That’s what it should be. Like Chief Atahm is for people to learn *Secwepemcstsin* and it’s the *Secwepemc* territory, so there’s the community effort together. (NS, December 20, 2009 transcript)

Through strong parental involvement, the school kept moving forward, despite residing within a larger community that still questioned the value of the *Secwepemc* language.

**The Role of the Elders**

The task of building a *Secwepemc* immersion school required not only the immense dedication of the parents but also a great deal of support from *Secwepemc* Elders. One teacher explains that a prominent part of the immersion program was, “The Elders in the classroom; that is totally unique. They are speaking the language and they’re fluent and the kids are really intrigued by what they are saying and what they are doing”. (SP, December 10, 2009 transcript) Another teacher explained how crucial they were to the school’s success:
The Elders involvement is important. We would never be able to do what we need to do without them. They were game for it. They might not have had the idea or the extreme belief that we did, but they were game for anything from the beginning. They thought we were crazy too, some of them. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

The Elders that were hired to teach language at Chief Atahm School were always willing to share their knowledge. Many of the staff members appreciated the learning atmosphere of the school. One expressed how it seemed that it “was okay to ask questions and it was okay to pursue them. And, it was genuine. I've been in other places where it seemed like a token effort”. (CR, January 23, 2010 transcript)

One Elder felt her job went beyond language speaking; it also included being a good role model:

I guess to show the community that we know our language and are willing to share and give it to the children and to the community if they want it, because we have the language. And to continue being – acting respectful – not to go around acting like we’re young chickens out there. To act like respectful Elders and to carry on what we are doing here and not let the community sway us, and just keep a bright outlook. (TP, April 17, 2009 transcript)

A former student explained how integral the Elders were to the school program:

They have a wealth of knowledge, like about certain areas about culture. So, it’s like learning little bits from each Elder. Medicines, like Mary Thomas knew different medicines, and like Sle7e Joe and Sle7e Larry, they would tell us different plants. They had a lot of knowledge about different plant names and what they were, and trees, and different things like that. And, just all of them together, they had their pockets of knowledge about the Secwepemc people and the Secwepemc language and how they used to live and how things used
to be. I think that’s how they are, our window to the past. (NS, December 20, 2009 transcript)

One of the Elders felt that although her involvement in the program has helped regenerate language in her family and in the community, more effort was needed to bring cultural traditions back:

Sometimes I think I’m sorry that I never started it right away – kept everything up a long time ago. I see how much the kids have lost. Since I quit school and I never taught my own children or my grandchildren. I think we have lost so much in that time period. Now I am so happy that we are getting it back. But, still I think there is still so much to learn. I think we should be doing more cultural stuff. I miss that – going up the hill and getting birch bark or stinesten, coming back and making the baskets – doing things like that. (AB, May 21, 2009 transcript)

Another Elder shared that teaching at Chief Atahm School helped renew his role in the community and gave him a chance to work in a setting he enjoys:

… I don’t really take it as work, I guess. I enjoy it. I’m the first one there, sort of expecting something big. But my time will come, I guess, when I have to slow right down. What keeps me going, what keeps me hopping around, is children. Even now, I’m a little bit forgetful about names. Maybe if I stop, I’ll really forget everything. I’ll forget what day it is even. I think it keeps me healthy – healthy enough to get up and make my coffee and have my mush and ready to go. (FN, April 28, 2009 transcript)

He further explained how he had to learn to share his knowledge to new generations of children within an immersion setting:

When I was young how I learned my language and I tried to give it that away to the young children. Parents used to talk the language all the time, all the
time. Do everything with it. Sometimes they tell you to do this and leave you. You have to finish it. The instructions once told and you finish it. I tried that a few times. No, not these kids. You have to teach them, teach them. You have to teach them often and more often. Teach them all the time. Speak the language all the time. (FN, April 28, 2009 transcript)

Not only did the involvement of the Elders provide language to the program, but it also restored them to their natural role in the community as knowledge carriers. In this sense, by virtue of their increased status, one Elder noted that the Elder’s lives were enhanced in the process:

Those involved, I believe, became alive because of their direct involvement with the school as consultants to the programs. I know my brother, F.N., has just become truly alive since he became involved. T.P. just feels so good about her involvement in the language and her sister, Christine is another example of a person coming alive again because her contribution is valued. Mia is another that came into the program, but she walks differently now. She walks with her head up. She walks with confidence. She feels good about her involvement. A.B., her involvement has made her so confident – made her alive. (IK, May 1, 2010 transcript)

Since the school’s beginnings, Elders have played a key role in providing the language fluency, cultural knowledge, and spiritual guidance for the immersion classrooms to flourish.

**Commitment to Looking Within**

The school community worked hand in hand with the Elders to regenerate Secwepemc knowledge within Chief Atahm School. Together they were committed to developing a program that brought language and cultural teachings alive in the
classrooms. One Elder expressed how impressed he was by the school’s commitment to looking within community for resources to improve the program:

The staff there have regular meetings to continue improving their delivery. In the cultural aspect, one of the things that we did at the beginning was to see what we had in our own community, what resources we had in our own community, and how we can utilize the knowledge and experience that these individuals had in our language & culture. We were surprised that there were many who had some knowledge, but lacked connections with the big picture of the language and culture. The young parents worked hard to make the connections between the knowledge that a non-speaker of the language had about the culture with the fluent speaker with experienced knowledge of the culture. The two coming together then gave good sound information. Many of our people that were good at arts and crafts, basket-making, making of tools from natural things were in the community, but they were not fluent. And others that were fluent probably were not skilled in these old arts and crafts of our people. So, they put their heads together with the teachers at Chief Atahm School to make the picture more complete. And that was good. (IK, May 1, 2010 transcript)

He also saw how the parents were open to looking outside the community for ideas on how to deliver an Indigenous language immersion program:

In the inner circle were the dedicated Tek’wemiple parents who were very determined to revive the language and culture of our people. It was certainly floundering very quickly. One survey indicated that only 10% of our Secwepemc people that were fluent in the language and this they said was not good for us. So with dedication and with passion, they decided to do something about it in a concrete way. They looked to the world for inspiration where some of the return to the tribal heart was real. One of the places was in New Zealand – the Maori people had started their immersion classes. Starting
right from the young babies, right up to the high school level. What was proven by them was that the involvement in the immersion program enhance the learning of English – enhanced the learning of English. The group looked to the Mohawks who were also in the immersion programs. They too found that the immersion programs enhanced the learning of English. We were fortunate to have met some of the university graduates among the Maoris. Some of them were teaching in the universities as a professor. We were fortunate, too, to have the Mohawks come across the land to help us launch our own program here at Chief Atahm School. Dorothy Lazore was one of those very important people, very valuable resource to us. But it needed the passion that these young people had, young parents had to make this program work. As I mentioned, they looked to the world for inspiration. (ibid)

A former student also noted that the school always seemed to be looking for ways to improve the program:

It’s like they strive to do things better. It’s like it would be nothing without the people. Just like all the Elders too, they’re definitely a giant part of it. And, the people’s attitude to make it better, not to be satisfied with anything less. (TM, January 12, 2010 transcript)

Another Elder noted that the school’s commitment to improvement was apparent at the Melq’wilc, the annual school community retreat where students, staff, and Elders came together to assess the school year:

What succeeds in Chief Atahm’s programs is – I think they tried everything. Ever-changing, going right from the beginning – what works and what doesn’t work. Always the main theme of every end-of-the-year sessions in Chief Atahm school and they go to retreat to try to find answers. “What failed?” “Oh, this was a success. Let’s do it over again.” Lot of success has come that way because trial and error. But the others failed because they keep one-track
mind. They don’t have a retreat. If they fail, it’s because they don’t change it. A lot of our dropouts, they recognize that because our children are ever changing. Their minds are really wanderers. They like change from the public schools. Oh, they have the same old, same old. Fail or not, they use it again… But Chief Atahm is ever trying change something better, something more fun – fun work. They really make success. They make work enjoyable. (FN, April 28, 2009 transcript)

Although the challenge of starting a community-based immersion school was overwhelming at times, the collective vision and individual energies helped sustain it in the early years.

**Keep Moving Forward**

The process of starting an immersion school on Adams Lake reserve was one that required adherence to the shared goal of a Secwepemc speaking classroom and many people willing to invest their time and energies to reach that goal. It was emphasized that the willingness to take a risk and make decisions, regardless of the consequences, was needed to keep moving forward:

An existing program is not the way to go. Do it yourself and make your mistakes and develop something that will work for you as a group. We made lots of mistakes. There are probably things we could have done differently. Everything that we did, we own. Nobody else can come in and say we did that for you. We did it and we’re the ones learning, our kids are learning. That’s what we wanted. We wanted to learn, we wanted our kids to learn, we wanted our grandkids to learn. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)
Program development took time and required the resiliency to keep moving forward even through the inevitable mistakes. One parent felt that this approach made for a stronger collective:

Yes. I think it was really good the way things happened. We didn’t know what we were doing like somebody that has gone to school for 10 years and had years and years of education. But, I think we are stronger people and we know more about what we are doing these days than if we had allowed people to make decisions for us because they may not have made the right decisions for us. We made the decisions; we made the mistakes and we learned from our mistakes. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

She also thought that perhaps the many different personalities involved provided the right balance for it to work:

I think extremely stubborn people, it’s the people that did it. You need to believe in what you are doing even though you can’t see in the future how things are going to turn out. We didn’t know how things were going to turn out with our kids until it happened. You have to go with faith. You have to keep each other going as well. There were times when we just propped each other up. When there was a roadblock, we tried what we needed to, to get around the roadblock. It seems like a core group of people. It seems to be that the Fox kept us going at times when we floundered, because you do flounder. It’s faith that it’s actually going to work, that someone is going to come out of it with the language. If it’s not the kids, well it’s going to be me then, or my imts [grandchildren]. So, I think it’s the imts [grandchildren] that are really going to come up and be the speakers. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

The success of the program relied on the ability of the parents and staff to trust in each other throughout the various challenges presented to them in developing the school program.
Empowerment

Some understood that building a school from the ground up that privileged Secwepemc language and knowledge required using whatever resources were available at that time and creatively adapting the program where necessary. One of the Elders describes how the Chief Atahm School circle was shaped and strengthened:

The children were the beneficiaries of these connections that Chief Atahm School staff have worked hard to make – make the connections and consider every contribution by the community members valuable – made our people who contributed feel very good that they have a contribution to make towards developing a program that will be good. The inner circle took upon it as a responsibility to develop a good program and as they searched for more information, for more skills they searched outwards to another circle of the community members who were knowledgeable and skilled and fluent in the language. (IK, May 1, 2010 transcript)

Through persistence and the creative use of resources from inside and outside the community, the school was able to maximize its growth during its early years.

Connecting the Language to the Land

For the first few years, Coyote was relied on to plan and implement the educational program. She utilized her understanding of the language and the knowledge that she learned from her grandparents to help her set up the kindergarten/grade one immersion classroom. Working alongside fluent speakers, together they worked to
incorporate many cultural experiences with classroom activities to support the children in learning the language.

There was other things that come natural. It wasn’t hard. The story telling was good. We had to get culture in – dances, all our activities – what we done as Secwepemc people. It was fun to hear the drumming and singing of an older guy that knows the dances and dance songs. There’s many activities that has their own dances and songs. That’s what I liked about it. Everything else sort of falls in place. (FN, April 28, 2009 transcript)

One parent reminisced that the program, “back then there was more whole language, more storytelling, more conversations and less focus on academics. There was more speaking and understanding there” (SP, December 10, 2009 transcript). An Elder saw how the program was beneficial in connecting children to the culture:

It started small and now it’s gotten bigger and better. The kids are learning a lot. They know what to do, or what they expect to see when they see a deer or a fish. When you go up in the mountains some of them know the medicines even. They know what the foods are. I was really fortunate myself to grow up with the language. I saw a lot of this happening. After I finished school I never did practice it. Never spoke my language. We did cultural things, but I never taught it to anybody. (AB, May 21, 2009 transcript)

Another Elder felt that the school helped reawaken many to the old teachings:

In that process we got to know our land. We got to know the natural resources of our land that our older people depended upon – the fish, the deer and other animals they hunted. The plants they used for food and the plants that are still used for food today – the berries. We start developing more and more and gathering more and more information regarding these
natural resources. Combining it with language and culture, it becomes real. They become alive to the youngsters, especially when they had the field trips. They were taken out to look at the mountains and what resources there were and still are in the mountains, of what peoples use that – what families were stewards of this valley, the next valley, and so on. The mountains and the rivers, the land became alive to the people and involved in all this was return of our old stories – the legends, the myths that we had, the stsptekwel, the slexlexey’e about our people. And, as the children listen to it more and hear it, they find that these stories, and myths and legends of our people and the lessons of the old people are dynamic. That means it applied to the people of long ago and it applies to the people of today. The lessons are there. They are imbedded in our stories. They are imbedded in our myths and legends. They are imbedded in our language. They are imbedded in our songs and drumming of our people and they are imbedded in the extremities of our people. This has been an exciting journey for our teachers and for the Elders as well. It’s been exciting, in having and striving to return to the tribal heart. This is what keeps the flames going – the flame of interest, inspiration. These things at Chief Atahm School are real. They are so real it enhances their lives – makes their lives better. (IK, May 1, 2010 transcript)

In so many ways the immersion program help restore the Elders to their natural role as teachers. The Coyote worked her magic to invite their knowledge into the classroom, thereby enhancing the intergenerational transmission of culture and language. One Elder felt that this beautiful opportunity sometimes was bittersweet, when he was reminded of all the changes that have occurred within the Secwepemculecw:

Outside we have to learn all about the plants, the trees. The names of the trees – what they’re good for. Where you find the good birch tree, make baskets. And how to make a lot of things. We used to make siding with cedar
bark, which was our siding for a house. If we make a winter home or even a tent, we’re going winterize it by using a lot of cedar bark. Cut it in the same lengths, make a roof and the sides – make it long enough to cover our tent and inside. All this we had to learn and this is what I like to teach. But, I guess we’re not going to have a chance. There’s no more left. They’re clearcut. The clearcut spoils a lot of things we can do. There’s no more squirrels. We can’t teach skinning. We can’t use that savvy as we know it – expertise – how to skin and make fur. (FN, April 28, 2009 transcript)

Yet, all of the participants felt that the immersion program provided something positive to the community. One Elder summed it up by saying that, "Having a school in our own community is really good. I like it. I love to see the kids learning. Sometimes I get really emotional just to see how the kids are doing and speaking and doing things and how fast they learn" (AB, May 21, 2009 transcript).

