wí’xwi’em’: My Hul’q’umi’num’ Storytelling Journey

by

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Abstract

Indigenous languages are at risk of extinction in Canada, and also at risk are the traditional storytelling ways of our ancestors. Our First Peoples have been using oral transmission to pass on cultural knowledge about our Indigenous ways of life from generation to generation since time immemorial. Storytelling is used to teach our young people about our beliefs, values, history and relationships. This project explores how one researcher’s personal journey utilized a storywork approach to connect to her cultural identity and language by telling four of her personal stories in Hul’q’umi’num’, a Coast Salish language of British Columbia. The stories and their English translations are given in the Appendix. The researcher is not yet a speaker of her language, but she proceeded with the support and guidance of a collaborative team of Quw’utsun’ Elders and language specialists. This report details the step-by-step learning process that a person can undertake to construct stories even if they are not fluent speakers of a language. The researcher learned much about the sounds and structures of her language as well as how new stories are designed. Through this process, the research was able to share teachings, important messages, traditional knowledge and a Quw’utsun’ worldview in her own language. By telling her own stories and making them available to her community in the form of texts and movies, this project makes a contribution to the Hul’q’umi’num’ language revitalization strategy.
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Dedication

*tthunu shtun’ni’iws*

My ancestors

*nilh ’uw’ nu swe’ nu sxw’i’em’ nu sqwul’qwul’ ’i’ hul’q’umi’num’ tsun tse’.*

*It will be my own story and I will be telling it in Hul’q’umi’num’.*
Acknowledgements

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I also wish to express my appreciation for the help of knowledgeable Elder Ruby Peter and language researcher Thomas Jones for their help in transforming my stories into Hul’q’umi’num’. Thank you to Donna Gerdts for her assistance with the transcribing, proofreading and translating back into English. Also thank you for helping to turn my art and text into iMovie's. I had many happy mornings working with my collaboration team. The storywork was supported through a Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council Insight Grant, Principal Investigator Donna Gerdts.

It has been my family that have been a cultural rock that I needed, I say Gilakasla to my husband Donovan Alfred, Huy chexw my children Richard Daniels and Vanessa Daniels for championing my confidence in my educational goals and my career outlook. To my daughter-in-law Huy ch q’u Natasha Daniels and my HÍ SW KE to my (imuth) grandchildren Kingston and Gillian that provide me with love, language pride and inspiration every day.

I cannot go without acknowledging my family Molly, Brenda, Linda, Virginia, my nieces Leateequia Daniels and Heather Harris for continuing to hold me up when I needed it and showing confidence in me and my language education endeavours.
To some very special friends and allies Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins, Sarah Kell, Janet Leonard, Leslie Saxon, Suzanne Urbanczyk, and Su Gessner that totally understand language work. In addition, a big thank you to Alex, Jessica, Barbara and Cathy, other very special past co-worker/friends that I worked with in the language field whom have always believed in me and my language journey;

It was the Pauquachin Nation Chief and Council and especially Theresa Dubas the Education Director that provided moral and educational support for two years.

There were numerous special friends Patricia Vickers, Dawn Paul, Val Bob and Eleanor Dean that provided me with support, guidance and inspiration throughout the years. Sometimes by just being there for me and other times by providing me with their words or presence that became part of my journey. To those previous language champions, knowledge holders, elders, leaders in the field of language revitalization for over ten years, I wish to acknowledge that you have been in my thoughts and mind each day while I was in my learning time. I remember so many of your powerful statements about why our languages are so valuable to us. Some of you are now in the spirit world.

But most of all, I want to recognize my late mother and father for their major role in my life providing me with values, ethics and pride in my life for being a hwulmuhw, a Coast Salish person. Your memories and advice is forever imprinted on my heart, I miss you and I love you so much. Your legacy lives within your family.
Chapter 1: Introduction

This project explores how one researcher’s personal journey utilized a storywork approach to connect to her cultural identity and language by telling four of her personal stories in Hul’q’umi’num’, a Salish language of British Columbia.\(^1\) In the Hul’q’umi’num’ language, the word *xwi’xwi’em’* means telling a story. My journey toward language fluency in Hul’q’umi’num’ highlights for me an important cultural component that is missing from my life. I wish to know more of the historical contextual meaning behind the stories of my people, of our creation and of our connections to the land.

