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Introduction

The First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) is a unique organization in Canada. Established as a provincial Crown Corporation in 1990 and supported by the legislated First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Act, the FPCC has a mandate to support the revitalization of First Nations languages, arts and cultures in British Columbia (B.C.). The FPCC supports B.C. First Nations community members to maintain, preserve and restore their languages by providing funding, training, capacity building and advocacy for language immersion, collaboration, planning, language and culture programs and archiving programs. We distribute provincial and federal funding and administer immersion-focused programs. Since 1990, the FPCC has distributed over \$37 million to British Columbia's First Nations communities for language, arts and culture projects. The FPCC is committed to providing communities with a high level of support and quality resources. Our cultural heritage, and the living expression of our identities, is integral to the health of all members of our First Nations communities, as well as to the well-being of all British Columbians.¹

British Columbia is rich with a great diversity of First Nations languages and cultures. B.C. is home to 60% of the First Nations languages in Canada, with 34 unique languages belonging to 7 different language families and 203 First Nations communities. All of the First Nations languages in B.C. are facing severe threats to their vitality. The history of colonization and the residential school system in Canada disrupted the cycle of intergenerational language transmission (the natural process of passing a language across generations) and caused significant language shift and loss. Compounding this disruption are issues such as the stigmatization of First Nations languages by speakers of majority languages like English; parental and community attitudes that promote the use of English for educational and economic reasons at the expense of First Nations languages; a lack of qualified teachers, fluent speakers and curriculum to teach the languages; the influence of media and the internet, where English is the dominant language; urbanization, where First Nations people are moving away from communities where their languages are spoken due to greater opportunities in urban areas. While most Indigenous languages worldwide could be classified as "endangered", the First Nations languages in B.C. are in a critical state, with only 4% of the population as fluent speakers, and 59% of those speakers are over the age of 65.²

Given the linguistic context of B.C. – the high linguistic and cultural diversity linked with advanced language loss – the FPCC is in a unique position to comprehend the challenges of language revitalization and to identify successful models, best practices and areas with continued need for development and support. In this paper, we focus on **initiatives and strategies** undertaken for, with and by Indigenous peoples to recover, use, revitalize and disseminate Indigenous languages (Theme 2); lessons learned from **formal and informal education systems** to strengthen Indigenous languages (Theme 3); and **the role** of States, the United Nations system, in particular UNESCO, Indigenous peoples and other partners to support the survival, revitalization, use and promotion of Indigenous languages (Theme 4).

¹ For more information on the First Peoples' Cultural Council, see www.fpcc.ca.

² Gessner, S., Herbert, T., Parker, A., Thorburn, B., & Wadsworth, A. (2014). *Report on the status of BC First Nations Languages 2014 (2nd edition)*. Brentwood Bay: First People's Cultural Council. Retrieved from <http://www.fpcc.ca/files/PDF/Language/FPCC-LanguageReport-141016-WEB.pdf>

Theme 2: Share initiatives and strategies undertaken for, with and by Indigenous peoples to recover, use, revitalize and disseminate Indigenous languages

2.1. How can information and communication technologies be used and for what purpose?

Indigenous communities and allies within B.C. and throughout Canada are implementing distinctive and varied strategies to vitalize their languages. These strategies include creative use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), as well as initiatives that focus on face-to-face communication and building infrastructure for language vitality. For language documentation, ICTs provide robust tools which allow Indigenous communities to create integrated multimedia databases for language archiving. The rapid advancement of these technologies over the last few decades now permits accessible, online archives that include audio, video and photo multimedia, and mobilize the cloud as an economical approach to storing and maintaining large quantities of digital data.