**K’weselktknéws: Community**

As the immersion program began to get more support from the community, the increased enrollment required the addition of more staff. By 1984, Chief Atahm School’s enrollment had over 30 students. In order to fulfill funding obligations, more certified teachers needed to be hired to work alongside fluent Elders. A Secwépemc teacher, who had previously worked in the public school system, was hired to work in the nursery school program. The teacher described her difficulty transitioning from her role as teacher at a public school to team-teaching with an Elder in a Secwépemc-speaking classroom:

I so wanted to hold onto what public school was all about. And establishing, “I am the teacher. These are my students. They are to respect me and they are
to act and behave in a certain manner.” Yet it’s so funny. I just described this
beautiful moment and yet I didn’t expand on it and keep going on it. There
was such conflict within myself and what was right, what was not right; what is
education and what is not education. He [the Elder in the class] sure opened
my eyes a lot. I fought against it for a long time, but he kept doing things in
class to just remind me, “Don’t be so serious. Don’t be so regimented.” He
kept reminding me that these are children and children like to play. Not only
children – but everybody likes to play, so bring the playfulness out. There is a
time to be quiet and still. Too much of that was happening in the day. When
you start realizing that they don’t even see you in that way. (CC, January 19,
2010 transcript)

She feels that there was often a conflict between the way she was trained to teach
and the expectations of the Elders and the program:

And, in the beginning we’re so dependent on the Elders. Well for me, I didn’t
have the language. When you are that dependent, that person is so
instrumental in the classroom. As a classroom teacher to now say, “Here it is,
that was the struggle, I’m sure of it - What! I’m not the focal part of this
program now?” The focus is on the Elders. Over the years, there’s been
frustration. I haven’t acted as great as I should have. There was annoyance.
How do you take what’s going on in this teacher brain to say, “Well, this is the
activity and this is why we’re doing it and this is leading to this and that”. A lot
of the times the Elders were going, “I don’t know why I’m doing this and what
is this all about. This doesn’t make sense.” But as you work through all of that
stuff it’s, “Oh, Oh! Oh, I see”. (CC, January 19, 2010 transcript).

Another staff person who was hired to work in the immersion classroom also
expressed feeling overwhelmed:

I remember some of those same feelings. I didn’t have the language. I had to
rely quite heavily on Sle7e [the classroom Elder] at that time. I didn’t know the
language and I didn’t have teacher training, so it was a double whammy. I
was in a school, so I thought I had to do school things. I didn’t know what to
do. I had no idea. Calendar time – what’s calendar time? Older kids do
calendar. I didn’t realize then, you don’t do calendar for a long, long time with
little kids. So, Sle7e is doing calendar and all the kids are doing this and
saying, “Are we done yet?” So I relied quite heavily on Sle7e to have an idea
of what to do. I didn’t have the language and I really didn’t know what to do in
the classroom so it was a struggle, a huge struggle. “What the heck am I
doing here? Who talked me into this? Let me at that person!” I think I relied
heavily on the other teacher for the other part of it, how to be “IN SCHOOL”.
‘What the heck do you do with this? What the heck do you do with that? I
have no idea. Can you help me out here because I really just don’t know’.
(NW, January 19, 2010 transcript)

However, both of these teachers spoke about how their experience at Chief Atahm
School helped them to grow as a person. One of the teachers acknowledged that
the support of the other staff helped her through the tough times:

The other thing is Chief Atahm School – it acknowledges our strengths and
makes us work on our weaknesses so we become a better . . . I think in the
public school, I would have become a better teacher, but would I have
become a better human being? I’m not sure about that. Would they have
cared about my emotional being, my spiritual being – well, for sure not my
spiritual being, right? But here at Chief Atahm School, those needs are being
met. I come and I have Elders here. If you are on the wrong track, they are
on you. Or somebody else, or your family members are on you or my friend
down the hallway. I’ve got an older sister that teaches, she’ll say, “I’ll kick you
in the ass. Smarten up and get back to work”. (CC, December 1, 2009
transcript)
The other teacher felt that her experience with team-teaching with an Elder gave her an opportunity to learn many valuable teachings:

You wouldn’t find Elders in the same way in a public school that you find them at Chief Atahm. It’s seems like they are just thrown to the wolves elsewhere. “Here, here’s 15 kids – teach.” My feeling there is that I’m not allowed to do that to the Elders – throw a bunch of kids at them to teach. So I do the planning for them and watch the kids. If they get out of hand I go and help.

With me and Sle7e [classroom Elder] it seems like a real partnership. It seems like he really put the boots to me a couple of times. I think I graduated when it came time to teach a TPR class [Total Physical Response, a language teaching methodology],

I said, “OK, Sle7e, are you ready to go?”

“No.”

“What! Are you going to leave me by myself?”

“You’re smart.”

So, I think I graduated then with him, because he put me though all kinds of stuff in that classroom. He taught me some things – different ways to do things and handle students. He’s the one that I’ll always remember. I tried to think of it as a partnership. I didn’t want to throw him to the wolves and I didn’t want him to think he was just a babysitter or something. I really wanted him to teach us. (NW, January 19, 2010 transcript)

She felt that in the process she has developed self:

I feel a lot better about myself today. I have done reaserch. I have done meetings. I have talked to people. It feels like I am a lot happier about where I am. At least I know now how things have come about. I’m satisfied that I have a better idea of that. I don’t know if I have the whole answer. It feels like
there is a lot more to be learned. We have a lifetime to do that. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

Through the two staff members who were brought on to expand the immersion program to grade three, we heard about some of the challenges there were in adapting to the learning environment at Chief Atahm School. Ultimately, these teachers felt that these challenges helped to strengthen their identities and helped to push them towards a better understanding of their role in the community.

**The Children in the Circle**

In the end, the circle of Elders and parents grew to provide support to the children at Chief Atahm School and facilitate the development of nurturing experiences that were communicated in the Secwepemc language. By 1998, there were three immersion classes and a preschool language nest in operation on Adams Lake Reserve. The Chief Atahm School community persevered through the early challenges and made the decisions necessary to get the school up and running. Over 325 students have enrolled in the Secwepemc immersion program in the past two decades. One of the Elders felt that the children benefited from the hard work of the school community:

The children were the beneficiaries of these connections that Chief Atahm School staff have worked hard to make. They made the connections and considered every contribution by the community members valuable – made our people who contributed feel very good that they have a contribution to make towards developing a program that will be good. The inner circle took upon it as a responsibility to develop a good program and as they searched for more information, for more skills they searched outwards to another circle.
of the community members who were knowledgeable and skilled and fluent in the language. (IK, May 1, 2010 transcript)

One of the teachers expressed that the school also provided a healthy place for a child to develop:

The kids all seem happy. They are all balanced and happy. They can adjust to me being here sometimes and then being with the other teachers at other times. We must be doing something right if we do have happy kids. When you walk in you get a pulse of it and the pulse feels really good. Again, it’s great for me to have that opportunity this year to step back and remind myself what it’s all about. It’s the child. (CC, December 1, 2009 transcript)

Although, the Chief Atahm School community was successful at building an immersion school, there were still periods of doubt and fears about whether a Secwepemc-based educational program was the right way to go. One parent remembers having some early doubts. She recalls that when her child came home from school exhausted from learning the Secwepemc language she felt that perhaps the immersion program was too hard on him. Another parent, one who had been involved since the beginning and who later became a teacher, remembers going through periods of doubt about her choices of Secwepemc immersion for her children. She recalls that when her children struggled to find their way during their teens, it may have been due to her choosing immersion education for them. However, now that they are adults, she feels that their struggles were consistent with what every teen has to go through these days, and that, if anything, their years at Chief Atahm School helped get them through it. In the end, she felt confident that
having the language and culture helped them have a solid grounding of who they were and where they came from:

I think that they have their language and they will always have their language. Even though they may have been angry with me at some times for sticking them into a school like Chief Atahm and having to learn an extreme minority language. But, they have their language and they have some fantastic memories of different activities that happened at the school. They will always have them. That will never, ever leave them. The language that they learned there, it is in them now. I don’t regret doing what I did. I think that they still continue to struggle. Well, life is a struggle. I think they are stronger people as a result of what has been “done” to them. They will never be someone who says, “Well, what the heck! I never, ever learned my own language, my own culture. What does it mean to be Secwepemc?” They’ll probably have their own questions and want answers to them. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

One of the former students, who is now in his fourth year at university, shared that he sometimes questioned the value of his education. He remembered that in his adolescence he felt an initial feeling of awkwardness when he first realized that Chief Atahm School was different than other schools:

…when you’re with another group of people and they ask, and their talking about what they’re doing at school and stuff like that, and you can’t relate at all. Like, it’s something like you have no idea what they’re talking about. And, you feel like a little bit of an outsider. And they try to engage you in a conversation about school, it’s just like you kind of pass it off. Just not talk about much I guess. I mean, at first it just seems kind of embarassing, at first I guess. (TM, January 12, 2010 transcript)
Although, within a few years he began to realize that his different education wasn’t necessarily a bad thing:

It’s like, I kind of realized it’s cool that I know Secwepemctsin. Like, I know even lots of people on reserve, it’s just like they don’t even know beyond 10-15 words. And it’s like something to be kind of proud about. And you realize that it’s not that different, once you get to that age, that immersion school in Secwepemctsin might be different, but it’s not really that different. There’s a whole bunch of people going to French immersion and stuff like that. I think it’s something good to have and it doesn’t really make you that different than anyone else. Well, it does, but, like not as far as when I first found out. It seemed like it was completely different. But, you realize it’s pretty normal, like going to school anywhere else, I guess. (TM, January 12, 2010 transcript)

And then later on, he appreciated the nurturing he received at Chief Atahm School:

…everyone kind of cared how you were doing and everything. It was just really supportive. And then it was completely the opposite at public school. Like, we had the First Nations counsellors, but, I guess it was just a friendly room in a cold place, I guess. Not that the people were horrible or anything like that, it was just you realize that it’s all on you. Like, they couldn’t care less I guess. (TM, January 12, 2010 transcript)

Other students who had gone through the immersion program also remarked on how valuable the support and teachings of the Elders had been in helping them throughout life. One shared how she felt the school was “more personal, you got to spend time with the Elders, spend time on the land, and learn about the knowledge from the people before us. I really enjoyed it” (AC, December 23, 2009 transcript). Another former student shared how his school experiences shaped his understanding of the role that language plays in the continuance of culture:
That's where I think the motivation came, because the language, basically, is our culture. So, without our language, it's just, we lose a whole thing, a way of seeing the world, which will be an incredible shame to see that ever happen. So, that's what I think it comes back to, is that motivation to be attached, to be a proud people. To keep accelerating, going forward as a people, we need to hold onto our core beliefs that we've had for thousands of years. And, that's all attached to the Secwepemc language. So, I think that's where most people's ambitions towards keeping Chief Atahm going are. And that's, kind of like growing up with Chief Atahm, that's really what I remember. (NS, December 20, 2009 transcript)

The former students shared that they have a role to play to promote and continue with the teachings learned at Chief Atahm School. One teacher reminisced about how moved a visitor to the community was on hearing a young man give a speech in Secwepemctsin:

The power of language – I think the kids don't know how much impact they have on the community and maybe other people. It's sad to say how rare they are. How rare a young person speaking the language is. And not only our language, but other languages. I know during Dad's funeral, one of our former students talked in the language. It had such an impact on a young Carrier woman who doesn't know the language. It had such an impact on her, I think it has put a spark in her, “What can I do to keep the Carrier language going? Because if I don't we're not going to have speakers and look how the Secwepemc people, how a young man that's a speaker of the language, can speak powerfully to the people and give a message.” That is what she had witnessed, so she asked what he was saying. They [the students] don't know the impact. This is their natural being. This is who they are. (CC, December 1, 2009 transcript)
Although the students who have learned the language through the language nest and Chief Atahm School expressed that they sometimes feel burdened by the responsibility of having to pass on their knowledge to others, they all have come to appreciate the gift of knowing their culture.

**The Future**

Over the last twenty years Chief Atahm School has grown from a small seed of an idea inspired by the Maori Te Kohanga Reo program into an established educational program that ties together generations of Secwepemc people with their land, language, and knowledge. The vision of “a Secwepemc speaking community living in balance with nature” is still being actively pursued. Although there were many challenges towards creating the immersion program, the community has made great strides in helping regenerate the Secwepemc language. Unfortunately, there is still much work to be done to keep the language alive in a world dominated by English.

One Elder expresses the need to keep working on the vision:

> I have a concern that our young people that have learned the language need advanced learning now, because they are going to end up being the Elders. The teachers that learned are going to be Elders and I want them to go to the next level because we are on our last legs and I want them to go up the next level of speech and learning. I want that to start happening very soon. That’s my concern. They know all the baby words, but if you go to the next level, they don’t understand. If our language is to survive our language teachers have to go on to the next level. But that’s not leaving the fact – it amazes me that these people that were not speaking at all who are teaching in the language. It blows my mind. It’s really a plus. (MK, January 23, 2010 transcript)
One thing is for certain, the hard work and dedication of the founding school community members helped breathe life into the Secwepemc language. It is now up to the leaders of the future to decide how to keep the energies growing and circulating.

**Words of Wisdom: How to Grow the Dream**

The story of the creation of Chief Atahm School shares how a small group of people worked together to build a place where Elders could share their wisdom to the young people in the community, thereby regenerating Indigenous knowledge and language. The people involved in this study emphasized that what they did to bring an immersion program to life could be also be achieved in any First Nations community. If they were to leave a recipe for others to follow to start an immersion program, it would have the following ingredients:

**Vision: To See the Possibilities of Immersion**

Many of the participants shared their wish that the stories from Chief Atahm School would inspire others to have a dream for their own communities. One Elder shared that it would be nice if others could see that, “This is good. This is doable. We just need passion. We need dedication. We need commitment to make it work – just as Chief Atahm started with” (IK, May 1, 2010 transcript). The commitment to the shared vision of “a Secwepemc speaking community living in balance with nature” was found to be a key component in the successful development of the school.
Leadership: A Commitment to Actively Pursuing the Vision

One of the teachers shared that the school has shown the willingness to take a risk to change from a state of language loss to language growth. Through the school’s leadership the community’s attitudes gradually changed from, “it will never work”, to that of Secwepemc immersion becoming the norm on Adams Lake Reserve:

I think the biggest thing I’ve seen is when we first introduced this whole idea, it was so foreign. It was not even in anybody’s consciousness about immersion or about doing our own schooling in our own language. It was so far removed from reality for 98% of the community. The few that did say “OK, let’s try this,” thought they were along for this joy ride, not knowing what was really going to happen. That’s one thing, that it has become more of a norm now. It’s not that unusual to choose Chief Atahm School or choose public school. (ME, December 1, 2009 transcript)

Many participants shared the importance of personal responsibility in bringing the dream of a Secwepemc immersion school into reality. The ability to take initiative and commit ideas into action was a major catalyst in bringing the school to life.