My motivation behind this Masters project is to connect myself to the language and to embark upon a learning process, which will clarify for me the specific knowledge and teachings that I am looking for. I have many fond memories growing up with my parents and grandparents of many occasions where I witnessed the loving but serious process of transferring valuable knowledge.\(^2\) Our oral Indigenous traditions, through conversational and iterative methods, help us to affirm this deep rootedness in our territory as Quw’utsun’ mustimuhw (people). These oral traditions have connected our people to *s’aal’lh tumuhw* (our territory) since the beginning of time. To address the gap in my personal knowledge about the worldview of my people, I find myself now searching for the foundational perspective that is embedded in our stories and

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1. Academics refer to the Halkomelem language. This is one of the twenty-three Salish languages spoken in southwestern British Columbia and the northwestern United States. It is one of ten Central Salish language spoken around the Salish Sea. Halkomelem has three main dialects, and the dialect relevant to this project is Hul’q’umi’num’, the dialect spoken on Vancouver Island and the neighboring islands. Within Hul’q’umi’num’, there are many different First Nations, with slightly different ways of speaking. Hul’q’umi’num’ as spoken by the Quw’utsun’ Tribes, in the vicinity of Duncan, BC, is the language variety used in this project.

2. My grandparents were from Quw’utsun’, Samuel Henry and Hilda Henry from Xinupsun (Green Point), Duncan BC. They are my late father’s parents. My father is Ernie Henry and my mother is Edna Daniels who was born in Squamish BC. She was also a fluent speaker of the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh sníchim. My parents spoke the Hul’q’umi’num’ language. Although they did not teach me the language, it was spoken at home around me. I am one of ten siblings.
Hul’q’umi’num’ language. This led me to return to my Quw’utsun’ mustimuhw, my ancestral community, to do my research.

This research journey is important to me, because it allows me to learn about the traditional approaches of our ancestors. It was our ancestor’s oral storytelling traditions that held the key messages about responsibility, humility, trust, respect and loyalty that are designed to help the younger people with relationships in their daily lives. With the loss of our languages, I feel that Indigenous storytelling systems are also being lost. It is important that we make every effort to work with skilled storytellers to pass on their knowledge and develop training programs. I use this research journey to help me gain a deeper understanding of the key aspects of storywork. I do this by sharing stories based on my personal experiences both in English and in the Hul’q’umi’num’ language.

Following Archibald’s (2008) storywork approach, I seek to incorporate Indigenous values, beliefs, morals, history and life skills into my research methods. Moreover, it is because of my passion for my language that I now take this time to engage myself in Hul’q’umi’num’ language learning. Combining both the storywork and the language provides an intimate study within which I am able to gain knowledge through a unique learning process. As with the traditions of the past, my personal stories have also become valuable tools in this journey.

An important and major first step for me in my own language development has been the opportunity, within the context of this project, to work with a Hul’q’umi’num’ speaking Elder, who is also a language expert, and a linguist, who is a specialist in our language.3 One of the key

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3 Assisting me on this project were Ruby Peter (Sti’tum’at) and linguist Donna Gerds (Sp’aqw’um’ultunaat) Mrs. Peter, of Kwa’mutsun Band of the Quw’utsun’ tribes, has been translating, teaching, and researching her language since she was a teenager. Her training included two years of linguistics at the University of Victoria. Prof. Gerds has been researching Hul’q’umi’num’ since 1975. They have been documenting, analyzing, and teaching the language together since 1980. Assisting with the audio recording was Thomas Jones (Siwut) from Snuneymuxw. He is currently active in the Coast Salish cultural community as a public speaker, artist, researcher, and teacher.
factors to this language and storywork development has been the close partnership that has
developed between these experts and myself. I refer to them as my collaboration team. Strong
bonds of trust have been built and I have had the opportunity to learn through a reciprocal
relationship with them. I have learnt how important it is for me to illustrate clearly my respect for
my teachings and to my teachers. In return those same teachers have provided me with an
unconditional respect and patience throughout the time they spend working with me.

I find it ironic that while I knew a lot about language revitalization methods, I came to this
project not knowing which methods would help me to learn and speak my own language more
fluently. I believe that for me, an important cultural component to becoming a fluent speaker in
the Hul’q’umi’num’ language is to learn the historical contextual meanings behind our stories of
creation and our connections to the land. Kovach (2009) explains that Indigenous methodologies
incorporate specific contextual knowledge, which consists of assumptions emerging from a
particular tribal knowledge base. Therefore, she supports my thoughts that I can find the
appropriate means of gathering knowledge that are significant to me within my own stories,
language and Coast Salish traditions.

This project represents why my passion for the Hul’q’umi’num’ language brings me on a
journey to explore a language learning by combining the storywork and the language in an
intimate study to gain knowledge. These are the guiding research questions:

1. What will Hul’q’umi’num’ xwi ‘xwi’em’ teach me about the Hul’q’umi’num’ language
   and storywork for language revitalization?

2. What approaches to Indigenous storytelling support me to become a storyteller?
Who I am

Absolon & Willet (2005) remind us that within Indigenous inquiry it is important to locate ourselves when we do research. Our personal experiences and cultural teachings influence our knowledge and inform our research. Sinclair (2003) says that the critical starting point of any discussion is to reveal our identity to others—who we are, where we come from, our experiences that have shaped those things and our intentions for the work we plan to do (p. 11). It is the Coast Salish way to begin an important message with such an introduction. Thus, I show respect to my ancestors and family, prior to beginning my project, by introducing myself.