These technologies are also used for language learning. From “Word of the Day” posts on websites and Facebook pages to fully developed online language lessons such as those possible through Duolingo, Rosetta Stone or the FirstVoices Tutor, a variety of options are now available to both teachers and learners of Indigenous languages. The value of these technologies for language learners lies in their accessibility for remote communities, as well as for urban populations separated from their language communities. Moreover, they appeal to younger learners for whom these technologies are a requisite for daily life. For language communities where fluent speakers may be few and overstretched, ICTs can allow for “virtual Elders” so that a greater number and diversity of learners can have access to fluent speech.

Finally, ICTs provide for a growing network of Indigenous language champions and allies between communities, languages, regions and nations. Global tools such as the Endangered Languages Project (www.endangeredlanguages.com, discussed in §4 below) connect activists from around the world. Local tools such as a Facebook page for a community program allows program coordinators to connect with community members and share information about important dates, events and program successes. On both ends of the spectrum, these tools allow for communities to increase awareness of their languages and generate engagement in their initiatives.

As a case study for how Indigenous communities are innovating creative use of ICTs, we highlight *FirstVoices.com*. FirstVoices is a suite of web and mobile technologies developed for language documentation and revitalization by the FPCC. The suite includes online multimedia documentation and archiving software, as well as a host of mobile applications and advanced learning tools. Communities documenting their languages in the FirstVoices database have the option of repurposing their collections as mobile dictionaries and phrase books for the iPhone, iPod and iPad. Applications include the FirstVoices Language Lab, a hardware-software package delivering language lessons to the Apple iPad via the Internet or a standalone laptop mini server, and FirstVoices Chat, an Indigenous language texting app for Facebook, Chat and Google Talk, with keypads capable of texting in over 100 Indigenous languages in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. The FirstVoices Language Tutor allows communities to build intuitive language lessons that mimic the way a child learns a language. It provides language learners with access to graduated, interactive, web-based language lessons with vocabulary and conversation building exercises. The online program includes a student tracking system so parents and teachers can monitor student progress through the lessons. While advances in ICTs have certainly been beneficial as supplemental tools for language learning, it should be strongly cautioned that ICTs are not the panacea for the problem of language loss. Languages will **not** live on without speakers who can speak them, so the creation of fluent first language speakers through intergenerational transmission and fluent second language speakers through immersion programs should remain the priority.

2.2. What are other non-technological methods that can serve this purpose?

While ICTs provide increasing support to language revitalization initiatives, non-technological approaches continue to be key to success. At the heart of every Indigenous language is spoken communication. Successful language revitalization efforts at their core rely on renewing the cycle of intergenerational language transmission and increasing opportunities for natural language acquisition in the home and the community. To this end, Indigenous communities in B.C. and across Canada are implementing a wide variety of other strategies and approaches to reversing language shift that are not solely based on the use of technologies.

The FPCC supports communities throughout B.C. to create and develop language immersion strategies that build fluent speakers at all levels, such as Language Nests at the early-childhood level and Master/Mentor-Apprentice Programs and language houses at the adult level. The goal of these approaches is to increase opportunities for meaningful, face-to-face conversation in the language, in daily life.

The Language Nest model, well-known thanks to the Māori Te Kōhanga Reo program in New Zealand and the 'Aha Pūnana Leo program in Hawai'i, supports language learning at the early childhood level by creating immersion environments for preschool-aged children. The aim of this approach is to raise a new generation of first-language speakers by providing the language input required so that young children can acquire their Indigenous language naturally, even though it may not be the primary language spoken at home. The model relies on a community-based approach that incorporates support from Elders, parents and other community members. In addition to providing an immersion environment for young children to learn the language, Language Nests can create opportunities for young parents to learn the language and bring it back into their homes and daily lives.

The Master-Apprentice method was developed in California in the 1990s (Hinton 2001).³ In this approach, a fluent speaker is paired with a motivated adult learner, and they engage in immersion through participating in everyday activities together in the language. It requires a substantial time commitment of 10-20 hours per week and ideally both master and apprentice are paid a stipend for their immersion time which permits participants to give up other paid work in order to make time for the program. The method has spread to Indigenous communities around the world. In British Columbia, the First Peoples' Cultural Council adopted the Master-Apprentice program (now called the Mentor-Apprentice program) in 2008 and has supported 84 apprentices in 27 different languages. This program has proven to be a successful way to develop practical language fluency in speaking and comprehension with the added benefit that the team often becomes a catalyst for further language growth in the community with many apprentices concurrently or subsequently taking on the role of language educators.