Resourcefulness: Work as a Team to Plan for the Future

Many members of the Chief Atahm School community believe that the resources to start an immersion program are readily available in every community. From the beginning, Chief Atahm School was committed to developing from within the community. Although the school relied on the energies of the young parent, key Elders were relied on to play a major role in reviving the language, knowledge, and
values. The school looked to their leadership in building a strong program that privileged Secwepemc knowledge, language, and beliefs.

**Connection: Foster Enthusiasm and Passion for the Language**

The parents provided the energy and motivation to start the program and were instrumental in sustaining it through the early years. Many of the parents expressed that through their involvement with the school they were able to connect to their heritage. Those who were raised in English-only environments strongly believed in the importance of keeping the language alive. One parent encouraged people to persevere in their efforts to save their language:

> Try, and don’t stop because you fall down the first time. If there’s a need, if there’s a want, if there’s one child – do it. Just do it. Because you never know that might be the saviour of the community one day – the one person that has the stories, one person who understands how to tan hides, or the language, or know all the place names of the community. It’s important. (SP, December 10 2009 transcript)

The ability to reconnect to community, history, and culture was shown to be a strong motivator in getting an immersion school started on Adams Lake reserve.

**Sustaining the Vision**

The four main ingredients to starting an immersion school, a dream, leadership, resourcefulness, and connection, requires some added ingredients in order to sustain momentum throughout the challenges faced within self and community. The
second part of the recipe adds the necessary ingredients to support the growth of
the program through its early stages:

**Commitment: Take Possession of Your Language**

To maintain the focus on the common goal of immersion education, Chief Atahm
School reinforced commitment to its vision at annual retreats, parent meetings, and
within the program’s development. Many of the participants shared how focusing on
the greater vision helped to sustain them when times got challenging. It was also
noted that it was helpful to have a couple of members of the group who held fast to
the vision despite all of the early struggles. These members could be counted on to
help motivate lagging spirits and to guide the group back to the path of language
immersion.

**Resiliency: Persist in the Vision of Language Regeneration**

One Elder shared his thoughts on how the *melq’wilc*, the school’s annual retreat, not
only helped solidify the vision, but also demonstrated a willingness to grow:

   Always the main theme of every end-of-the-year sessions in Chief Atahm
   school and they go to retreat to try to find answers. “What failed?” “Oh, this
   was a success. Let’s do it over again.” Lot of success has come that way
   because trial and error. But the others failed because they keep one-track
   mind. They don’t have a retreat. If they fail, it’s because they don’t change it.
   (FN, April 28, 2009 transcript)

The theme of learning through experience resonated amongst the participants. The
ability of the school community to work through the negative community pressures,
the immense challenges of learning how to run a school, and of teaching the language, displayed incredible resiliency of spirit. There was a sense of shared ownership in overcoming the obstacles to starting an immersion program. A former student shared her sense of responsibility to carry forth the vision, “My role is to continue my knowledge that I learned from everybody, from the Elders, and pass it on to my daughter and to the next generations of children”. (AC, December 23, 2009 transcript)

Many of the Chief Atahm School community felt that the answers to many problems could be found from within the community and through the strengthening of self. Through many people making a personal commitment to the goals of the school they were able to keep moving forward.

**Empowerment: Discover Individual and Community Potential for Growth**

Chief Atahm School was able to see the potential in their community members and understood the value in maintaining *Secwépemc* stories, knowledge, and language. It was reinforced that communities need to empower themselves, as has been modelled by the Chief Atahm School community:

Don’t worry about people judging, because anything new that starts on the reserve is going to be judged. Don’t worry about universities and learned people coming and saying, “Oh, you’re doing it wrong.” This is our way. The more you do it your way, the more you’re going to empower your own people and yourselves. Look at our own children going to universities and public schools from here. They are *Secwépemc*, and they are on *Secwépemc* land, and they succeed. (MK, January 23, 2010 transcript)
One Elder reinforced the relevancy of Indigenous languages and knowledges:

…being involved in the immersion program enhances their learning of English. We see that when our children transfer into the town schools. In some subjects they are more advanced than the town schools. Mind you, all of these students taught themselves how to read – taught themselves with the help of their parents. They didn’t have any formal lessons. They had to examine English. Amazing! And the other complaint is that it's obsolete. It is not so. Our teachings, our cultural values, our languages are dynamic. In other words, the lessons that our people knew thousands of years ago, passed down to us, are still very valuable today. These are imbedded into our total life. If we delve more deeply into our culture and language we will reap the benefits of these age-old teachings of our people, which will help us live a good life. (IK, May 1, 2010 transcript)

Chief Atahm School saw the value of reconnecting to Secwépemc culture and knowledge and integrating these teachings into their program. Through the repositioning of Secwépemc knowledge, they empowered their Elders to regain their role as teachers within the community.

**Community: Find Your Sense of Place Within Community**

Perhaps the most valuable ingredient within Indigenous immersion education is the reconnecting of the self to community. All of the participants commented on how their experiences with starting Chief Atahm School had fostered a greater connection to family and community. One of the former students expressed how important he felt Chief Atahm School has been to a sense of community:

… it's a sense of identity, I guess, for the reserve. It’s like an immersion school was needed, because it was just nothing before. I can’t even imagine
the reserve without a school. It’s such a giant part of it, to me. I can’t even picture it without the school, how central it is to my image of Adams Lake, anyway. (TM, January 12, 2010 transcript)

Another student reflected on what Chief Atahm School has offered the community:

… I know that people kind of started to realize that there was a very real chance that Secwepemctsin might become extinct if nothing was done. And, even with all the efforts that Chief Atahm has done to preserve language, to document everything, without Chief Atahm, it could, it could very well be on it’s last legs right now. Even the Elders probably wouldn’t be proud to be speak it to their children, or even to each other. It was like they weren't proud to be Secwepemc, I guess, in a sense. That’s one thing with Chief Atahm, that’s what keeps the school going, it kind of gives them, a lot of people, meaning and purpose. (NS, December 20, 2009 transcript)

Conclusion

The story of Chief Atahm School shares the dream, the challenges, and the triumphs of a small group of parents, Elders, and children who started a battle against the language monster in their midst. This story helps to identify the tools that were developed within their community to initiate and maintain a Secwepemc immersion education program that defended their rights to their language, their stories, and their culture. With the sharing of their story, Chief Atahm School hopes to incite others to action. One of the school’s former students warns people of the dangers of waiting too long to do battle against their language monster:

Why aren’t people making a better effort and realizing that if the language is lost, what that actually means? Because when that day comes and people will go, “Oh, we should have tried harder. We could have did this, could have
“But, by that time, it’s obviously too late. It’s just forward thinking, rather than, “Oh, is it going to be beneficial?” It’s not going to hurt your community that’s for sure. All I can think is that it can only strengthen people’s identities if they could learn their own language. It’s something I would see a lot of people proud of. Because a lot of people ask me, “Oh, that’s so cool you can speak your own language. Even people my own age, like, “Oh, that’s so awesome that you can speak your language!” So, the benefits far outweigh anything. Sure, there’s going to be effort. It’s not going to be easy, but it’s worth fighting for. It’s going to be hard if it’s worth fighting for. (NS, December 20, 2009 transcript)

These powerful words spoken by a young man brought up within the Chief Atahm School circle validates the hard work and determination of the parents, staff, and Elders that helped bring the program to life. This story of Chief Atahm School has looped backwards and forwards to form into a circle connecting the past to the present, and the young to the old. Now that the story of Chief Atahm School has been shared with you, you are being entrusted to retell it. It is important to remember that this story of a community doing battle against the language monster is like all stories; it needs to be restoryied with other adventures to fully gain its power.
Chapter Six: Coyote’s Path to Language

The overall purpose of the research was to explore the motivational factors surrounding the creation of a Secwepemc language immersion program with a particular focus on the factors that helped sustain the movement forward in its early stages of development. In this chapter, I continue to draw on the experience of Coyote to help interpret the main themes and plotlines within the Chief Atahm School creation story. Throughout each chapter of this thesis, I have travelled in the footsteps of Coyote by crossing boundaries into different areas of Secwepemc experience to explore language loss within the Nation. This path has led me to the internal and external worlds surrounding the development of the Chief Atahm School immersion programs. In Chapter One, I introduced Secwepemc storytelling, or stsptekwle, as the theoretical and conceptual framework through which the research would be guided and interpreted. I began with sharing a personal story that marked my path of entry into the research as a personal etsxe, or vision quest, in which I sought to uncover the stories of how a Secwepemc immersion school came to life and was able to persevere despite many obstacles. This etsxe can be seen as a continuation of a lifelong process of reconciling the two Secwepemc values of knucwestsut.s and k’weslktnéws, or, of merging the self within the whole. In Chapter Two, I looped backwards to revisit earlier times of the Secwepemc when stsptekwle played a prominent role in nurturing younger generations. Then, by jumping forward to explore the century of conflict beginning with the arrival of the seme7 (Whiteman) into Secwepemc territory, I uncovered Trickster stories that gave
evidence of shifting values and practices that influenced the decline of the Secwepemc language. In Chapter Three, I focused on transformative sites of theory and practice that helped open up the pathway toward Secwepemc immersion education. In Chapters Four and Five, the path narrowed, leading to a group of storytellers telling their tales of how a Secwepemc community worked to reconnect to each other and the earth, through language. In this chapter, I will relate the study’s major themes to the research findings in order to map out new paths for reconnecting to the language.

“Restorying” Chief Atahm School

To help map out the language territory, I once again jump on Coyote’s back to loop backwards and forwards through time to restory the research findings within the tradition of stsptekwle, using the Secwepemc values of knucwestsuts and k’wsectktnéws to frame the pathways. For this journey, I call on the spirit of Coyote, as he appears in the form of Senxwéxwlecw, the Great Traveller. Within the Secwepemc Nation, Sek’lep is sometimes referred to as Senxwéxwlecw, a moniker that acknowledges his prowess for travelling great distances. This name also reflects the prominence of Coyote as a Trickster character within many First Nations oral traditions in Canada and the US. I apply the spirit of adventure that Senxwéxwlecw embodies to create a mind map to tie together the stories discovered throughout this research journey. Senxwéxwlecw helps place the study within the First Nations territory of the Secwepemc in South-Central B.C, and helps to mark the

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7 Ron Ignace (p. 92, 2010) provides this breakdown of the word senxwéxwlecw: (from a reduplicated root, nuxw-to run like an animal + ¬ecw = land, ground - hence “ground-runner”)
boundaries of the internal and external spaces surrounding the development of Secwepemc language immersion. Using this incarnation of Coyote, I will show language regeneration through the eyes of Senxwéxwlecw: as a transformative process uniting the self to family. Coyote markers will be strategically placed to reclaim the rights to the language territories that First Nations have been disconnected from through assimilative practices of the Canadian Government.

Within this study, I have travelled to many areas to find the markers on the paths that help tell the story of how a small group of people were successful in regenerating language within self and community. In this chapter, I will use the magical powers of Coyote and his family to help breathe life into this retelling of the Chief Atahm School story. In traditional stsptekwle, Coyote’s brother, the Fox, and his wife, Mole, often are called upon to bring him back to life. They have the power to revive Coyote by jumping over him three times. Likewise, in this chapter, I will use the power of the three leaps to help bring life to the transformative practices discovered at Chief Atahm School. In the “first leap” of this chapter, I loop back to revisit the Colonial Trickster to relate how colonial practices connect to feelings, beliefs, and attitudes towards the Secwepemc language within the Secwepemc Nation. Through reframing historical events that influenced language loss as battles waged in four territories, the body, the spirit, the mind, and the heart, I set the stage for action. The “second leap” of this chapter will show how the motivational and sustaining factors supporting the development of Chief Atahm School can be restoryied as the harnessing of the Trickster and Transformational elements of Coyote. Finally, in the “third leap”, I merge the Trickster with the Transformer to
present a personal and community development tool to help revive ailing First
Nations languages.

**The First Leap: The Claiming of the Language Territories**

Earlier in the research process, I travelled to different territories where the
Secwépemc engaged in battles to maintain their claim to land, language, and
culture. For example, in Chapter Three, I followed the path of the Colonial Trickster
to witness how denominational schooling laid claim to Indigenous souls and
Indigenous thought, thereby, displacing Secwépemc children from traditional modes
of knowledge transfer. The residential school era was shown to be one of many
colonial policies and practices aimed at separating the Secwépemc from their land,
language, teachings, and stories. In this “first leap”, I continue to connect the
threads of Secwépemc history through “Restorying” the research within the territory
of Senxwéwxelecw, wherein the antagonist, the Coyote Trickster, has invaded the
four internal territories of the Secwépemc essential to maintaining intergenerational
transfer of language.

In order to focus in on the relationship between language loss and the larger agenda
of control and domination of First Nations in Canada, I have intentionally simplified
the complex and interconnecting series of events that have occurred over many
decades within the Secwépemculecw. By drawing on Smith’s (2006) concept of
colonization as an act of naming and claiming the external and internal worlds of
Indigenous peoples, I remap language loss as acts of naming and claiming of four
language territories:
1. The Territory of the Body – representing connection to the land;

2. The Territory of the Spirit – representing spiritual beliefs based on interrelationship and balance;

3. The Territory of the Mind – representing the intergenerational transfer of Secwepemc knowledge as shared through stsptekwle, mentoring, and experiential learning;

4. The Territory of the Heart – representing the connection of the self to family; the merging of the two values of knucwestsuts and k’wseltktnews.

It is through the attacks on the internal territories of the body, spirit, mind, and heart that we can trace the roots of language loss within the Secwepemculecw and the persistent challenges faced in language regeneration efforts. The four territories claimed by colonial forces weakened the traditional values of k’wseltktnews and knucwestsuts, two values essential to creating nurturing ties and interdependency between individual and community. As language is the conduit through which a society perpetuates their knowledge, spirituality, beliefs, and stories, it can be said that the decline of the Secwepemc language paralleled the erosion of these foundational values. Through setting the story of language loss within four sites critical to the survival of the Secwepemc language, I can highlight the relationships that exist between historical events and the feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes surrounding the development of Chief Atahm School.

This remapping of history also helps to identify strategic points of entry into the battle for Indigenous language survival. In order to implement a campaign to save a
language, participants need to be aware of the obstacles and barriers they face. Many of the obstacles presented in language regeneration can be attributed to internalized negative beliefs that have been reinforced by the assimilative practices of Canada. The research uncovered some of the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes of community members that challenged the development of Chief Atahm School. These challenges can be linked back to the four sites of colonial attacks, and seen as byproducts of the systematic indoctrination of the Secwepemc into the Euro-Christian “story” supporting the political and economic goals of Canada.