I was born in the Quw’utsun’ territory in Xinupsum (Green Point), Duncan BC. I belong to the Hul’q’umi’num’ mustimuhw (people). I was given the ancestral name Xway’Waat, which comes from my mother, through a cultural ceremony. I am a mother of two and have two grandchildren. I am married into the Nam’gis nation and the family of my husband, Donovan Alfred.

As a child I remember listening to my father tell stories about his life experiences and about our family Quw’utsun’ teachings. In the early days of the 1950–60’s we did not have a television or radio in our house. This was the time when my father’s stories came out about family, olden days, his friendships, life’s challenges and successes. Some of his memory stories were about the hole in the mountain for the whale to escape whale hunters and the mermaid he saw when he was out fishing one day, sasquatches, the spirit world and so much more. My me’ (grandfather) also told stories in Hul’q’umi’num’. I remember hearing laughter while listening as he told his stories. In my recent research I found out that he contributed stories to a book called

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4 The Namgis is one tribe among the Kwakw’akw Nations, occupying lands along the Nimpkish River Valley. Cormorant Island, Alert Bay BC. Their language is Kwak’wala. The Namgis First Nation are people of the Gwa’ni.
The She-Wolf of Tsla-a-Wat, Indian Stories for the Young by Anne Simeon (1977). My grandfather only spoke Hul’q’umi’num’ and with some broken English. I recognize my parents and grandparents as the knowledge holders of our family values, ethics, teachings and worldview. My father always spoke very highly of his parents because they taught him to live by the Coast Salish teachings and the ways of a good life that are rooted to our traditional lands.

A language story my mother shared was about her new life when she moved to my father’s home. My mother spoke fluently the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh snichim (the Squamish language) and English. At my father’s house everyone was fluent in Hul’q’umi’num’, therefore it was necessary for her to learn Hul’q’umi’num’, because that was all her new family spoke, they did not speak any English. My fathers’ family used to talk in front of her most times they would be laughing and joking with each other. She thought they were laughing and talking about her, but they weren’t. It was their normal family life to laugh, share and communicate to each other in Hul’q’umi’num’. My mother motivated herself to immerse herself in Hul’q’umi’num’ to speak, understand and communicate with her new family. I feel pride in her accomplishment as she spoke two Coast Salish languages at a very young age.

My professional background has been in language revitalization with all of the Indigenous languages of British Columbia for over ten years. I worked with a Crown Corporation called First Peoples’ Heritage Language and Culture Council; their name has since changed to the First Peoples’ Culture Council. I was the coordinator-manager that supported language revitalization projects with thirty-two of BC’s Indigenous languages. I began a language revitalization journey with the Indigenous Nations of British Columbia and Canada. It was with those language champions and speakers that inspired me in my life’s journey in education and language revitalization. It was through one of my special projects with the University of Victoria,
Community-University Research Alliance, Salish Language Revitalization Project that I found deeper connections to two Coast Salish languages. I understood what our languages meant to our communities by working with both of our South Island languages, SENĆOŦEN and Hul’q’umi’num’. In this five-year project community-based collaboration project, I was the Chairperson and language revitalization resource person. This project opened my eyes to the determination of young people, speakers, elders, staff, teachers, committees, parents, singers, cultural experts and linguists that successfully mobilized two languages communities.

**Situating the Research**

In undertaking this research journey to learn the Hul’q’umi’num’ language through storywork, I was inspired by the contributions of many Indigenous women scholars. For example, Thomas (2005), Absolon & Willett (2005), Archibald (2008), McIvor (2012) and Rosborough (2012), all worked with Elders to research stories from an Indigenous research perspective, leading the way for future scholars to follow. As with other researchers who have used storywork methodology, I seek to “put story at the heart of my study” and “make meaning through stories” (Rosborough, 2012, p. 24). As Cajete (1994, p. 46) and others have explained, stories are a “path” symbolizing a journey and a “way” symbolizing a cultural philosophical framework.

In particular, Archibald’s (2008) storywork research provides a valuable contribution to my project because it helps me to reclaim my Coast Salish voice in the Hul’q’umi’num’ language and fosters a renewed vision of culture and oral literacies. Archibald points out that storywork reinforces principles of reciprocity, responsibility, respect, reverence, holism, interrelatedness and synergy—all which come from with working with Elders in storywork research. These principles are expressed within Hul’q’umi’num’ epistemology as ‘uy’
shqwaluwun “good thoughts and feelings”, kw’am’kw’um’ shqwaluwun “strong heart and mind”, nuts’umat shqwaluwun “being of one heart and mind” (Daniels, 2015). These are also the important guiding principles of my current research.