A language house is a relatively new approach to creating fluency. Language houses share the strength of the Mentor-Apprentice Program in that they focus on language use in daily life through immersion, rather than isolating language learning to a classroom context. In the language house approach, a community identifies a house to become an immersion site. Committed learners and fluent speakers live together in the house for a period of time, committing to using the language for all aspects of their daily life.

Other non-technological approaches include strategies that connect culture and language to support the holistic renewal of the cycle of language transmission. Initiatives like Language and Culture Immersion Camps allow families and whole communities to immerse themselves in the language through practicing traditional cultural activities.

³ Hinton, L. (2001). The Master-Apprentice language learning program. In L. Hinton & K. Hale (Eds.), *The green book of language revitalization in practice* (pp. 217–226). San Diego: Academic Press.

In the B.C. context, healing from language-related traumas is another essential way to increase language learning and use. First Nations communities in B.C. have large populations of latent (or silent) speakers – people who can understand their language but do not speak it due to language-related traumas and other issues. Based on a program initiated by Indigenous Sámi people in Sweden, the FPCC is exploring the role of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and language mentorships to support latent speakers to overcome the obstacles to speech and to reclaim their languages.

Finally, crucial to successful revitalization of Indigenous languages is the necessary infrastructure to support those languages in all levels of society. From community-based language planning, to regional and state-wide policy development and legislation, there is a continued need to develop effective infrastructures that can support community-directed language initiatives and strategies.

2.3. How can these initiatives and strategies reach out to all levels of society?

Increasing the visibility of Indigenous peoples in all levels of society is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed. Mainstream arts and culture organizations continue to focus on settler history and tend to include Indigenous voices and narratives only in a past-tense, anthropological point of view. Indigenous people are active in contemporary society and have contributed much to their nations which is not recognized. There is a need for resources, first for Indigenous people's own work in their communities and then for Indigenous-run organizations to help mainstream arts and culture organizations build better relationships with Indigenous peoples.

One example of increasing visibility of Indigenous peoples and acknowledging First Nations as tellers of their own story is the recent museum exhibition on the languages indigenous to B.C. The First Peoples' Cultural Council partnered with the Royal BC Museum to deliver the award-winning language exhibition entitled *Our Living Languages: First Peoples' Voices in B.C.* The exhibition showcases the diversity of the 34 First Nations languages in B.C. and celebrates the communities who are working hard to ensure these languages continue to be vital. By telling this important story, we can better support, enhance and encourage these efforts by increasing understanding of the complexities of language revitalization. Other projects such as revising public school curriculum to include local Indigenous history and developing signage in public places such as highways and government buildings are essential to generating increased awareness of the Indigenous languages of the province and to gathering increased support for language work.

Theme 3: Lessons learned from formal and informal education systems to strengthen Indigenous languages

Ultimately, Indigenous languages must become the everyday languages of the home and community, maintained through intergenerational transmission, in order to ensure their longevity. Given that this is not the status quo for a majority of languages, both formal and informal education have a large role to play to support language maintenance and development. Whether formal or informal, language educators must adopt an immersion-based approach with the strategic goal of creating fluency.

3.1. What are the experiences of informal education systems in strengthening Indigenous languages?

Humans have an innate capacity to acquire language and the acquisition process begins before birth. Young children (particularly under age 7) have the best potential to become fluent language speakers and so it is crucial that educational efforts target this age group. The Language Nest movement (discussed in §2.2. above), which began as an informal program to raise preschool children in their Indigenous language in immersion-based home environments, is a highly effective method of language education. In both New Zealand and Hawai'i, Language Nests have developed into a formalized system of preschool education and

have become the foundation for later formal K-12 immersion programs.