The Claiming of the Body:

The process of claiming the four language territories can be viewed as occurring within a historical timeline as a series of systematic attacks. The colonial attack on the territory of the body symbolically represents the physical separation from the land imposed on the Secwepemc. This era, occurring in the early 1900s, was marked by land displacement and an influx of new European settlers into the territory. During this stage of the battle the Secwepemc were first introduced to Euro-Canadian concepts of race, social, and economic stratification. The first round of attacks that displaced the Secwepemc from their traditional land base influenced changes within the social and economic system, thus rupturing the foundational Secwepemc value of k’wseltktnéws, the value of interrelationship. The enforced marginalization of the Secwepemc within Canada and the disconnection from the land resulted in a loss of confidence and trust in traditional ways of living based on the seasonal rounds.
The disconnection from a traditional way of life and the introduction of the concept of social and economic stratification created a conflicted sense of identity in many individuals and families. As it became apparent that the “old ways” were no longer viable and the Secwepemc language was not the language of the new economy, more and more people began to denigrate their own culture. Research conducted at Chief Atahm School shows that negative views of the Secwepemc language and culture had persisted within the community during its development. In particular, during its first years of operation, some of the participants expressed that there was a prevailing attitude in the community that the Secwepemc language and culture was not relevant to a child’s future in the modern world. One research participant shared that some of the Elders in the community felt that it was futile to hang onto the old ways:

They thought that the immersion program would deter the students from advancing. Some thought that what was being taught was obsolete – it’s gone. Our old people did it. That was good for them, but not in this modern day. (IK, May 1, 2010 transcript)

Another participant also recalled some of the negativity in the community:

I remember some families just flatly refusing to have anything to do with us because we were doing things in a backwards way. If you are involving your children in learning a language, well, “You are taking them way back – life is not like that any more. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)

Within the research findings, we find evidence that one of the challenges to starting an immersion education program was in maintaining momentum despite a prevailing
belief that the Secwepemc language and culture was in some ways inferior to Euro-Canadian language and culture.

The positioning of the Secwepemc language and culture as inferior is an example of the successful indoctrination of the people into the “Colonial Story”. The first strategy for gaining control of the Secwepemc territory was the introduction of the concept of social stratification. Then, to further advance the Euro-Canadian claim, the introduction of the new economic system helped secure their rights to the lands and resources. The marginalization of the Secwepemc promoted a shift away from collective ideals towards an adoption of capitalistic forms of economy. This eroded the central value of k’wseltktnéws and helped to further disconnect the individual from community.

Within the research, some participants shared that the pressure to accept the Canadian social and economic model often would often create conflicting emotions towards the school and the Secwepemc language. Many of the parents and Elders expressed that during their lifetime they had experienced implicit and explicit messages from family and community that negated the value of the Secwepemc language and culture. One participant recalled that when she was young it was implied that the route to success lie in making money, “You go out in the world, and you’ve got to have a purpose. In the séme7 (white person) world, it’s driven by money and the economy” (CC, December 1, 2009 transcript). Another participant shared that community members would often question the ability of a Secwepemc school in securing a future for the children in the new economy, “They didn’t think this was going to be a success. Some of the Elders even didn’t think – they said,
'Why are they doing this?' ‘Don’t you know our language is going out of the door. They’re trying to bring it back, why?’ (TP, April 17, 2009 transcript). Some of the community members believed that an immersion school would actually prevent a child from succeeding. One Elder recalled hearing a parent say, “Oh, I don’t want to send my kids there, they’re not going to learn English. When they go to town school they won’t know their English and they will fail” (AB, May 21, 2009 transcript). The research findings support the theory that Euro-Canadian concepts of economic and social stratification have negatively influenced attitudes towards language. Cohen's (2010) study shares that the development of their school was also challenged by the colonizing hegemonies present in the community. He shares this historical view of hegemonies surrounding language:

   Historically, in schools and communities, Okanagan children were ridiculed for speaking their own language, and Okanagan kids would criticize and tattle on other Okanagan kids for speaking Okanagan, and that continues today by Okanagan people nitpicking and complaining about our little school even when they are not connected to the school at all and have no interest in Okanagan language or rights. This is a good way to colonize and take power away from First Nations is to get them to colonize and disempower themselves. (p. 222)

The internalization of the Colonial position that the Secwepemc language and culture is inferior to English can be seen as one of the challenges faced in implementing an immersion education program that privileges Secwepemc language and knowledge systems.
The Claiming of the Spirit:

The next wave of attacks by the Colonial Trickster focused on the claiming of the spirit. Christian missions were established to promote the “new story,” thereby further asserting the Euro-Canadian social and economic model that placed the Secwepemc at the margins. Policies, such as the outlawing of the potlatch in 1884, reinforced the message that the “old ways” of living were sinful, inferior, and needed to be destroyed. As the linking of the Secwepemc to the land and to the spiritual world was foundational to Secwepemc ontology, the destruction of those beliefs effectively crippled the intergenerational transfer of Secwepemc knowledge. The condemnation of the practice of etsxe (quest for personal power) further disconnected the individual from their Secwepemc beliefs and from their sense of responsibility to the community.

The research conducted within the Chief Atahm School community indicates that this sense of spiritual disconnection may have been present within the community when the school was first started. For some participants, their feelings of disconnection became a motivating factor in choosing to become involved in the Secwepemc immersion program and in staying involved. One participant expressed:

I had a lot of questions about how we live today and had no answers. Through schooling and through talking to different individuals in the program and everywhere, I felt that we seemed to have lost our way. I felt that I had lost my way. I felt that I didn’t know what it meant to be Nlîk̓épmctcwcw. (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript)
One of the teachers shared how working at the school helped her to connect to her spirituality:

I think in the public school, I would have become a better teacher, but would I have become a better human being? I’m not sure about that. Would they have cared about my emotional being, my spiritual being – well, for sure not my spiritual being, right? (CC, December 1, 2009 transcript)

Moreover, although satisfied with her role in helping others to reconnect to the Secwepemc way of life, one Elder shared her sense of regret for not sharing her knowledge with her own children:

Sometimes I think I’m sorry that I never started it right away – kept everything up a long time ago. I see how much the kids have lost. Since I quit school and I never taught my own children or my grandchildren. I think we have lost so much in that time period. (AB, May 21, 2009 transcript)

Many of the research transcripts resonated with a sense of disconnection of the self from community, heritage, and history. The attacks on the language spirit can be seen as creating a lasting scar that some participants felt had only started to heal through their involvement with Chief Atahm School.

**The Claiming of the Mind:**

The demonization of Secwepemc beliefs occurring in the early 1900s was followed by an all-out attack on the mind, with the advent of mandatory residential schooling for First Nations in Canada. Assimilative practices intent on removing the “Indian” from the child, helped to further disempower the value of knucwestsuts, whereby an individual strived to develop self in order to best support family and community
Within this era, the reproduction of the “myth of the savage” helped to reinforce the message that in order to move forward in the new society you must reject your past. The removal of children from parents and Elders negated the traditional modes of knowledge transfer of storytelling, modeling, and mentoring. The resulting feelings of shame and inferiority caused them to reject their own language, which ultimately led to them choosing to raise their children in English only.

Residual negative feelings of self-worth continued to affect the community during the establishment of immersion programs on Adams Lake reserve. Many of the participants recalled that, within the community, there were blatant attempts to disparage the creation of a school that privileged Secwepemc knowledge and language. One Elder expressed that the negativity was essentially an attack on self, and could be interpreted as a cry for help:

   We can’t change that [negative] feeling and attitude. That’s so hurtful at times and the people who are the loudest are the ones that need the program the most – the language, the culture. (FN, April 28, 2009 transcript)

These findings are consistent with the findings of Aguilera and LeCompte (2007), and Cohen (2010), which show that Indigenous immersion sites often face the greatest challenges from within their own community. Many participants realized that their choices in becoming, and staying involved, in Chief Atahm School required dealing with their own negative internalized beliefs. One participant summed it up by saying, “I think we’re the people that seem to believe in all the junk that society throws at you” (NW, December 14, 2009 transcript). One teacher expressed how
within mainstream education children are often judged negatively, “According to the white people you’re a failure. And, that didn’t feel good” (CC, December 1, 2009 transcript). She believed that her internalization of that message often caused conflicts within her work at the school:

I so wanted to hold onto what public school was all about. There was such conflict within myself and what was right, what was not right; what is education and what is not education. (CC, 2009)

Many participants reported that there were Secwepemc community members opposed to the creation of Chief Atahm School. These negative attitudes can be related to the indoctrination of the mind that occurred at both residential schools and within the mainstream public school system.

The Claiming of the Heart:

The destruction of the values of knucwesut.s and k’wselktknéws that was perpetuated within residential schooling and public schooling has continued within the battle over the territory of the heart. This final frontier marks the current struggle of the Secwepemc to maintain the desire to keep fighting for possession of the four territories. Some of the stories from Chief Atahm School speak of the pain and suffering this battle has caused to the community. One of the Elders shared how the negativity in the community affected him:

I noticed that on the whole, when it come down to a few items that we needed to continue or to add to our program, the community was reluctant, ‘Oh, that’s not what we want’. There was sort of a negative feeling. You could feel it, see it. That’s why we were so sensitive because we’re learning our language. And
once you’re in your language you’re sensitivity is sharpened by other people around you who are a bit negative. Especially Elders can feel it lots and hurt from feelings. (FN, April 28, 2009)

Many other participants spoke as if they had to prepare themselves from “attacks” from members of their own community. One teacher shared how, “for many years, I was protective. I think I still am. I put my guard up. Sometimes I relax and be a community member and put my guard down, but not too often” (CC, Dec.1, 2009 transcript). Within the research, there was strong indication that the greatest obstacle and threat to the continued operation of Chief Atahm School was opposition from within the community itself.

The battle for the territory of the heart is the cruelest one because it occurs within our own community. Within the stories shared by members of the Chief Atahm School community, we hear how vicious this fight can be. For over a century the Secwepemc have been bombarded with the same message: leave your old ways behind and accept your role within the new society. We have seen a growing adoption of Euro-Canadian practices that reinforce the superiority of the English language and the acceptance of Canadian values placing Man in dominion over the land. Rising hegemonic practices and beliefs within Secwepemc communities give evidence of how the Trickster’s story has begun to be internalized as truth. Owing to the power of persuasion that the Trickster has, some people have even forgotten that there ever was a Secwepemc story. Some people have begun to believe the story that the Secwepemc are pitiful and helpless and that the only route to salvation lies in accepting the handouts offered to them by Canada. More and more people
have begun to believe that assimilation into Canada is the wave of the future and are rallying their own people to accept the Canadian education system as the route to success. Now, as more people accept the Colonial Trickster’s keys to Canada, we see each new generation increasingly disconnected to their Secwepemc language and heritage.

**Disconnection of Self from Community**

This story, depicting the gloomy battlefield of language loss, helps to establish what areas require the most support in community language revitalization. The diagram below illustrates pre-contact Secwepemc society with the four territories nurturing the development of self.

**Figure 5: Four Territories Surrounding Self**
The following diagram (Figure 6) models how changes within the four internal territories effectively blocked off and separated connections between self and community, thereby limiting access to the language.

Figure 6: Disconnection of Self to the Four Territories
Through sharing the sad history of the Secwepemc, filled with people who have lost their way, we can better appreciate the strategies used by Chief Atahm School to overcome some of the challenges of language regeneration. Sites of counterattacks, such as the immersion initiatives at Chief Atahm School, help us to see that there is still hope for the survival of the Secwepemc language. By retelling the Chief Atahm School story as a counterattack, waged by a small army working together to reclaim the language territories, perhaps I will rouse some people to fight against further infiltration of the ‘Colonial Story’. If Euro-Canada is successful in fully claiming the territory of the heart, it will destroy the relationship that the Secwepemc have nurtured for tens of thousands of years: the relationship to each other, the land, language, stories, knowledge, and beliefs.

**The Second Leap: Calling on the Powers of Coyote:**

In the “first leap” of this chapter, I explored the research findings through a historical lens in order to trace the beginnings of negative beliefs and attitudes towards the Secwepemc language. With this “second leap”, I call on the Trickster and the Transformational powers of Coyote to help organize a plan of attack to reclaim the four language territories. In this section, we learn how to employ Coyote’s cleverness and appetite for action to help move from a state of language loss to language redemption.
On Becoming Coyote

In story, Coyote’s constant movement marks a path that zigs and sags from fool to genius, from vulgar to sacred, and from Trickster to Transformer. Through story, we become both voyeur and participant in Coyote’s search for earthly pleasures. By “becoming Coyote” for a while, we are shown both the outer limits of human depravity and the possibilities for transformation. Through jumping into Coyote’s world, we can vicariously experience the freedom of giving in to our selfish desires without having to fear the consequences. As an audience, we enjoy riding along with Coyote in his quest to sate his desires by giving in to one temptation after another, seemingly oblivious to the consequences. Ultimately, when Coyote’s grand plans go awry (which they always do), we are able to jump off his back in order to distance ourselves from the chaos. Once again, we revert to being an innocent bystander to his foolish antics, and, sometimes, even feel smugly reproachful of his wanton ways.

It is within this transition from “being Coyote” to “judging Coyote” where we are faced with our greatest challenge as humans: how to balance individual desires with collective needs. Coyote stories effectively highlight the tension that exists between self and society or, within the Secwepemc context, between the values of knucwestut.s and k’wseltkttnéws. The ability of stspekwle to both implicate and exonerate the audience is what gives power to a story. The psychological realism of the story, or its level of believability, is enhanced as we “jump on Coyote’s back” to share in his adventures. Often, Coyote’s adventures will have a sense of familiarity, as if he is travelling to areas of our ‘self’ that needs changing. This tweaking of the
conscience often feels as if a story is “stalking” you to show how giving in to your selfish desires often occurs at the expense of someone or something else. Coyote’s reflection of our ‘self’ that needs shaping has the power to reappear in dreams and as faint echoes that invade our consciousness.

Although Coyote is good at reminding us of our lapses in judgment, he is also quick to forgive our wrongdoings. In Secwepemc story, Sek’lep shows amazing resiliency. His ability to bounce back after one fatal error after another helps us to see that it’s okay to make mistakes. Moreover, the assistance that Coyote’s family members provide by bringing him back to life emphasizes the importance of family and community. Stories help us see that it is often through our mistakes that positive change occurs. This highlights what I believe to be the greatest gift Coyote has to offer us, the gift of transformation. Coyote’s paths, that zig-zag back and forth between the world of the Trickster and the world of the Transformer, lead us to see the possibilities of turning our human foibles into something fabulous.