Archibald shares the knowledge from many Elders in her research, in particular a Coast Salish Elder, Ellen White mentored beginner storytellers, trained and guided them with her storywork approaches that she uses as the skilled Coast Salish storyteller. Mrs. White states that a method of learning stories is to go to the core of the story and to find its important cultural teaching (Archibald, 2008, p. 133). She makes it clear that the storyteller must have an intimate relationship with the story, knowing its content and story meaning making. These tools are what are needed to master the story you are telling. Without this relationship you are just memorizing the story without gaining and sharing the knowledge from the story.

Inspiration for undertaking a storywork journey as my Masters project came from a talk I heard during the Language in the Present conference at the University of Victoria in Fall 2015. Hul’q’umi’num’ teachers, storytellers, and artists talked about their mission to create one hundred new stories (Gerdts, Hart, & Seymour, 2015). They described the process of taking personal memories and then working with Elders to produce Hul’q’umi’num’ versions. They used art or photographs and combined these with the sound files and then posted them on the website for the enjoyment of language learners. This talk resonated with me because I was looking for a way into learning the Hul’q’umi’num’ language.

Narrative Inquiry

I used a process of personal narrative inquiry to document my project-learning journey. The narrative inquiry approach informed my personal observations and my experiences in the

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5 The stories website can be found at <sxwiem.hwulumhwqun.ca>. 
Hul’q’umi’num’ story-telling process. In a similar method McIvor (2012) used a reflective journal that documented her personal journey in language (p. 96). My goal on using this journaling method is to remember all of my personal feelings, emotions, successes and challenges that came up during the xwii’xwi’em’ learning process. This approach was important for me, as I was able to go back into my journal and reread all of my journal entries, which recorded my experiences while learning at home, my meetings with the collaboration team, and the language steps in the learning process. My journal provided me with insights of all the project phases each day and week. I felt like I was writing a story every day of my experiences and it invited me to record everything about my feelings, thoughts, frustrations, plans and my project goals. The journal was beneficial to my project because I was very busy on all learning levels, and it was useful to document how my project unfolded as a whole. From my journal I am able to share some data, reflections of my project experiences, ideas, thoughts and realities in the three-step process in Chapter 3.
Chapter 2: xwi’xwi’em’ (Storytelling) Journey

In conducting my research, it was my responsibility to undertake specific and appropriate cultural protocol steps for myself and for this project. Wilson (2008) states: “the purpose of ceremony is to build stronger relationship or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. And the research that we do as Indigenous peoples is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insights into our world.” (p. 11) This is where I begin my relationship in to my storywork research.

For the period of three months that I carried out my research it was my cultural responsibility to undertake specific and appropriate ceremony prior to any research work in order to prepare myself. Archibald (2008) explains that one of her principles appropriate to cultural protocol and preparations for research is the “responsibility” principle. I agree that to become cultural worthy—it means being ready intellectually, emotionally, physically and spiritually to fully absorb cultural knowledge (p. 41). Similarly, in our Coast Salish principles, this kind of preparation is called kw’am’kw’am’stuhw’thun’ shqwalwun “make your heart and mind strong”. It is in respect for Coast Salish culture that I honour the authority and expertise that I received from my collaborating Elder and linguist consultants.

My project exemplifies the relationship principle described by Archibald (2008) through the work between the collaboration team members and myself. I summarize here the protocol that I established for engaging in the work. I must show respect for the knowledge that the Elder holds and for her willingness to work with me. I show respect in the relationship by expressing my humble feelings to the team who have shared their knowledge and teachings with me in this journey. For receiving this new knowledge, I give thanks daily and in reciprocity I will give back to them and to the community what I have learned by sharing the results of this project.
Archibald (2008) states that we must remember the stories. In the traditional ways the term “remember” (p. 27) implies that authority is given by telling stories to others; thereby carrying on that tradition is an example of way that the principle of reciprocity can be followed. In the case of my project, my collaborators and I agreed that my stories would become a part of a story project to be shared with the Hul’q’umi’num’ mustimuhw community.

The xwi’xwi’em’ process itself involves three major steps: 1) working with the language systems, 2) the learning and assessment, and 3) the story development and transformation. I use the word transformation as my way of explaining the process of transforming my English stories into the Hul’q’umi’num’ language and to make meaning. Throughout all of the steps in the process I engaged myself fully into the working with my stories.

In doing this research, I needed to rely heavily on the Elder speaker and a language expert to help me through the storywork and the process of learning how to transcribe and translate stories into Hul’q’umi’num’. Over a three-month period I worked with a collaboration team that consisted of an Elder, a linguist and a language specialist. The time we spend together is very precious. I value the learning time together, two to four hours per sessions, twice a week. In order to carry out this project work, I travel to Duncan, BC and stay there overnight away from home. I enter this process as a learner and the researcher, with both hats I engage into the cultural context with little or no cultural knowledge. Therefore, I respectfully pay attention to the important cultural knowledge and teachings through my interactions with the Elder and linguistic teachers. This is what Archibald (2008) explains as the learner teacher relationship and over a period of time with a practice of cultural protocols before teaching and learning can occur. The protocols that are important for me in this project is to be culturally ready, asking for help, show
respect, have patience and by providing gifts all in order to receive knowledge from the Elder. For each meeting I brought homemade jams, canned fish and food for the team each day. The following illustrates the step-by-step process of how the project was undertaken over the three-month period.

