



University
of Victoria

ONE mind · ONE people

NETOLNEW

*Adult Indigenous contributions to reviving languages in
British Columbia through Mentor-Apprentice style learning*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A community-university research partnership



NETOLNEW means “one mind, one people” or “doing things as one” in the SENĆOŦEN language spoken on southern Vancouver Island.

This was the name given to the three-year research partnership between [WSÁNEĆ School Board / Saanich Adult Education Centre \(WSB\)](#), [First Peoples’ Cultural Council \(FPCC\)](#) and the [University of Victoria \(UVIC\)](#). The two community partners are leaders with considerable expertise and experience in Indigenous language revitalization, and in particular with adult language learning through Mentor-Apprentice style programming (MAP).

Purpose of study

OUR JOINT RESEARCH project studied adult Indigenous language learning in British Columbia through the popular Mentor-Apprentice Program (MAP) method. Increasingly, adult Indigenous language learners are identified as the “missing generation” who hold great potential to contribute to the revival of Indigenous languages and act as the middle ground between Elders, children, and youth in their communities.

About the study

WITHIN THE MAP approach, adult language learners (known as apprentices) and proficient speakers (known as mentors) create their own oral language-immersive context through daily activities, cultural practices, and community involvement. The method directs spending 10–20 hours a week in one-on-one language immersion over a two to three year period.

The research project aimed to document the successes and challenges of MAP in the BC context. Over a three-year period, we interviewed over 60 participants, including current and past *apprentices*, current and past language *mentors*, and *administrators* in both partner organizations.

Current apprentices were interviewed up to six times over two years, to document their learning process. *Past* apprentices, that had previously participated in MAP, as well as mentors and the administrators were interviewed just once.



Research findings & recommendations

Successes of MAP

THE RESULTS FROM this study indicate that MAP as a language learning and revitalization method has had *tremendous positive impacts for mentors, apprentices, and communities across BC.*

Proficiency

- › Nearly 90% of current apprentices reported an improvement in their speaking abilities.
- › Current apprentices were able to increase the length of time remaining in the language (without breaking into English) by up to three times from the beginning to the end of the study.

Beyond language learning

- › Apprentices acquired valuable skills in cultural practices, including conduct around Elders, and reported increased feelings of wellbeing and confidence.

Occupational outcomes

- › Two-thirds of all current and past apprentices secured occupational opportunities within their communities, working in language-related positions in a school setting as teachers or teacher assistants, or curriculum developers.

Educational implications

- › Many apprentices pursued higher education as a direct result of their language learning in MAP, either through formal post-secondary or graduate degree programs, or community-based language programs.

Community outcomes

- › Communities were strengthened through the occupational and educational pursuits of apprentices and the leadership roles they took on.
- › Most apprentices have accepted language responsibilities in their communities, including passing on their language to the next generation or participating in Elder groups.
- › Many mentors are more overtly recognized as language keepers and asked to contribute their wisdom within their communities.

“

I think [MAP] is a good way for somebody to become fluent [in] the quickest way, for a person to gain fluency.

— Bucky Ned, St'át'imcets Mentor



Challenges of MAP

THERE WAS AN overall sense expressed by study participants that the language learning they are doing now is “just” a beginning. More is needed: *Participants expressed they need more time and more learning opportunities.*

A need for long-term language programming

- › Mentors emphasized that to move learners past beginner levels, language programming must be secure, long-term, and multi-year.

A need for adequate support during MAP

- › Both apprentices and mentors spoke of the challenges of needing to work to earn a living while in MAP, and of balancing the demands of paid work, family life, other studies, exercise, recreation, and commitments to MAP.