From Trickster to Transformer

Traditional stories present us with relational perspectives of the world that include strategies for moving towards positive change. In Secwepemc stspetkwle, the Trickster character, Sek’lep, is often used to reflect an exaggerated view of human behaviours, especially ones that threaten the core value of k’wselktktnéws, or interrelationship. The tales of Coyote crossing moral and physical boundaries in search of happiness allow us the opportunity to laugh at ourselves by making light of
our human frailties. A whole host of negative traits are displayed by Sek'lep in *stsptekwle*, including, but not limited to:

- Greed;
- Dishonesty;
- Impulsiveness;
- Vulgarity;
- Gluttony;
- Wantonness.

As an audience to his antics, we are appalled at his behavior, yet somehow intrigued by his bold pursuit of his goals. Although Sek'lep is an intensely flawed character, he still possesses some admirable traits. In the table below, I demonstrate how, through a change in perspective, some of the Trickster qualities of Coyote can also be interpreted as being admirable traits, or qualities of a Transformer:

Table 3: Trickster and Transformer Qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trickster Qualities</th>
<th>Transformer Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cunning</td>
<td>Creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulgar</td>
<td>Shocking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsive</td>
<td>Fearless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impatient</td>
<td>Eager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greedy</td>
<td>Possessive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>Self-determining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foolish</td>
<td>Insouciant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nosy</td>
<td>Inquisitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrepentant</td>
<td>Resilient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruthless</td>
<td>Single-minded focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Trickster character helps us to see how some of our negative human behaviours are closely connected to transformative qualities. I will build on this relationship between the Trickster and Transformer to restory language loss as a transformative process, using the research at Chief Atahm School as examples.

From the stories shared by the research participants from the Chief Atahm School community, we heard many examples of how the experience of starting a school was often a process of committing to a path of action and then learning from mistakes. To help interpret the agency displayed by early members of the school, I will place some of the main themes that emerged through the research within a paradigm using different elements of Coyote. First, I will use the following *Trickster Powers of Coyote*, to demonstrate some of the ways that the Chief Atahm School community worked through their early challenges:

1. **Possibility:** Coyote sees a world of possibilities. When he spies something he wants, he immediately sets out to claim it as his own, regardless of the consequences.

2. **Pursuit:** Coyote’s willingness to risk it all in order to get what he desires often leads him into all sorts of dangerous predicaments.

3. **Plan:** The cleverness and cunning of Coyote is most apparent when he needs to devise a plan to get what he wants.

4. **Passion:** Coyote’s sincere belief that he will get the object of his desire makes him a compelling character. He has utter faith that the universe will provide for him.
The Trickster elements can be seen as bringing in the necessary bravado and
daring to “jump into” the adventure of starting an immersion school. In Figure 6 on
the following page, I match each of the Trickster powers to the four territories linked
to language loss (body, mind, spirit, heart) and to the following themes that emerged
from the data:

1. Vision;
2. Leadership;
3. Resourcefulness;
4. Connection.

Within each of these categories, I show how Chief Atahm School channeled their
Trickster Power to help set into action the reclamation of their language. The
Trickster’s Path to Action Chart (Figure 7) can be seen either from the perspective of
moving the self, or the community, from a state of language inertia to language
action.
**Figure 7: Trickster’s Path to Language Action**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internalization of the Colonial Trickster Story</th>
<th>Trickster Power</th>
<th>Trickster Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apathy</td>
<td>Possibility:</td>
<td>&quot;I always believed that 2 mothers had a dream. They both had the desire and the dream together (JB, December 1, 2009, transcript).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Why are they doing this?&quot; &quot;Don’t you know our language is going out of the door?&quot; (LW, April 17, 2009, transcript)</td>
<td>Coyote sees what he wants, and sets out to get it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Pursuit:</td>
<td>&quot;It was not even in anybody’s consciousness about immersion or about doing our own schooling in our own language. It was so far removed from reality for 98% of the community. The few that did say “OK, let’s try this,” thought they were along for this joy ride, not knowing what was really going to happen&quot; (JB, December 1, 2009, transcript).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;There was such conflict within myself and what was right, what was not right, what is education and what is not education?&quot; (JB, December 1, 2009, transcript)</td>
<td>Willing to take a risk and “just do it”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td>Plan:</td>
<td>&quot;Do it yourself and make your mistakes and develop something that will work for you as a group. We made lots of mistakes. There are probably things we could have done differently. Everything that we did, we own. Nobody else can come in and say we did that for you&quot; (SM, January 19, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Nobody seemed to know how to conduct a meeting or how to call a meeting. Somebody just said we were going to have a meeting, so we all came together and no one knew how to start it&quot; (SM, January 19, 2010)</td>
<td>Able to See Different Paths and Perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Passion:</td>
<td>&quot;...we need to hold onto our core beliefs that we’ve had for thousands of years. And, that’s all attached to the Secwepemc language&quot; (SA, transcript).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;According to the white people you’re a failure. And that didn’t feel good&quot; (JB, December 1, 2009, transcript).</td>
<td>Love of life:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust in the universe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Building from the Trickster model, I will now relate how the Transformative elements of Coyote connect to the resiliency and fortitude displayed by the founding members of Chief Atahm School. The school community has exemplified how a core group of committed individuals can persevere within a community often antagonistic towards their vision of language immersion. Each *Trickster Power* (See p. 213) corresponds to a *Transformer Power* as demonstrated below:

Table 4: Coyote Power and Personality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trickster Power</th>
<th>Transformer Power</th>
<th>Coyote Personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possibility</td>
<td>Possession</td>
<td>Coyote displays an intense drive to get what he desires. No obstacles can sway him from his plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuit</td>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>Coyote has the amazing ability to rebound from terrible accidents and to work his way around many obstacles. He knows how to dust himself off and look for other ways to get what he wants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>Potential</td>
<td>Coyote has a great belief in his own power. This confidence helps him capitalize on the resources at hand to get to his goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Coyote has a carefree attitude. He has complete faith that things will go his way. However, he knows that he can trust his family members to rescue him when he’s in a bind. More often than not, it will be his brother Fox, or his wife Mole, who have to come to revive him with their magical three leaps when he goes too far.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following chart (Figure 8) helps to answer the research question, “What factors help to sustain involvement in Aboriginal immersion education?”
### Figure 8: Transformer’s Path to Resiliency

#### Transformer’s Path to Language Resiliency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internalization of the Colonial Trickster Story</th>
<th>Transformer Power</th>
<th>Transformer Resiliency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negativity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Possession:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There will be negative from your own families; there will be negative from your own Chief and Council; there will be negative from the school across the river. There will be negative everywhere” (SM, January 19, 2010).</td>
<td>Ownership of his Dream Body</td>
<td>“You have to have somebody or somebodies who believe. Your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole need to be involved in what you’re doing. If not, you are probably sunk” (SM, January 19, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Pity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Persistence:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The way we were getting there, we may have stumbled but that is part of the process — that stumbling. Well, we didn’t stumble, we fell face first, nothing to break the fall (laughing)”. (SM, January 19, 2010).</td>
<td>Moves on from his mistakes Spirit</td>
<td>“I think they tried everything. Ever-changing, going right from the beginning — what works and what doesn’t work... Lot of success has come that way because of trial and error” (LM, May 28, 2009, transcript).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doubt</strong></td>
<td><strong>Potential:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I didn’t have the language and I really didn’t know what to do in the classroom so it was a struggle, a huge struggle. “What the heck am I doing here? Who talked me into this? Let me at that person!” (SM, January 19, 2010).</td>
<td>Confidence in his ability to succeed Mind</td>
<td>“If we delve more deeply into our culture and language we will reap the benefits of these age-old teachings of our people, which will help us live a good life” (JM, May 1, 2010 transcript).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blame</strong></td>
<td><strong>Place:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I wasn’t a speaker when I was growing up. That was something I didn’t have. We’d go visit our grandparents in Lillooet and they would be nattering away to each other and it was just so awesome and I couldn’t understand them.” (TL, December 10, 2009, transcript).</td>
<td>Coyote has a great sense of belonging to his territory and to his family Heart</td>
<td>“We didn’t know how things were going to turn out with our kids until it happened. You have to go with faith. You have to keep each other going as well. There were times when we just propped each other up” (SM, January 19, 2010).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Figure 7, Coyote the Trickster is used to focus in on the main change agents involved in developing an Aboriginal immersion school. In Figure 8, Coyote the Transformer highlights the sustaining factors in maintaining momentum in language education. In this second leap, I have revived the Trickster and Transformative qualities of Coyote to reframe the change factors and sustaining factors discovered in the research at Chief Atahm School. Within this section, I have connected the roots of negative personal and community attitudes and beliefs to post-colonial history and have shown how Chief Atahm School channeled the transformative powers of Coyote to restory language back into their community. In the third leap, we will see all of the powers of Coyote revive, as he shows us how to lay claim to our language territories.

**The Third Leap: Coyote’s Path to Language Power**

In this third leap, I call Coyote out to play. By bringing his humourous side into the forefront, I restory the research findings into a lighthearted game that brings language regeneration to life within First Nations communities. Through this reshaping of the knowledge gained throughout the research I hope to infuse humour and laughter into the somber world of language loss.

**Objective of the Game:**

Everyone knows how Coyote marks his territory. Thus, I borrow from this unique ability in a language program development game called, *Coyote’s Path to Language Power* that utilizes Coyote P to mark the language territories. The objective of the
Coyote’s Path to Language Power Game is to battle against the Colonial Trickster within each of the four territories to claim back the rights to your language. In order to gain back your language power, you must reconnect the self to community, through marking your territory with Coyote P. One Trickster P to Power and one Transformer P to Power corresponds to each of the territories. This game rewards those who are able to hone their individual skills and develop a team spirit while maintaining an intense commitment to winning back their language. The player who can best channel the Trickster and Transformer powers of Coyote will quickly overpower the Colonial Trickster in order to reclaim their language.

**The Four Territories**

The game board (Figure 9) depicts the four territories First Nation communities have become disconnected from that are essential to language survival: Body, Spirit, Mind, and Heart. At the centre of the board, you can see how these territories surround the “self”; thus, blocking off connections to the community and to the language.
In Figures 10 and 11, I show how the Colonial Trickster P's to Powerlessness and his P's to Problems establish claim to the four territories. These represent the self-destructive beliefs and attitudes stemming from the internalization of the “Colonial Story” that thwart the progress of language revitalization.
Figure 10: Colonial Trickster P's to Powerlessness

The positioning of Euro-Canada as having authority over First Nations people, their lands, resources, beliefs, and language

The proclamation and reproduction of the “Colonial Story” placing Euro-Canada as superior and First Nations at the margins

The programming of First Nations children into the Canadian social and economic system, at the expense of First Nations

The pacifying of First Nations through policies and practices supporting the retelling of the “Colonial Story” within First Nations communities by First Nations themselves
Pessimism and negativity within the community and your language program takes the energies away from achieving your goals.

Panic and self-pity prevents people from overcoming obstacles and moving forward on their language goals.

Paralysis sets in when faced with the overwhelming task of finding the resources to develop and sustain a program within a hegemonic atmosphere.

Pointing fingers perpetuates the blaming and shaming of the Colonial Trickster aimed at eliminating First Nations in Canada.

Pitifulness

Pessimism

Powerlessness

Pointing fingers
The Colonial Trickster’s Claim to the Four Language Territories

The game board shows how the Colonial Trickster P’s mark his claim to the four territories, thereby further disconnecting the self from language.

Figure 12: Colonial Trickster’s Claim to Territories
Preparing for the Fight to Win Back Your Language

The *P’s to Powerlessness* and the *P’s to Problems* represent the strategies that the Colonial Trickster has used to advance his claim to the four territories. The first steps to winning back your language is to work on preparing your community to fight against the Colonial Trickster. To prepare yourself and the community for battle you must first understand where and how the Colonial Trickster has infiltrated. In order to do this you will need to make a list of all the negative patterns of thinking and behaviours that challenge language revitalization efforts in yourself and in your community. If you have already started a language program in your community, you will need to complete two charts. If you are just starting to plan for language immersion then you will only need to complete the first chart. Tables 5 and 6 on the following pages demonstrate how the Chief Atahm School experiences were used to fill out the *P’s to Powerlessness* chart and the *P’s to Problems* chart.
## Evidence of Colonial Trickster P’s to Powerlessness within Community

### Table 5: Trickster P’s to Powerlessness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Territory of the Body</th>
<th>Proclaim Territory of the Spirit</th>
<th>Program Territory of the Mind</th>
<th>Pacify Territory of the Heart</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marginalization of First Nations: Reserve system, loss of access to resources</td>
<td>Divided beliefs in community; Catholicism, Sundance, Pow wow Role of Elders as knowledge keepers is diminished.</td>
<td>All children attend public school. Integrated nursery school on reserve with non-native teacher</td>
<td>First Nations support workers in public schools maintain the belief that public education is a partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that the Secwepemc language is inferior or obsolete; there is no economic benefit to knowing the language</td>
<td>Negating a Secwepemc based education as nothing other than “drumming and singing all day”</td>
<td>Belief that public school education is necessary to survive in today’s economy</td>
<td>Nominal attempts at integrating Secwepemc language in public schools (1.5 hours a week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevailing attitude that a community school will be “going backwards” and will destroy the “progress” the community has achieved (i.e., integration into public school)</td>
<td>Feelings of hopelessness; “it’s too late to save the language”</td>
<td>Dependency on external systems to raise our children. Alienation of Secwepemc teachings. No intergenerational transfer of language.</td>
<td>Band chief and council not willing to support “taking children out of public school” and risking their future in a FN operated school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6: Trickster P’s to Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Pessimism</strong></th>
<th><strong>Panic</strong></th>
<th><strong>Paralysis</strong></th>
<th><strong>Pointing Fingers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Territory of the Body</strong></td>
<td><strong>Territory of the Spirit</strong></td>
<td><strong>Territory of the Mind</strong></td>
<td><strong>Territory of the Heart</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative attacks from community members</td>
<td>Division in families; differing levels of support within families for immersion</td>
<td>The feeling of being overwhelmed, for example, “we can’t do math in our language”</td>
<td>Separating self from community, “I knew it wouldn’t work”. Infighting within the language program itself indicates a loss of focus on the language goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff and parents needing to be defensive and on guard to protect themselves from negativity</td>
<td>Tendency to forget the big picture when the school faced early challenges: self-pity, hopelessness</td>
<td>Staff, parents looking for guidance but none is available; feelings of isolation, self-doubt</td>
<td>Deflecting ownership: “If so and so didn’t force us into this these problems wouldn’t have happened”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that knowing two languages will confuse the children and make it more difficult for them to succeed in the “real world”</td>
<td>Fear of not speaking the language correctly, not knowing how to teach language, fear of doing something new, fear of being judged</td>
<td>Burn out and exhaustion; feelings of helplessness; “If only we had… more Elders, more money, more time, more something.”</td>
<td>Blaming the school for dividing the community and families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Playing the Game

Now that the Colonial Trickster charts have been completed, you can start on the path to reclaiming your language. Place the Trickster cards and the Transformer cards on their corresponding territories (see Figure 12). The game board is divided into Trickster and Transformer sections. In Figure 13, the Trickster and Transformer Power Cards are shown.