**The Language Process – Presenting my Personal Stories**

The goal in this first step is to bring my four personal stories into the story work project. I wrote these stories in the English language to be used for this project. It is here that I ask in a humble mannerism to translate my stories from the English version into a new reflection in the Hul’q’umi’num’ language. I always held, in mind that I want to learn the new way of speaking, in the profound Hul’q’umi’num’ beauty with its cultural expressions that echo in my heart as a Quw’utsun’ mustimuhw person. Each story is documented into the Hul’q’umi’num’ language in story form. All language aspects completed will be used and act as the key research components and learning tools for this project. From the English version it is these three documentation pieces that we use to begin the storywork journey.

**A.** This is where the discussions begin for determining the accuracy from one language to another. To begin with I learned about the methods of writing Hul’q’umi’num’. This included learning about orthographies and linguistic systems. This quickly became challenging, difficult and confusing, particularly because I do not fully understand the systems.

An Elder and I reviewed the stories to ensure that she clearly understood the intended perspective for each story that I was hoping to convey. This was done through ongoing discussions between the Elder and myself. I learned that it was not always possible to translate each English thought into the Hul’q’umi’num’ language.
It is here through discussions with the Elder and the linguist that I came to understand that our Hul’q’umi’num’ language is extremely descriptive. The language has a variety of combinations of various verbs and nouns. The combinations are often very different from the way that the English language conveys similar meanings. Some of the variation was in word order, how words are built from other words or how to describe parts of my story.

B. The Elder was ready to start making a Hul’q’umi’num’ version of the story. We would examine a line of English and then she would think about it from the Hul’q’umi’num’ meaning and then she said it in Hul’q’umi’num’ for the audio recording. I used the audio recordings to learn the Hul’q’umi’num’ wordings by modelling the Elder’s speech, pronunciation and story intonations through repetitive practice.

C. As the Elder is a language expert who writes her language, I played the audio recording for her and she wrote out the transcription in the orthography that is in current use by the Quw’utsun’ people. The written forms were used in the book development and my language learning. Completing the translations required the team to carry out extensive editing on the story words and discussions. I then typed out the Elders’ written transcriptions, and these were proofread and edited by the collaborative team.

D. For the final process, we went through the stories again made adjustments to the final versions. This gave us a final version to use in my book of stories. This completed step one.

The outline for these steps is in Figure 1 below for the language process:
Learning and Assessment Process

The work of translating, transcribing, and editing the stories mostly involve many enjoyable hours working with the Elder. The goal of this second step involving learning the stories and self-assessment through journaling required me to spend many hours working on my own. I utilized the story resources that had been recorded, translated and transcribed by the collaborative team. My language learning strategy involved daily work of studying and research, using dictionaries and other resources (Gerdts, Edwards, Ulrich, & Compton, 1997; First Voices, 2013a; First Voices, 2013b). Hukari and Peter (1995)\(^6\).

\(^6\) Hukari and Peter (1995). Thank you to Donna Gerdts for providing a version of this dictionary transliterated into the current orthography. I used this dictionary for the majority of my research and learning. *The Cowichan Dictionary of the Hul'q'um'il'num' Dialect of the Coast Salish People.* Duncan, BC: Cowichan Tribes
Together with my collaboration team, I developed the following plan for learning and assessment:

A. To begin I identified the Hul’q’umi’num’ words that I knew and those that I needed to learn. I looked up the words that were unfamiliar in the dictionary, studied their structures, and then learned them. It has become clear that I cannot just go to a Hul’q’umi’num’ dictionary and expect to find one-word translations for each word. As mentioned above the English language is not easily translated into the Hul’q’umi’num’ language. For instance, one word in English is not the same in Hul’q’umi’num’ where instead it may take a whole sentence to describe that word, action, person, place or thing. Many of my story words are not in the Hul’q’umi’num’ language, instead those words became more like descriptions of the person, place or action. For example, in my Father the Fisherman Story, there is no Hul’q’umi’num’ word for mermaid. The Elder identified the mermaid through a descriptive Hul’q’umi’num’ phrase, as a woman with a tail like a fish that is swimming in the water.

B. Within each sentence of a story, I identified key nouns, verbs and adjectives that carried the semantic message of the story. These are what I call “storyline identifiers”: key nouns refer to the main characters, objects and locations, key verbs convey actions, motions and relations, and key adjectives add important details to the depiction of a scene. I highlighted the important lexical items in color format throughout the four stories.