While language nests may be the best place to start, the challenge for most communities is the lack of fluent speakers required to sustain the immersion environment for children in the nests. In most Indigenous language communities, fluent first-language speakers are elderly and are not in a position to work as full-time language educators. Thus it is critical that young adults are provided with opportunities to become more fluent so that they may become the lead language educators. Because formal adult language education programs are non-existent for most Indigenous languages, informal immersion-based approaches such as the Master-Apprentice method (also discussed in §2.2. above) are indispensable.

What is notable about programs such as Language Nest and Master-Apprentice, in contrast to many formal education programs, is that they were developed for Indigenous people and for the most part by Indigenous people. They were shared internationally and are great examples of the international network of Indigenous language revitalization experts. In addition to being successful in creating new speakers, these approaches fit well within an integrative, holistic Indigenous approach to learning.

3.2. Can bilingual education at elementary and secondary levels make a difference?

Bilingual education at elementary and secondary levels can make a difference if investments are made in strategies that work – namely, full or dual immersion programs. Dual immersion programs can be effective for languages where the language is still spoken in the home and there is another majority language that children need to learn to be successful (e.g., Aymara and Spanish). Such programs allow for children to receive support in their first language while gaining skills in the majority language. In the British Columbia context where languages aren't spoken in the home, full immersion in the Indigenous language would provide the best option since English is already so privileged outside of the school environment.

Simply offering bilingual education for a limited number of hours per week is not preferable, though it is better than offering no language at all. To take British Columbia as an example, many schools (including both Indigenous band-operated and some provincial public schools) have been offering classes in First Nations languages for decades, with little success in increasing language fluency. Typically, these classes take a western approach which focuses only on literacy and are generally offered 1-4 hours/week. While offering classes at this frequency increases *awareness* of language and culture, students must be able attain *competency* in an Indigenous language in order to achieve the benefits that such competency can afford. Beyond increasing language fluency, there is a correlation between Indigenous students being connected to their language and culture with success in school, greater high school completion rates and increased participation in post-secondary education. In addition, there are the well-documented cognitive benefits that come from being bilingual.

Furthermore, public schools, especially in urban areas, have a role to play. As many Indigenous children attend public schools, all schools could offer the language of the traditional territory as an option to *all* students. This would not only give Indigenous students an opportunity to learn an Indigenous language but would give non-Indigenous students a greater understanding of Indigenous language and culture which would aid in addressing racism and issues around the inferior status of Indigenous languages and peoples. In sum, states should be encouraged to provide full immersion in the elementary and secondary school system which will contribute to the overall success of Indigenous students and strengthen their languages at the same time.

3.3. What are the challenges for curriculum and educational texts in Indigenous languages?

Although implementing wide-scale immersion is the best option, there exist many challenges. Indigenous language teachers usually don't have curriculum for their courses and must create it all themselves, though

most are not trained in curriculum development for second languages. The curriculum that exists often has no scope and sequence (a summary of what is to be taught and the sequence in which it will be taught) and typically there is no coordination between early childhood education, primary, secondary and post-secondary curriculum. There are few educational texts developed for Indigenous language teaching or for other core content in immersion settings. Such materials could be developed (in part) by supporting the digitalization, transliteration and sharing of recordings in archives in museums and academics' collections around the world. Teachers need to have access to training in language curriculum development and immersion teaching methodologies.

The lack of curriculum and education is compounded by the paucity of language teachers. Certified language teachers are often not fully fluent and fluent teachers are often not fully certified and are paid less than other teachers. Post-secondary institutions must invest in language teacher training programs that support Indigenous languages and students. As one example, the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia, has recently developed such programs, offering both a Bachelor's and Master's program in Indigenous language revitalization, with support for cohorts of students from the same community. Partnering with Indigenous communities, programs such as these can completely change the future of Indigenous languages.