Figure: 13: Trickster & Transformer Card Placement
Figure 14: Trickster & Transformer Cards

- **Trickster Action**
  - Possibility: Commitment to a shared vision, ability to work through negativity
  - Pursuit: Willingness to take risks, everyone has a responsibility; everyone’s a leader in some way
  - Plan: Maximizing of local people, resources, develop and honour individual strengths
  - Passion: Trust and teamwork is fostered, gatherings and celebrations

- **Transformer Resilience**
  - Possession: Revisit the vision, strategies for group consensus building
  - Persistence: Ability to rebound from mistakes, group problem solving processes
  - Potential: Utilize Indigenous practices and knowledges, mentorship models for training of new staff
  - Place: Establish support networks, share your strengths; help each other
The Game Strategy

In order to defeat the Colonial Trickster you must cover all of the Colonial Trickster P with Trickster and Transformer P to reclaim your language territories. The youngest player in the group starts the play by spinning the arrow at the centre of the board to find out where to start the work of reclaiming your language. If the arrow lands on Trickster territory then that player turns over the Trickster card in that territory for all his teammates to see (if it lands on Transformer territory then flip over the Transformer card). The team must then all discuss whether they feel that the Trickster or Transformer Power shown on the card is present within their language program. After listening to the group discussion, the player then decides whether the community has earned the corresponding Trickster P to Language Action or the Transformer P to Language Resiliency. If a P has been earned, the team takes the Coyote P and places it on top of the Colonial Trickster P to symbolize a language territory reclaimed. Play continues counterclockwise.

The Coyote P’s to Power Game Pieces

To fight against the Colonial Trickster’s P’s to Language Loss you must earn as many Coyote P’s to Power game pieces. The Trickster P’s to Language Action have the power to destroy the Colonial Trickster P’s to Powerlessness and the Transformer P’s to Language Resiliency have the power to destroy the Colonial Trickster P’s to Problems, as demonstrated in Figures 15 and 16 on the following pages.
Figure 15: Trickster P’s to Language Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colonial Trickster P to Powerlessness Defeated</th>
<th>Trickster P to Action</th>
<th>Language Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Territory of the Body</td>
<td></td>
<td>POSSIBILITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Attacks the Colonial Trickster’s Position of Authority over First Nations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Influx of Optimism over the possibilities for language survival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Establishes visioning and goal setting in language programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territory of the Spirit</td>
<td></td>
<td>PURSUIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Attacks the Colonial Trickster’s Proclamation of superiority by reconnecting First Nations to the languages and teachings of their ancestors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Asserts the rights to Indigenous education in Indigenous languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territory of the Mind</td>
<td></td>
<td>PLAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Attacks the Program of assimilation of First Nations into Canadian society by restoring traditional modes of knowledge transfer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Engages plans to maximize resources within community to support language regeneration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territory of the Heart</td>
<td></td>
<td>PASSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Attacks the Pacification of First Nations by developing support networks assisting one another in the fight to reclaim Indigenous languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Renewed belief in the power of community to gain back what has been lost.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 16. Transformer P's to Language Resiliency

Colossal Trickster P to Problems Defeated

Territory of the Body

PESSIMISM

POSSESSION
1. Overcomes pessimism by taking possession of the language vision to maintain focus on language revitalization.
2. Foster individual and community responsibility for carrying out the vision.

PERSISTENCE
1. Fights against the feelings of panic that arise when your language program suffers from inevitable setbacks.
2. Persist in a vision for self and community in order to move from a position of self-pity to strength.

Territory of the Spirit

PANIC

PERSISTENCE

TERRITORIALITY

POTENTIAL
1. Moves past the paralyzing fear that education that privileges Indigenous languages and knowledges will not be relevant or meet academic standards.
2. Explore the potential of Indigenous knowledge to prepare students for today’s world

Territory of the Mind

PARALYSIS

POTENTIAL

PLACE
1. Moves past the blaming, shaming, and pointing fingers to create pathways to lead the self back to a sense of place within community.
2. Build support systems to assist each other in times of struggle. Remember to laugh and celebrate successes together.

Territory of the Heart

POINTING FINGERS

PLACE

Language Power
Claiming Back the Four Language Territories

The *Coyote’s Path to Language Power Game* is an ongoing game with no real starting or ending point. The object of the game is to stay sane, stay together, and have fun trying. There may be times when a team successfully reclaims all eight territories, only to have some of the territories re-invaded by the ‘Colonial Trickster’. It is important to keep reinforcing your claim to your language territories to guard against the feelings of powerlessness and panic when faced with problems in language program delivery.

The eight *Coyote P’s to Power* are meant as guideposts to help communities overcome the challenges of starting and maintaining First Nations language programs. The language game developed from themes arising from the research. Earlier in this chapter, I revisited the history of colonization in the Secwepemculecw in order to draw connections to negative feelings, beliefs, and attitudes towards Indigenous languages. Using stories from Chief Atahm School, I have demonstrated ways in which a community could work through the challenges of regenerating language in our communities. The *Coyote’s Path to Language Power Game* presents some of the successful strategies employed by Chief Atahm School to maintain focus on their vision for immersion education. In the next chapter, I complete this journey of discovery with a discussion of the implications of this research and suggestions for future pathways for investigation into the world of Indigenous language revitalization.
Chapter Seven: Connections

In Secwepemc oratory, a speech always connects back to its beginning. Often, it is only when this final connection is made, that the true meaning of the speaker’s words becomes clear. It’s as if a speaker artfully strings out his/her points until a gentle tug at the very end pulls all of the pieces together to expose the underlying message. My father was quite gifted at this style of oratory; yet, it took me years to appreciate how magical his speeches were. As a child, I resisted his attempts at “discipline through story”, and then, as an adult, I found his long-winded explanations and his penchant for pausing and pondering, exasperating. He was always the thinker and I was always the doer. Yet, in so many ways, these differences strengthened us and helped assist in the development of Chief Atahm School.

Through this research journey, I have taken the opportunity to revisit the stories that he shared with me. In the beginning, these trips down memory lane overwhelmed me to the point that I felt unable to continue with my research. For months after my father’s passing, I didn’t have the strength to continue with the research, as it was an ever-present reminder of my loss. However, I was finally able to break through this block by giving myself permission to freely write about anything, regardless of how irrelevant it was to my research. My first writings centered on the teachings my father had shared with me. I began to remember all of the times and all of the ways he tried to show me that his stories had a point. Then, when my dreams and research ideas kept shifting towards traditional stspekwle, I felt it was his way of
showing me that his stories did, indeed, have a point. They had a point sharp enough to wake me from my slumber and to get me back working on my research. I woke up to the realization that I had to carry on his legacy and share the message of language transformation. Through channeling his contemplative spirit, I managed to sit still long enough to sift through the complex layers in order to tell the Chief Atahm School story.

I realize now, that by dedicating this work to him, and through revisiting his stories of Sek’lep, I was just hanging on to him a while longer. However, now that I am nearing the end of the story, I am forced to complete the circle and say goodbye. In this sense, this concluding chapter represents the hardest part of my journey. Although I know that I will survive without his nurturing presence and his “sick” jokes, I also know that it still sometimes hurts to smile. Nevertheless, I am secure in my belief that his stories and teachings live on. I have now integrated the transformational aspects of my father into my Trickster self. And, just as language revitalization constantly shifts from states of Trickster to Transformer, I know my grief will come and go. However, the legacy my father has left me will help keep me focused on the vision of a Secwepemc speaking people following in the path of Coyote, *welme7 yews, welme7 yews* (forever and forever).

**Looping Back: Study’s Major Findings**

This research began as a solo journey into the wilderness. I struggled and fought my way through the stories of my past in order to reconnect to the paths showing me the power of Secwepemc language immersion. I shamelessly jumped on Coyote’s
back and begged him to show me the tricks of transformation so that I could transform my grief into action. Through revisiting my father’s teachings, and joining in the adventures of Sek’lep, I gained the strength to continue with my telling of the Chief Atahm School story. My exploration of participant stories that shared the immense struggles and commitment required to start an immersion program, reminded me that a small group of people could make a difference. This pushed me to look for the deeper meanings within the Chief Atahm School story that could be used to help activate others in language regeneration.

The questions I sought answers for required that I look back into Secwepemc history to find the roots of language loss within community. I shared a story of how the Colonial Trickster travelled throughout the Secwepemc Nation, claiming the four territories of the Secwepemc language: the body, the spirit, the mind, and the heart. In the list below, I summarize the path left by each chapter that led towards the transformation of language loss into a story of language action and language resiliency through Indigenous immersion:

1. The Coyote Story – personal stories of disconnection, loss, helplessness, fear; introduction of the study of Chief Atahm School as a search of self and community;

2. The Colonial Trickster Story – stories of language loss;


4. The Great Coyote Story – development of an Indigenous conceptual and methodological research framework based on the Secwepemc oral tradition;
5. The Chief Atahm School story – research findings sharing the challenges and triumphs of starting an Aboriginal immersion school;

6. The Story of Language Transformation – the use of Trickster and Transformer powers to reconnect the self to community through reclaiming the four language territories; and

7. The Story of the Self Reconnecting to Community – sharing of the research stories, study’s findings, and a celebration of Indigenous languages.

In Chapter Six, the research findings were connected to the Trickster and Transformative elements of Coyote and to the stories of the Colonial Trickster. *The Coyote’s Path to Language Power Game* placed language loss within a conceptual framework wherein the territories of the body, spirit, mind, and heart were attacked by the assimilative forces of the Colonial Trickster. I uncovered the following four strategies employed by Euro-Canadian invaders that worked to erase Indigenous claims to their languages:

1. **Position:** By positioning itself as having authority over First Nations, Euro-Canada assumed claim to their lands and resources.

2. **Proclaim:** By proclaiming First Nations beliefs as inferior to Euro-Canadian beliefs and replacing Indigenous stories with stories that reproduced the ideals of the colonizing nation, collective identity within First Nations was weakened.

3. **Program:** By programming generations of First Nations children into believing in the “Colonial Story” that placed them at the margins, intergenerational transmission of language ceased to happen in many families.
4. Pacify: By instituting systems that awarded First Nations who accommodate the goals of assimilation, hegemony grows within communities. This pacification of Canada’s First Peoples through the successful indoctrination of the ‘Colonial Story’ prevents many from reconnecting to their language.

By reconceptualizing the challenges and change agents in language loss as Coyote P, I harnessed the restorative powers of humour found in the Secwepemc oral tradition. The following diagrams give a pictorial summary of the strategies and ideological shifts demonstrated by Chief Atahm School in their fight to reclaim and maintain their claim to the four language territories. Figure 17 summarizes the Trickster’s Path to Language Action. It highlights strategies to mobilize language in First Nations communities. Figure 18 illustrates how Transformer Power can be utilized to sustain existing language programs.
Figure 17: Summary of Trickster P’s to Language Action

How to Reclaim Your Language

Understand how the Colonial Trickster Claimed Possession of the Four Language Territories

- By claiming a position of authority over the Territory of the Body
- By proclaiming the superiority of the ‘Colonial Story’ over the Territory of the Spirit
- By programming First Nations children through the reproduction of the ‘Colonial Story’ in education to claim the Territory of the Mind
- By pacifying First Nations through a system that rewards assimilative programs and practices, thereby, advancing the Colonial Trickster’s claim to the Territory of the Heart

Trickster P’s to Language Action

Steps to reclaiming the four language territories

**Possibility**
- Collective Vision
- Stay optimistic
- Reclaim the rights to your language, the oral tradition, and Indigenous Knowledges

**Plan**
- Mobilize community and reactivate traditional modes of knowledge transfer
- Evaluate and assess; keep moving forward
- Reach out to other immersion sites for ideas and support

**Pursuit**
- Actively pursue language immersion as an avenue for language regeneration
- Take risks and learn from your mistakes

**Passion**
- Learn to work past differences and hegemonic beliefs in order to keep focused on a common vision
- Develop support networks
- Remember to have fun, laugh, and celebrate
How to Keep Your Language Program Alive

Understand how the Colonial Trickster Tries to Regain Possession of the Four Language Territories

- By infiltrating language initiatives with pessimism and negative hegemonic beliefs that First Nations languages are obsolete, inferior, or disruptive to a child’s education
- By inciting panic when politics, personality differences, and funding scarcity causes people to lose sight of their language vision
- By causing widespread paralysis when the reality sinks in that saving a language is a monumental, overwhelming task
- By encouraging an atmosphere of blaming, shaming, and pointing fingers

Transformer P’s to Language Resiliency
Steps to maintaining your language program

**Possession**
- Revisit and recommit to the Vision
- Foster individual roles and responsibilities
- Practice collective decision making

**Potential**
- Maximize local resources through integrating indigenous knowledge in core content courses
- Regular group planning sessions
- Try new language teaching methodologies; search for innovative ideas

**Persistence**
- Be adapt and responsive to change
- Search for creative solutions to problems
- Keep trying and keep positive

**Place**
- Remember to help and support each other
- Honour the role each member plays
- Welcome new members into the group
Within this research, I have relied on the wisdom of Coyote to place markers on the trails toward Indigenous language revitalization. With the experiences shared by early members of Chief Atahm School, I have developed a model that literally marks the trails with *Coyote P* to show Indigenous communities how to move through negative internalized hegemonic beliefs to reach their language goals.

**Trickster Aspects of the Study: Challenges and Limitations**

**Challenges of Self**

Reflecting back on this research journey, I can see how my research choices engaged both the Trickster and Transformative elements of Coyote. In Chapter One, I invoked the Trickster as a way to share some of the personal difficulties I had with committing to the research. I used the Trickster as a metaphor of the many challenges in the field of Indigenous language loss. The varied personalities of the Trickster helped express how interrelated our emotions are with the subject of language loss. However, I’ve since come to realize, that by clinging to this metaphor I was also clinging on to my father a little longer than I should.

Through integrating highly personal stories throughout the thesis I may be accused of being self-indulgent, of using this research as a platform for discovery of self. Although Kovach describes the integration of self within an anti-colonial agenda as a feature of Indigenous methodologies that is a “holistically layered process where theoretical positioning intersects profoundly with the personal conflicts of navigating two distinctive worlds” (p.83), there are some that criticize the blatant exploration of self. Kovach reports that “the incorporation of narrative, story, and self-location
found within Indigenous writing is perceived as indulgent rather than being recognized as a methodological necessity flowing from a tribal epistemology” (p. 84).