C. Next, I had to study each story to learn the authentic Hul’q’umi’num’ way of constructing phrases and sentences. The structure of Hul’q’umi’num’, in terms of ordering words, using function words and connecting clauses is very different from English. In studying the stories, I also paid particular attention to the Elder’s
pronunciation of each phrase. Where did she pause? How did she pitch her voice? Where did she speak fast, and where did she speak slowly?

D. The next step to learning was to try to mimic the Elder’s pronunciation. One method that I used to learn the story was repetition. I listened to the recorded stories and then repeated, a phrase at a time, over and over. Through this iterative process, I managed to improve my pronunciation and increase my language memory. This was a very challenging process to undertake on my own. I recorded myself telling each story in Hul’q’umi’num’ and assessed my pronunciation. At first, I tended to speak very oddly and sounded as if I were reading and talking in my English language. With time, I improved a great deal. At that point, I was ready to try the story out on the Elder.

Meeting with my collaboration team, I asked for their assistance in recording the stories in my own voice. They gave me some helpful tips about how to produce challenging sounds, such as glottalized sounds and affricates. They also helped me in instances where I was uncertain of the word structure or had trouble relating the Hul’q’umi’num’ meaning to the English translation. Although I found that my learning has much further to go on my journey to become fluent in Hul’q’umi’num’, I noticed that I had come a long way down the path during this project. I was very proud when the team mentioned how much I had improved.

The outline of the steps is in Figure 2 for language learning and assessment is below:

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7 Hul’q’umi’num’ has twenty-one consonants that do not occur in English.
Learning & assessing language

**Hul’q’umi’num’ words**

**Mimic Elder**

**Verbs, Nouns, Adjectives**

**Phrases, sentences**

*Figure 2 Learning and assessing language*

**xwi’xwi’em’ Development and Transformation**

The development of the Hul’q’umi’num’ stories can now be fully transformed in a book in both languages in this final step in the process. All the previous translation work marries the languages of English and Hul’q’umi’num’ together, they both interpret the stories for the book. My artwork story illustrations that I developed help to visualize my personal stories. The artwork includes culturally appropriate pictures that enhance the experience for the audience that will read these stories. The language review by the collaboration team for edits is a very long process. We are looking at each spoken word and each written word for each of the stories. Accuracy and a verification process are of high importance in this process. It takes a very long time to carry out each step. Each of the team members must commit a significant amount of their time if this task is to be carried out in a meaningful, scholarly and appropriate manner.
A. Storybook development involves a full interpretation from English to Hul’q’umi’num’ and Hul’q’umi’num’ to original English again for the book. The editing for this final step involves the language team reviewing the story language (s) to ensure there is a match between the words and the descriptions for the two languages. In addition, a thorough review is carried out to check for errors in spelling and grammatical structure. Listening to the audio recordings, reviewing the written forms both in English and in the Hul’q’umi’num’ language transcriptions. It is time consuming.

B. As a team we review all language story words and story frameworks to ensure correct reflection of the wider cultural context and my own personal perception.

C. Real life experience is expressed using visual artwork for each story. I created 16 original art pieces to help me tell the stories.

D. Each story is fully transformed into a traditional oral story in the Hul’q’umi’num’ Storybook. This book is in draft ready for print. In addition, I have developed a Hul’q’umi’num Glossary for each of the stories. The glossary is intended to support other learners wishing to understand the language story words, descriptions and activities that can be found in the storybook.

E. A relationship between storyteller and reader is developed. The two mediums, which will be employed to share these stories, are in book form and in IMovie form. I will tell a story using the IMovie technology.

The outline of the steps is in Figure 3 below for xwi’xwi’em’ Development & Transformation is given below:
Figure 3 xwi’xwi’em’ Development & Transformation
Chapter 3: Reflections on my Storywork Journey

I started my research by posing the following questions: What will Hul’q’umi’n̓um’xwi’xwi’em’ teach me about the Hul’q’umi’n̓um’ language and storywork for language revitalization? And what approaches to Indigenous storytelling support me to become a storyteller? The path was not a straight one. Many days I was bogged down in the details. But whenever I felt like I was not making enough progress, I went back to these core questions and also reminded myself of the reasons for my journey. It was my deep desire to connect with my language and culture kept me moving forward.

Storytelling as a Tool for Language Learning

Billy (2015), who is a language teacher at the Chief Atahm School in Chase BC, shares the following knowledgeable and powerful statement; “In second language acquisition storytelling is an effective tool for language proficiency” (p. 15). For me this statement validates my personal goals and confirms for me that I must become a speaker of Hul’q’umi’n̓um’.

Although, I do not see myself as a fluent speaker at the time of writing this, I acknowledge the intense amount of learning that I have been able to achieve in a relatively short time. I have been able to complete this language project, and through it I have learned that I need to continue to build for myself a better foundational background and to improve my knowledge of the Hul’q’umi’n̓um’ language. This project is the beginning of my journey and it has required that I start speaking, writing and reading Hul’q’umi’n̓um’. In a relatively short time I have been able to make a meaningful and appropriate contribution to storywork.