3.4. What is the role of language standardization in the survival of an Indigenous language?

The strong link between language and identity extends to the level of dialects, defined as mutually-intelligible varieties of a single language. For many members of Indigenous communities, recognizing and perpetuating dialect differences within a language is essential. For that reason, it is optimal that each language be fully documented and recorded along with dialect differences.

Nevertheless, if populations are low and there are few speakers, it make sense to standardize writing systems and share curriculum among different dialects. The first obstacle is, who gets to decide on a standard? Educators? Chiefs and councils? Language authorities? Should policy makers and outsiders decide? Secondly, what is lost in the process of standardization? Languages are tied to lands and ecosystems and cover wide ranges of diverse language landscape. Standardization may result in the loss of knowledge unique to specific areas. Indigenous people themselves must decide how they want to approach language standardization and be aware of the consequences of those decisions. What processes exist to support standardization? Can communities that share a language across vast areas work together?

One practical way to mitigate issues arising from standardization is through the development of a language revitalization plan. The first component of a language plan is an assessment of the language's status. In B.C., the FPCC requires grant applicants to complete a Language Needs Assessment for their community. The Language Needs Assessments are filled out online and elicit information regarding the status of each language, such as the number of speakers, semi-speakers, learners, population totals, community language resources, school programming and early childhood education programs, as well as language revitalization challenges and opportunities in the communities. First Peoples' Cultural Council uses this information to compile the *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages*, produced every four years. The report presents an accurate snapshot of the state of the languages, with the goal of providing useful information for First Nations leadership, governments, communities and language stakeholders to use in revitalization efforts at all levels. Government agencies or organizations such as the UN could provide similar infrastructure to support the collection of this data in all jurisdictions where Indigenous languages are spoken.

Once the status of language has been assessed, planning can begin. But support for planning, such as through FPCC's Language Revitalization Planning Program, is crucial. This program supports communities who share the same language to come together across dialects to develop a revitalization plan and language policies for the language as a whole and to identify shared resources and opportunities for collaboration. Once a plan is

developed, it can be implemented through strategies that work across all levels: language nests for early childhood; immersion schools, language camps and FirstVoices programs for children; Master-Apprentice programs and support for latent speakers in the adult population. With implementation comes assessment and evaluation, and then the process must begin all over again in order to ensure continued progress.

Theme 4: The role of States, the United Nations system, in particular UNESCO, Indigenous peoples and other partners to support the survival, revitalization, use and promotion of indigenous languages.

Indigenous peoples must lead the planning and implementation of programs to support the survival, revitalization, maintenance and promotion of Indigenous languages. The role of the state or nation is to support investment in Indigenous language revitalization and education and to develop legislative and policy support at all levels of national, regional and local government which recognizes that access to Indigenous languages is a human right. Governments need to develop their internal capacity to respond to and understand how language revitalization and education can be achieved and work collaboratively with Indigenous language experts to make effective investments.

UNESCO could support the development of a global network of Indigenous languages experts. In addition, the collection of language data on each of the world's Indigenous languages is imperative in order to establish baseline statistics to estimate the level of investment needed for revitalization and maintenance. At the very least, each language must be documented with digital technology and archived for future generations.

Over 40 percent of the world's approximate 7,000 languages are at risk of disappearing.⁴ But today we have tools and technology at our fingertips that could become a game changer. An example of a project in which UNESCO could invest is the The Endangered Languages Project (ELP). ELP uses technology for the service of the organizations and individuals working to confront language endangerment by documenting, preserving and teaching them. Through this website, users can access the most up-to-date and comprehensive information on endangered languages and resources provided by partners, but they can also play an active role in putting their languages online by submitting information or resources in the form of text, audio or video files. The ELP was supported by Google with the long term goal for it to be led by true experts in the field of language preservation. As such, oversight of the project transitioned to the First Peoples' Cultural Council and Eastern Michigan University. The project is now managed by the FPCC and the Endangered Languages Catalogue/Endangered Languages Project (ELCat/ELP) team at Eastern Michigan University in coordination with a Governance Council with representation from around the globe. Since launching in 2012, the ELP has 3,227 unique language pages, 15,000 user accounts and over 5,700 user-uploaded resources.