One of the challenges of this research was in framing ‘my story’ so that it was transparently seen as an intentional feature highlighting the internal factors related to language loss. The development of ‘self’ paralleled the epistemological process that engaged the values of knucwestsut.s and k’wseltktnéws, which in turn related to the ideological struggles affecting language revitalization in Aboriginal communities.

The methodological challenges of integrating ‘self’ within the research magnified with having to position myself as a main character within the study itself. As an insider to the research of Chief Atahm School, I needed to address how to present my “character” within the research. As one of the school founders, I realized that the absence of “my story” within the document would be noticeable, however, it became increasingly difficult to decide when to interject my voice within the document. At times, I felt that I distanced myself from my own stories in order to create some sense of objectivity. I became my own worst editor, as I pored over my writings and questioned whether they were necessary, or relevant enough, to add to the thesis. Although these challenges are familiar ones in autoethnographical research, I did not appreciate the added anxiety of editing “self”.

**Challenges of Choice**

Another challenge within the research was trying to find a way to weave my own stories, the stories of Chief Atahm School, and the stories of Sek’lep together in a way that would make sense to others. For some reason, I felt compelled to keep all
of these elements flowing within the thesis, even when it became apparent that I would have to spend extra time sorting out the intersecting, overlapping paths. I can only hope that I have adequately validated the presence of each of these themes: my personal story as representation of my Indigenous voice and as a model of ideological influences within the study of language loss; the Chief Atahm School stories as evidence of language action and resiliency; and Sek'lep stories as a validation of Indigenous methodologies, and an assertion of Indigenous rights.

Amongst all the complexity of intersecting themes, I also wished to retain the flavour of the oral tradition. I sought to write a thesis that had all the elements of a good story. It needed to have the pathos, the humour, the adventure, and the passion that all good stories have. This goal was the cause of many conflicts and compromises along the way. I wrestled with each academic expectation that I felt compromised the telling of a good story. Each chapter took an enormous amount of energy, as I laboured over rewrite after rewrite, only to ruthlessly edit out the boring stuff. In the end, I tired of being my own slave driver and succumbed to a general fatigue that left me silently assenting to my committee’s wishes. Overall, I’m sure I will look back upon this experience of writing a thesis as character building. My only hope is that the characters that I’ve built my story around have told a good story.

**Challenges of First Nations Language Revitalization**

This research limited its focus on the efforts of one community that has demonstrated perseverance in Indigenous immersion education. Although Chief Atahm School is only one of a handful of Aboriginal language Immersion schools in
the province of B.C., some of the experiences can be seen as representative of language initiatives occurring in other small First Nation communities. Year after year the school produces a small number of speakers who have the ability to communicate in the language within the context of the school program. Even though it has been immensely challenging to deliver a language immersion program in a community where English dominates homes and community, the school remains active in their efforts. Despite the persistence of Chief Atahm School, there is still a long way to go to ensure the continued survival of the Secwepemc language. With growing dependency on external social, educational, and economic systems, there is little incentive for children to push their language learning further than what is offered at the school. Ultimately, the future of Indigenous languages lies within each individual and the choices that we make to live our lives. Although this study shares only the story of Chief Atahm School, it is the hope of this researcher that others will build on this story by embarking on their own journeys of language discovery.

The Three Leaps: Strengths of the Study

Our language is part of the ongoing Coyote story. And, like in some Coyote stories, where Coyote is found laying face down on the path, we sometimes have to rely on others to revive us by jumping over us three times. Within this research, I have shared three leaps of language revitalization found within the Chief Atahm School stories. These three leaps represent the major strengths of the study of change agents and sustaining factors within Secwepemc language revitalization through immersion education.
The First Leap: “Restorying” Self to Community

The first leap of this study was the conscientizing process of connecting of self to community (or knucwestsut.s to k’weseltktnéws). Freire’s theory of conscientization (2006) was employed to help uncover the roots of Indigenous language loss and to begin the process of actively engaging in transformative change. As Smith (2003) states,

…transformation has to be won on at least two broad fronts; a confrontation with the colonizer and a confrontation with `ourselves’. This is what I have labeled as the `inside - out' model of transformation – in this sense, as Paulo Freire (1971) has reminded us, `first free ourselves before we can free others’. (p.3)

Transformation was explored in three ways:

• through exploring “self” using Archibald's *Storywork* (2008), *Secwepemc* stories, and autoethnographical paths to assist in “making meaning”;

• through the privileging of *Secwepemc* knowledge, ontology, and epistemology, through the “Restorying” Coyote Theoretical and Research Approach;

• and, through challenging colonizing hegemonies that weaken Indigenous languages by using the *Secwepemc* oral tradition and epistemology, Indigenous scholarship, and critical theory, to interpret the transformative strategies found within the Chief Atahm School story.

One of the major strengths of this study was the positioning of the research within the “Great Coyote Story”. The autoethnographical elements of this research asserted my voice within the research, but, more importantly, served to highlight the
connection I have to the research site, Chief Atahm School. The linking of my own stories with the stories from the Chief Atahm School community, honoured the Secwepemc value of k’wseltktnéws, or interrelationship. The privileging of the foundational value of interrelationship was further supported through engaging the various elements of Sek’lep, the Trickster character from the Secwepemc oral tradition.

I focused a “Coyote lens” on Secwepemc history, specifically searching for the paths that led to the change factors that influenced language loss within the Secwepemc. This journey uncovered a series of major events, spanning from the gold rush era in B.C. to Canadian education policies for First Nations, that gradually eroded the will and the motivation of the Secwepemc to raise their children in the language. I was joined on this journey through Euro-Canadian colonizing policies and practices by scholars who, Cohen (2010) termed “gifted translators” who:

…help us understand our own cultural capital (language, knowledge, traditions, etc) and assist us in the struggle to live culturally informed lives. To sort out and make sense of the tensions, contradictions, and hegemonies at play in the wake of colonization and continuously emerging new forms of colonisation [sic], gifted translators are useful and necessary. (pp. 55-56)

Through the assistance of the Secwepemc oral tradition, Bourdieu’s theory of social and cultural capital, Freire’s theory of transformation, and Kaupapa Maori Transformative Praxis, I translated the history of Secwepemc language loss into a multi-layered story of hegemony, conflict, and tension between the self and the Secwepemc collective, fueled by the ongoing forces of colonization. This reconceptualization of language loss within the Secwepemc adds to existing
scholarship that highlights the internal and collective tensions within Indigenous language revitalization (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2007; Cohen, 2010; Hermes, 2007; Smith, 1997). Through modeling the internal and collective tensions within language loss as dynamic movements between the Trickster and Transformative aspects of self, I lend a Secwepemc perspective to the ideologies at play within Indigenous language revitalization. Then, by inverting the focus from the Trickster aspects of language loss to transformational sites of Indigenous revitalization and immersion education, I made way for the second leap: the path of discovery of the change agents within Chief Atahm School.

**Second Leap: Theoretical and Methodological Contributions of the Research**

Within the second leap of this study, I explored transformational stories from key members of the Chief Atahm School community. By privileging the voices of Indigenous community engaging in transformative language practices, I highlighted the potential of immersion education for language revitalization. Through this research, I have also asserted my rights and my responsibilities to my Nation. As a Secwepemc woman who has spent most of my adult life working to reconnect the self to community through language, I bring an insider perspective to the field of Indigenous language revitalization. I have set out to uncover the stories from the Chief Atahm School community that speak of the challenges and the successes in immersion education. Specifically, I looked for stories of personal transformation from parents, Elders, and staff members who persisted in following the dream of language education. With the assistance of the Trickster Coyote, these stories were
developed into an interactive community game aimed at engaging people in the fight to reclaim their language.

The “Restorying” Coyote Theoretical and Research Approach, that helped frame the discovery of transformative practices at Chief Atahm School, also reinforced the role of storytelling within Indigenist research. I reenacted the “discipline through story” sessions with my father in order to come to terms with the swirl of emotions that intertwined with my study of Chief Atahm School. Through this process of reconnecting self to the whole, through story, I touched upon Archibald’s (2008) seven principles of Storywork: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. Although her list of seven principles makes the process seem so beautiful and enlightening, I believe my version of how “stories can ‘take on their own life’ and ‘become the teacher’” (p. ix) sheds light on how painful and messy storywork can sometimes be.

The “Restorying” Coyote Theoretical and Research Approach was at once my greatest challenge and my greatest triumph. I was able to demonstrate the process of “Restorying” self through sharing stories and reflective notes that moved me from a state of grief and disconnection towards a greater understanding of my role within my family, my Nation, and within Indigenous scholarship. To help connect self to community, I have shared my own stories to demonstrate how connected our internal worlds are to the subject of language revitalization.

In a sense, I have used the research process to help me move past my personal grief, by hopping on Coyote’s back to revisit the worlds of the Trickster and the
Transformer. Through travelling back in time, I was able to see the relationship between colonial policies and practices and the common challenges faced within language initiatives. Throughout this journey, I have been able to gain insight into how history has influenced our attitudes, and even our indifference, towards language. As a Secwepemc researcher, who has worked alongside the Chief Atahm School community to work towards the dream of a “Secwepemc speaking community living in balance with nature”, I have shared a unique perspective on Secwepemc language education that helps advance our knowledge of the motivating and sustaining factors within Indigenous language revitalization. It is my hope that this journey of reconnecting self to community has the ability to prod and provoke others to seek connection too.

Within this narrow field of scholarship, I joined hands with my fellow community members from Chief Atahm School to assert the importance of Indigenous language survival. The stories of agency and resiliency resounded with the message that we, as First Nations, all have a responsibility to revive our languages. One of the school’s former students questioned people’s apathy towards language:

Why aren’t more people making a better effort and realizing that if the language is lost, what that actually means? Because when that day comes and people will go, “Oh, we should have tried harder. We could have done this, could have done that.” But, by that time, it’s obviously too late. (NS, December 20, 2009 transcript)

Although his words are powerful, the unfortunate reality is that the message he shares is not something everyone is willing to hear. In this research, I used Basso’s (1996) concept of being “stalked by stories” and also Archibald’s (2008) discussion
of stories having a life of their own, to show how stories have the power to nestle into areas of our consciousness. I believe that this invasive nature of stories can help describe the uneasiness and ambivalence many feel towards their language. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) highlight the internal tensions that individuals wrestle with that both push them towards language revitalization, and pull them away from it. Aguilera & LeCompte (2007), Cohen (2010), Hermes (2007), and Smith (1997) also bring forth the complex ideologies that interfere with language growth. Like my dad’s “discipline through story”, language can be seen as an unwelcome tweaking of Indigenous consciences. Although we may understand how important the language is to communicating the richness of our heritage, this belief is not enough to get people speaking their language. I hope that the messages I bring forth from the transformational stories of Chief Atahm School will have the power to nestle into the body, spirits, minds, and hearts of other First Nations.

Third Leap: Practical Applications of the Research

If we were to imagine that Indigenous languages were in a fast moving canoe about to face the rapids of language loss, then I would be one of the crazy few to jump off to try to madly swim upstream. And, once in awhile, when my head would bob above the water, I would catch glimpses of my fellow community members from Chief Atahm School, also frantically trying to stay afloat. It would be the knowledge that others were also fighting against the waves of the future that would keep my spirits up and give me the strength to keep my arms and legs moving. In the distance, the faint images of our ancestors would help guide us towards the rocks, firmly planted in the
earth. As each of us made our way to the rocks, we would take big
gasps of air in preparation for our next dive towards shelter. We
would cheer each other on and remember some of the words of our
Elders:

Our teachings, our cultural values, our languages are
dynamic. In other words, the lessons that our people knew
thousands of years ago, passed down to us, are still very
valuable today. These are imbedded into our total life. If we
delve more deeply into our culture and language we will
reap the benefits of these age-old teachings of our people,
which will help us live a good life. (IK, May 1, 2010
transcript)

Finally, some brave souls would volunteer to risk the dangers of the
rapids to swim ashore. Once there, they would gain a solid footing to
help drag others to safety.

This story of mine illustrates the fast moving waters in which language revitalization
flows. It also demonstrates that the vision of language regeneration is held by only
small numbers of people in First Nations communities across Canada. Through the
Chief Atahm School Story we can see that even small numbers of people have the
potential to create back eddies in which the waters gather to form an evolving circle
that has the power to generate its own energies and expand. Within the third leap of
the study, I employed all the powers of Coyote to help show how Indigenous people
can generate their own energies to save their language. Through combining the
powers of the Trickster with the transformational elements found within Chief Atahm
School, I sought to rouse First Nations from their slumber. The *Trickster P’s to Language Action* and the *Transformer P’s to Language Resiliency* provide models through which First Nations can begin the process of “Restorying” their languages back to life.

Through reconceptualizing Indigenous language loss as a story of invasion by the language monster, the Colonial Trickster, I offered a practical, strategic tool to engage the fight in individuals and community against language loss. I looked for ways that could cut through the academic ‘wordiness’ that tends to disconnect grassroots people from scholarship. I brought forth the creative forces of the Trickster to help transform the field of Indigenous language revitalization into a language battle in which First Nations are given the tools and the knowledge to fight.

Using the Trickster and Transformative elements of Coyote, I show how to navigate past negative internalized beliefs and hostile community members that block language initiatives in order to maintain the focus on language regeneration. By making this final leap of “Restorying” Chief Atahm School with the powers of Coyote, I engage age-old techniques of knowledge transfer. In this way, I assert our rights and our responsibilities as Indigenous people to our selves, our communities, our lands, our languages, and our knowledges.

**Summary of the Three Leaps of this Study**

The three leaps of this study help slow the swirling back eddy down in order to demonstrate how the circle grows within Indigenous language revitalization. Within the first leap of this study, through connecting colonizing practices in Canada to First
Nations language loss, I helped shed light on the prevailing inertia in language revitalization. This looping back to the past drew from Freire’s theory of conscientization (2006), and conscientization within an Indigenous context through Smith’s *Kaupapa Maori Transformative Praxis* (Smith, 1997). Within the second leap, I brought forth transformative practices from the Chief Atahm School community. This study, along with Cohen’s study of Okanagan immersion (2010), adds to our understanding of transformative praxis within the Salishan context. The research shared stories from founding members of Chief Atahm School that brings a Secwepemc perspective into the field of Indigenous immersion education. Finally, in the third leap, through using Coyote humour, I show how the change agents found within Chief Atahm School can travel to other communities to assist in Indigenous language revitalization. This final leap gives Trickster cunning and Transformer agency to First Nations to assist with the reclamation of their language territories.