Recommendations

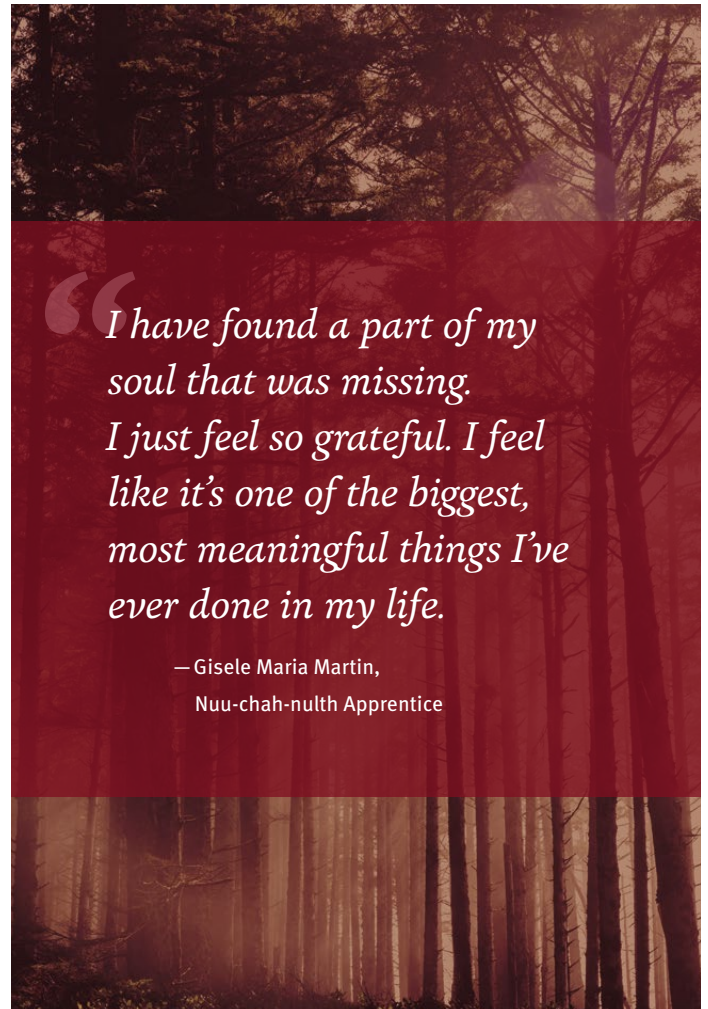
- › *Multi-year funding is critical* • Throughout the study and across participants, the need to expand the current 300-hour support to 1,000 hours per year for 3–5 years was resounding. In any language, 300 hours of learning over a 6-month period would provide familiarity with a language, but would not be expected to create new speakers in any other circumstance.

- › *Greater funding for organizations to support MAP* • Both FPCC and WSB provided tremendous support to both apprentices and mentors. Stable and adequate support for these kinds of organizations and Nations is critical to the success of apprentices and mentors in MAP.
- › *Provide adequate funding to Apprentices* • This would allow learners to dedicate full-time attention to language learning as occurs with other adult language learning programs in Canada. This funding would also recognize that most apprentices are also working or going to school full-time (or both), as well as raising young families.
- › *Provide greater funding to Mentors* • Elder speakers often live on limited income and offer their time to these learners. A greater stipend to recognize the value of the knowledge they hold would be more honouring to our language speakers.
- › *Language learning assessment* • Regular and consistent longer term (beyond 300 hours) assessment of learner’s progress would be beneficial to continuing to improve this method.
- › *Learner goal-setting* • The findings emphasize the power and positive outcomes of setting realistic and informed language learning goals for learners. It is recommended that any organization undertaking this program ensure there is strong support to teach learners about realistic outcomes and assist with goal-setting and monitoring.

Future directions

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR future research:

- A** A longer study of MAP participants over a 5–10 year period, as they enter the program and staying with them after their completion to study *language learning plateaus* and *additional strategies undertaken to continue language learning to higher levels of proficiency*.
- B** Participants expressed concerns about *language change*, e.g. changes in pronunciation occurring with the apprentices, and the need for the creation of new words and of new forms of existing words. Therefore, we recommend:
- › Research in tracking the pronunciation of MAP pairings to investigate the nature of this language change;
 - › The incorporation of pedagogical materials in future MAP endeavours to assist with pronunciation development; and
 - › Providing MAP pairs (and their communities) with models of how new words can be formed.
- C** Expanding the pilot *Language Learning Assessment Tool* developed for this project, to include Reading and Writing, as well as Advanced and Superior levels of proficiency.



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WSÁNEĆ School Board / Saanich Adult Education Centre (WSB),
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