I also learned that stories, when told by Elders/storytellers, bring back an ancestral practice that teaches us about truths, teachings, culture and our histories. For me, understanding the Hul’q’umi’n̓um’ language is crucial to my understanding the Coast Salish worldview. The
language itself shapes how I perceive that worldview. In my own thoughts, I am able to understand a little better now that an Elder helped me see the world through the Hul’q’umi’num’ language. By working with her, I have come to think about the story in the same way. I will need more time, effort and further training to get fluent in Hul’q’umi’num’, but this project has shown me the way to accomplish this.

I have completed a Hul’q’umi’num’ and English storybook based on my personal experience stories. In my stories I share the Hul’q’umi’num’ translations, teachings, values and messages that represent an oral tradition of our Coast Salish peoples. I think this is a big accomplishment for me in my research. As I journeyed through the storywork process over a three-month period, I demonstrated how my research knowledge was gained by detailing all learning processes to get to where I am today. I cannot take sole credit for the success of the project; it was my collaboration team that played key roles in the language and storywork process.

**Why I was Disconnected from my Language**

I want to also mention a few thoughts about my experiences with language disconnection. I am an adult person that did not grow up speaking my language but I remember hearing it a lot around my home and community. Today in my world, I do not hear the Hul’q’umi’num’ language or stories being told in the language because it is being lost. Our language situation today is that our traditional language stories are being told in English. These English stories are being taught in our education systems and I don’t think we can call them traditional stories any more. Archibald (2008) explains that “Indigenous stories have lost much educational and social value due to colonization, resulting in weak translations from Aboriginal languages due to English, stories shaped to fit a Western literate form, and stories adapted to fit predominately
western education system.” (p. 7) I believe that this is what we face today and this disturbs me. However, I believe that this is the reality of our language loss. We have lost the originality of story humour and meanings and this leads to misinterpreting the original intended cultural teachings. It is with those realities that I respectfully place my stories in Hul’q’umi’núm’ so that they can be accessible by others to read, learn, and make meaning from them.

*hul’q’umi’núm’stuwh – Putting it into Hul’q’umi’núm’*

I have adopted a unique approach to researching and learning storywork. My approach has been to translate my English version stories into the Hul’q’umi’núm’ language context. The next step was to check story language for accuracy by using a thorough process of revising and editing. The verification process brought to light that there are many differences between English and Hul’q’umi’núm’.

The Elders understood that the traditional stories had already lost their meanings and sense of humour during the translation process. They also say that events and descriptions expressed in Hul’q’umi’núm’ language is not funny in English. In Hul’q’umi’núm’, I found out that very often words and concepts could not be translated into English. It was challenging and it took a longer time than I expected to provide accurate translations for the stories. To reiterate, once my stories had been translated into Hul’q’umi’núm’ from English, we then had to go back and translate the stories the other direction, from Hul’q’umi’núm’ to English. Then it was necessary to compare the English translations to the original English version in order to verify that each word or phrase maintained the story meaning and teaching in both languages. We addressed the challenge by “ensuring accuracy of content and meaning from one language to another” (p. 30) as Archibald (2008) discusses.

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8 Archibald (2008, p. 75) discusses the use of the verification process in her storywork.
The stories will be in print form for a book as well. It took time to ensure that my stories maintained the spirit of the oral tradition. By following the process of story transformation, my stories now include valuable messages and Quw’utsun’ teachings in the Hul’q’umi’num’ language. I want my book to be useful not only to Hul’q’umi’num’ speakers and learners, but to outsiders as well.

**Connecting to my Coast Salish Culture Through my Stories**

The Elder consultants in Archibald’s (2008) research shared their own personal experiences as a way to teach others that want to gain knowledge, cultural information and make meaning from their personal stories. After, participating in this research I feel a deeper connection with my Hul’q’umi’num’ identity and a stronger sense of belonging to Quw’utsun’ mustimuhw. My personal stories have connected me to family, community, culture and the Hul’q’umi’num’ language. This research has allowed me to hear the words of my ancestors by working with my Elder’s voice and translations of my stories. It is through the expression of the Hul’q’umi’num’ language that I feel a new relationship with the land, waters, dreams and the supernatural within the personal experiences through story. This is a small but worthwhile step.

I now uphold that an underlying principle to maintaining my Hul’q’umi’num’ language is synonymous to maintaining my Coast Salish culture through story. The Hul’q’umi’num’ language helps me look at how it can shape my thoughts as I learned key words that describe storylines and teachings. This was my approach to learning the language of my story. I have not increased my language to a large extent, but this project has increased my foundational knowledge to storywork. Many a time I heard Elder/speakers say that language is the heart and soul of a culture. I believe that.
How to Learn a Language

I have learned in this journey that language work takes an insurmountable amount of time and effort and significant resources. I have discovered also that our language worker Elders and linguists don’t get acknowledged enough for their dedication, commitment and unending hours of work. As my collaborating linguist often said, if the story is well designed, elegantly translated, and carefully transcribed, it will actually seem that it was quite easy to do. But a lot of effort actually goes on behind the scenes to create even a little story.