**Implications for Further Research**

Within the field of language revitalization, the study of Indigenous language immersion occupies a small segment of scholarship. This study, focusing on the motivational and sustaining factors within Secwepemc immersion education, occupies an even narrower area within the literature. Although the recent work of Cohen (2010) helps illuminate our understanding of the challenges and change agents within the development of an Okanagan school centered on language and cultural practices, this study is the only scholarship to date focusing on language ideologies within Secwepemc immersion. Further work needs to be done to explore
the hegemonies and counter-hegemonies that hinder or support the implementation of Indigenous immersion education. The development of Secwepemc-specific scholarship focusing on these issues would also help advance Secwepemc language revitalization in general.

Within this study, I have proposed an interactive community game to engage discussion on language revitalization within Aboriginal communities. It is important to follow up this study with plans to implement and assess the model within Secwepemc communities. It also would be interesting to see further development of community language engagement models that incorporate the oral tradition as a mode of knowledge transfer.

The insights brought forth from the stories of key participants from the Chief Atahm School community suggest that the development of a collective consciousness helped support individuals in the process of developing an immersion program. These findings are consistent with Hermes’ (2007) that show that the implementation of immersion education requires community building in order to support the development of relationships, trust, and commitment necessary to carry out the vision (p. 60). Cohen’s (2010) examination of Okanagan immersion also supports the importance of building community and “reaching out to others” (p.280). Within this thesis, the expansion of the theme of k’wesiltktnews, or interrelationship, as a connective element within Secwepemc immersion education, built from previous Secwepemc scholarship (Billy, 2009; Ignace’s, 2008). In order to continue the process of reconnecting self to community, scholarship that expands on the application of the foundational value of interrelationship and other Secwepemc
epistemological principles will need to be encouraged. Specifically, studies that build from this work, and Billy’s examination of Secwepemc pedagogy (2009), will help guide the development of Secwepemc-based educational models.

Conclusion

What First Nations people are seeking is not a lesser education, and not even an unequal education, but rather a better education – an education that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives. (Barnhardt & Kirkness, 1991, p.14)

The struggle to regain and assert identity as Secwepemc people within Canada requires a concentrated focus. Reclaiming this right requires a rigorous research agenda and transformative praxis that stretches us into new areas of possibilities in order to challenge the current status quo and our own hegemonic thinking. While the Secwepemc may have suffered many challenges, they are still finding ways to assert their independence and distinct identity. The assimilative forces of the residential school and the public school have not yet destroyed the Secwepemc language. There are still people that have the passion and the resiliency to ensure that the Secwepemc culture and language survives.

The Chief Atahm School community sought to repair some of the damages to self and community by reconnecting their children to the language through traditional modes of knowledge transfer. The drive and energy that arose from within a small reserve community of less than 500 people helps give hope that the concentrated
efforts of a few can go a long way in reviving a language. With a critical mass of people intent on reconnecting their children to traditional cultural teachings and to their language, we can surely begin to awaken First Nations in Canada from their deep slumber.

The relationship between the government and First Nations in Canada is a history of unequal power relations that have left little opportunity for First Nations languages and cultures to endure. Throughout the entire period of contact, the newcomers have controlled the playing field and have implemented policy intent on forcing acquiescence of First Nations. Throughout all government shifts in policy, there have been two constants, the pressure towards assimilation, and the continued weakening of treaty and non-treaty rights of First Nations. Within the existing social and economic climate of Canada, Indigenous worldviews that value the collective and the equality of all beings are still seen as being inconsistent with the capitalistic goals of the country.

In order to assert our Indigenous right to remaining linguistically and culturally distinct, we will need to increase our energies asserting local authority over education and strengthening First Nations governance. The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 1993) asserted that, “All Indigenous peoples also have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages.” It is now our challenge to follow this assertion of rights with action. Through the research findings, we are shown that our visions for language revitalization need to be actively engaged in order to save our languages from extinction. This study
translates this message into a Salishan context: in order to move forward in our goals for language revitalization we need to engage Coyote agency. Or, as my esteemed cohort member, Dr. Teelahah Marie Anderson so eloquently stated, “Coyote is a doing, not a being” (personal communication, November 26, 2011).

Through the stories of Chief Atahm School, we hear about how ordinary people became active in the fight to reclaim the Secwepemc language. A former student from Chief Atahm School, also shared how ordinary people need only ordinary actions to keep the language in their midst:

We’d be going up to the mountain all of the time for school. We’d go build a sq’ilye (sweatlodge), or we were always just moving. All of the parents were always, they were always volunteering. That’s the only reason we could do all of those things, because there were a number of parents that would volunteer and help to drive and to watch kids. It’s not easy taking thirty, forty kids up into the mountain. So, you had to have the parents that were involved, so that they could help out and watch everything. But, I guess, I always knew that we had something different at Chief Atahm. That it was something special, that parents were a lot more hands-on, they were involved. Because it’s like the Secwepemc way, it’s a community thing, it’s a community. That’s what it should be. (NS, December 20, 2009 transcript)

This study offers Coyote’s Path to Language Power as a way to stem the tide of Indigenous language loss. However, language survival requires a personal commitment from each member of the community.

While this study provides strategies for engaging in the battle to reclaim a language, it does not delve into the complexities of planning and implementation of language immersion programs. The next story to be told would have to move past the
ideologies surrounding language revitalization and focus on the structural support systems, including administration, funding, resource development, and teacher training, that facilitate the operation of Indigenous language immersion. As for now, since I am a firm believer in Coyote action, I will continue moving along my path of helping to bring forth the vision of Chief Atahm School by returning to my position as curriculum coordinator and language nest teacher. Nevertheless, someday in the future, my father will probably find a way to prod me into telling another story. Failing that, I invite other storytellers to add to our understanding of how to relight the language fires.

Secwepemctsin, welme7 yews, welme7 yews....
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Appendix A: Contact Letter to Potential Study Participants

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Date

Re: Interview for a Research Study titled, “Creation Stories from the Chief Atahm School Immersion Program: Motivating and Maintaining Community Language Revitalization”

Dear Name of Participant,

Weytk, as you may be aware, I have been working on my educational doctorate through the University of B.C for the past three years. My major research project will focus on the Chief Atahm School immersion program. The research will look at the history of the school through the personal and collective stories of the school community. It is my hope that these stories may serve to inspire others to become involved in aboriginal immersion education and language learning.

As I consider you a key member of the Chief Atahm School community I will value your contribution in this research. Your participation would consist of involvement in interviews and/or focus groups over the course of 12 weeks. I anticipate that each participant will need to commit between 3 and 12 hours to the project. Any involvement in this research is purely voluntary and will not affect, in any way, your position at the school or your relationship with the researcher. For your information, I have enclosed a detailed description of the project including signed letters from the Adams Lake Band Council and the School’s Tekwemiple, indicating their support for the project.

1/8/12

Page 1 of 2
I would be honoured to have you participate in this project. I would appreciate a reply to me within two weeks either by phone or in person. Before the project begins I will require 2 signed consent forms from each participant (enclosed), one for your records. If you have any questions please contact me and we can discuss them. I look forward to your reply and appreciate your time and dedication to help keeping our Secwépemc dreams alive.

Kukstsemc,

Kathryn A. Michel
Ed.D Candidate/ UBC

Encl.

Consent Form
Research Questions
Adams Lake Band Consent Letter, January 30th, 2009
Chief Atahm School Consent Letter, February 6th, 2009
Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter to Study Participants

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational Studies
Mailing address:
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: 604-822-5374
Fax: 604-822-4244
http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca

Participant Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Creation Stories from the Chief Atahm School Immersion Program: Motivating and Maintaining Community Language Revitalization

Researcher:
Kathryn A. Michel
Ed.D Candidate, UBC Graduate Studies (Education)
Contact Info:

Research Supervisor:
Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald
Professor, UBC Faculty of Education/EDST, Vancouver
Contact Info:

Purpose of the Research:

This graduate study explores the ways in which the Chief Atahm Secwepemc Immersion School on the Adams Lake Reserve near Chase, B.C. has attracted and sustained interest in language immersion. It is the purpose of this study to research the motivational and transformational stories of key school community members through interviews, focus groups, and school historical documents. The goal of the research is to promote community dialogue and discovery of ways in which we can attract and sustain interest in the Secwepemc immersion program, thereby supporting the intergenerational transmission of language and knowledge. The research will be part of a thesis and will be accessible by the public.

Page 1 of 5
Research Participants:
This research will invite voluntary participation from members past and present of the Chief Atahm School community who have contributed to the development of the school. The Chief Atahm School community shall include staff, parents, elders, students (not including minor children), and involved community members.

Summary of Research Design:
The principles of Chief Atahm School will guide this study, namely those of: K’wseltknwes – We Are All Family; Slexlexs - Develop Wisdom; Qweqwetsin – Honour the Spiritual; Knucwwestuts – Take Care of Yourself; Mellelc – Take Time to Rest/ Balance

The four principles of Knucwwestuts, Eitxe, Slexlexs, and Mellelc can be seen as being sheltered by the overarching value of Kwesellnews or “we are all related”. It is through this value that we can see that the linking together of past, present and future creates space for the spiritual or Qweqwetsin. This research strategy supports the connection between the community and the researcher and emphasizes the value of building relationship. Dr. Jo-ann Archibald’s ‘Storywork’ lends support to the core principles of Slexlexs and Qweqwetsin. The works of other indigenist researchers will also be used to guide this research. A copy of the research proposal is available from Kim Dennis, Chief Atahm School, if you require a complete overview of the research design and process.

Data Collection:
Participants in this study have the opportunity to collaboratively develop with the researcher data collection strategies that will contribute to the sharing of information required for this study. At the onset, it is anticipated that interviews and/or focus groups will play a primary role in data collection.
Voluntary Participation, Risks or Discomforts:
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may stop participating at any time. There will be no financial benefit to participants in this study. Your involvement or choice to not be involved will not affect in any way the nature of the relationship with the researcher or the nature of your relationship with Chief Atahm School either now or in the future. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study although there will be an inconvenience of having to commit the time to participate in research activities.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:
You are being asked to volunteer to between 3 to 6 interviews, meetings and/or focus groups throughout a three-month period for a maximum of 3 hours per session. You will be given the opportunity to stop participating at any time during the study, for any reason. You may also refuse to answer any questions or participate in audio recording or filming.

Confidentiality:
You have the choice to have your identity used or, if you desire that your real name not be used, a pseudonym will be chosen for you. You will be sent a copy of research transcripts and/or drafts of the research text that make reference to you or your comments for approval. The researcher will arrange a meeting for all participants to discuss the research results and provide feedback. The researcher and research supervisor will have access to the data. Participants will have access to their own data only. All data (text files, audio recordings, videotape) will be kept in digital format and stored in a locked cabinet at Chief Atahm School during the research process. At the end of the research project all data will be stored in a locked cabinet at UBC for 5 years. At the end of the five-year term the data will be erased.
For More Information:

The research proposal has been reviewed and accepted by the Adams Lake Chief and Council and the Chief Atahm Tekwemippe. It also conforms to UBC ethics guidelines. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research and your role in the study please contact the research supervisor, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald at contact number or the researcher, Kathryn Michel at contact number. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or email RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I ________________________, consent to participating in the research project titled, “Creation Stories from Chief Atahm Secwepemc Immersion School: Motivating and Maintaining Community Language Revitalization” conducted by Kathryn Michel. I understand that by signing this consent form I agree to the following:

1. I voluntarily consent to participate in the research with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time.
2. I do not waive any of my legal rights by signing the consent form.
3. I consent or do not consent to having my name used in the report.
   
   _____ I consent to use my real name in the report
   
   _____ I wish to remain anonymous in the report and be given a pseudonym

Page 4 of 5
4. I consent or do not consent to being involved in focus groups. All attempts will be made to ensure confidentiality within focus groups, however, the researcher will not be able to control what each participant discusses outside of the group.

_______ I consent to involvement in focus groups.

_______ I do not consent to involvement in focus groups.

5. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant

________________________________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

________________________________________________________________________
Date

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Appendix C: One on One Semi-structured Interviews Guide

Guiding Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of staff and students at Chief Atahm School that can assist in our understanding of Aboriginal immersion education models?

2. What motivates people to become involved and stay involved in Aboriginal immersion education?

3. How can these experiences assist in furthering the goals of First Nations language revitalization within B.C.?

General Questions

1. What is your role in the Chief Atahm School community?

2. (If applicable) What are your responsibilities?

3. What is the nature of your relationship or interaction with the school?

4. How long have you been involved in the school program?

5. How did you begin to be involved with Chief Atahm School?

Thematic Questions:

Personal experiences:

• What are your memories of how the school was started?

• Why do you think the school was started?

• Describe your involvement with the school?

• What were your motivations behind enrolling your child/your employment/your participation in the school?
• Can you share any specific personal experiences you've had relating to Chief Atahm School?
• If you are still involved with the school – What sustains your interest in the program?
• (if applicable) When and how did you learn to speak Secwepmectsin?
• How has your involvement with Chief Atahm School influenced you personally?
• How has your involvement with Chief Atahm School influenced your family life?
• Describe what Chief Atahm School means to you

Collective experiences:
• Memories of school events, history, and program development
• School outings, curriculum development, and school culture
• How would you describe the connection between staff, parents, elders, and children?
• How do you think Chief Atahm School has influenced the community?

What can we learn from these experiences?
• Have you gained any insight on language learning through your involvement with Chief Atahm School?
• What challenges and successes do you feel helped strengthen the school?
• What can you share from your past experiences that will help others with language revitalization and/or immersion education?

What do you feel is important to share with others?

• Insights on language learning/immersion?
• Challenges and Successes
• Aboriginal language revitalization
• Intergenerational transfer of language
Appendix D: Focus Group Interview Guide

Introduction

Weytkp, xwexweytep, thank you for taking part in this research. I have invited you today to discuss, as a group, certain themes of interest to me for my research on Chief Atahm School. Our meeting today will be videotaped and audiotaped and I will be taking notes during the interview. I am interested in the collective experiences of the Chief Atahm School community. In particular, I would like to explore the highlights and successes of the program. If you have any thoughts or comments to add during the session please feel free to mention them at any time.

1. Focus Group One – Participants: Elders

Collective experiences, stories:

- Memories of school events, history, and program development
- School outings, curriculum development, and school culture
- What are the strengths of Chief Atahm School; what role did you play in the development of the school program?
- How do you think Chief Atahm School has influenced the community?
- How has Chief Atahm School responded to the challenges of establishing and maintaining an aboriginal immersion school?

2. Focus Group Two – Participants: Chief Atahm School staff, parents

What can Chief Atahm School learn from the past experiences of developing an
aboriginal immersion school?

- Have you gained any insight on language learning and language immersion through your involvement with Chief Atahm School?
- What challenges and successes do you feel helped strengthen the school?
- What can you share from your past experiences that will help others with language revitalization and/or immersion education?

_Yiri7 E Stsukws._