4.1. How to assist Indigenous peoples to revive their languages using success stories from the survival of non-Indigenous languages?

The successful examples of language revitalization can be used to shift the negative messaging about Indigenous languages and could assist advocates to convince Indigenous leadership that it's not too late to invest in Indigenous languages. Examples of language revitalization and legislation from other countries can be shared to facilitate leadership support and to make the case to policy makers that extinction isn't an inevitable or natural phenomenon but rather a choice.

Anyone working in language revitalization must fight against the mainstream desire for status quo and the proactive campaign to homogenize the world to be English speaking. There is very little discourse about the value of diversity in languages. The negative beliefs and messages from mainstream society about Indigenous languages over the years have been absorbed by our Indigenous communities, accepted as truths, and continue to fester as internalized racism. There are several commonly believed myths: the languages are too

⁴ Endangered Languages Project. (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2015, from <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/about/>

hard to learn; the languages are simple and primitive; if we want our children to be successful they need to assimilate and give up their languages; it is better if we all speak English and forget who we are. These beliefs are barriers that need to be addressed in order to get language on the agenda in our Indigenous communities and beyond. Health programs that include addressing language related shame and supporting silent speakers are working in Sámi land. The FPCC is piloting a healing program based on a successful Sámi model that supports silent speakers to engage with their language with the support of a therapist using Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (discussed in §2.2.). There is a lot to share and learn from Indigenous groups around the world. We need to strengthen our networking and sharing through technology.

4.2. What can be done to increase the number of fluent speakers — not just documenting or archiving — for the most critically endangered languages?

Sections 2 and 3 above outline successful, proven strategies to increase the number of fluent speakers. Immersion-based approaches that foster the development of everyday communication in Indigenous languages (such as Master-Apprentice) are key.

4.3. How to address the lack of funding and political will to promote and protect Indigenous languages?

Investments and political support can be won by demonstrating the value of Indigenous languages to Indigenous peoples and the wider nations. The knowledge in the languages is uniquely connected to place and contains powerful information about how to live in harmony with a specific territory. This knowledge can assist with local issues like land use management and positively contribute to larger issues such as global warming. Environmental and species knowledge in Indigenous languages will be invaluable in the coming centuries as humans struggle to survive on this planet dealing with the impact of environmental damage. Governments must be advised to make investments in new long-term national funding plans and programs that address the true cost of language revitalization and maintenance. A commitment to maintaining diversity is essential to develop as a core value in governments at all levels. We need resources for research that demonstrates how an investment in languages will result in better education and socio-economic and health outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

4.4. What kind of support can be provided to address the extinction of Indigenous languages?

Indigenous peoples need stable organizations led by Indigenous people with core funding and trained staff to support communities with plans and funding to address language revitalization and language education. Communities that share languages need to collaborate and maximize their resources. Indigenous communities need to be strategic and clear about the outcomes they want such as fluency and invest in the right strategies to achieve these outcomes. Continual evaluation of the investments will ensure the plans and strategies that aren't working are adjusted and improved.

Outsiders cannot save Indigenous languages nor be the decision makers about which languages are viable and which languages do not merit investment. Universities, linguists and governments do not get to choose which languages are more important than others. For language revitalization to be successful it has to be led by Indigenous peoples and they need to be recognized as the experts. The policy makers have to engage with Indigenous peoples and organizations representing Indigenous peoples. All other experts should act as support systems for community not place themselves as experts over community people. Only those language revitalization models based in collaboration and community development will achieve the goal of keeping languages alive for future generations.