Ideally, more time is required so that the collaboration team can work together in an effort to improve my pronunciation and understanding of Hul’q’umi’num’ in order for me to tell a story without the help of the written words in Hul’q’umi’num’. As the sounds of the language become more familiar to me and my fluency improves, I look forward to coming back to my stories and telling them in my own words.

This project is one way of learning the language and storytelling. It is not the only way for individuals to learn a language. While I had success with my particular method to begin my language journey, what works for me might not work or another person. There are other methodologies that can be employed. For example, the Mentor-Apprentice method is a one-on-one language immersion program. A mentor (a fluent speaker of a language) is paired with an apprentice (learner). The mentor and apprentice do everyday activities while using the language for many hours a week.9 The activities provide a rich context so that no English is required. In fact, my experience was quite similar to Mentor-Apprentice in that I got a lot of one-on-one time with an Elder in undertaking this project. And once the story had been put into Hul’q’umi’num’, that was the language that we were using most of the time.

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9 For example, the First Peoples’ Cultural Center mentor-apprentice program suggests a target of 300 hours per year of speaking the language together <fpcc.ca/language/Programs/Master-Apprentice.aspx>.
Greymorning (2005) developed the Accelerated Second Language Acquisition Method. This is a language method for teaching language-using pictures instead of the written word. Sentences are developed orally and the students hear the correct pronunciation first by the teacher and then by the students in the group. Greymorning’s approach brings language learners to a level of language competency while accommodating language instructors working with limited resources and time. It is reported as a highly successful immersion model used by children and adults in Arapaho territory. Many Indigenous Nations in Canada and United States use this method. An obvious next step for me is to use the pictures from my stories as context to try to converse with an Elder about the story. This will incorporate a natural method that will help unlock my speaking ability and improve my memory. I am looking forward to the next challenges in my language learning.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

Indigenous languages are at risk of extinction in Canada, and also at risk are the traditional storytelling ways of our ancestors. Our First Peoples have been using oral transmission to pass on cultural knowledge about our Indigenous ways of life from generation to generation since time immemorial. Storytelling is used to teach our young people about our beliefs, values, history and relationships. This research outlines an exciting journey of personal learning and discovery into storywork. My goal was to make a contribution to the revitalization of my own language by creating a book of stories for language learners to enjoy. I used my personal cultural Coast Salish knowledge to bring out teachings and I worked with an Elder to transform these stories into Hul’q’umi’num’ Then I set out to learn these stories.

I have been inspired to take this journey by the researchers who used Indigenous methodology to do storywork. Archibald (2008) notes the principles of reciprocity, responsibility, respect, reverence, holism, interrelatedness and synergy are important while working with Elders. Guiding me were the valuable Coast Salish teachings of snuw’uyulh, nuts’umat shqwaluwun, ’uy’ shqwaluwun, and kw’am’kw’um’ shqwalwun. Each holds a guiding influence to my Indigenous research for my project learning. It was indeed these principles that I followed working with my collaboration team, who helped guide me through the research from a Hul’q’umi’num’ perspective.

In this three-month project I developed a relationship to storywork research by laying out four of my personal stories that are attached in the Appendix. I aimed to learn my Hul’q’umi’num’ language and the oral story telling traditions through studying my own stories. I was surprised at my progress at learning to understand the meanings of the words and to read the story out loud in Hul’q’umi’num’ in a short time period. One point I should reiterate is that it
was necessary to put in a large amount of hours by me and with the collaboration team in order for the learning process to be successful and meaningful. But the effort was worth it, as I now have a good foundation for further learning. Also, I have found that, through the use of my own stories, I have returned to the practices of my Quw’utsun’ ancestors that teach us about truths, teachings and a Coast Salish worldview. This project and my stories have connected me to my family, community, culture and Hul’q’umi’num’ language.

My project is a contribution to language revitalization. At this time, I recognize that our oral traditions of storytelling are being lost as my language declines. I urgently recommend that we identify talented storytellers and ask them to share their knowledge and skills with others. We need this type of training as part of our language revitalization strategy in the community and schools. By doing this we will bring back the intergenerational responsibilities of teaching cultural knowledge by teaching interested people the oral traditions.

My next steps will be to continue my language-learning journey by increasing my language fluency by undertaking language training in workshops, courses and immersion settings with Elders and through cultural events. These steps will help me explore further the Hul’q’umi’num’ language and knowledge systems and will allow me to understand better the sacred Quw’utsun’ values.
References


Appendix A: sqwul’qwul’s Hul’q’umi’n’um’ she’kw’utl’ Xway’Waat