

**saačinkin huuhtakšiiḥ (We are Always Learning Together):  
Advancing nuučaanuł Adult Learners Through Peer-Support**

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**A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of**

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In Indigenous Language Revitalization

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### **ńiic ciciqinkýak (Short Prayer)**

čuu Һawıl hinaayıl?ath, Һaacsaałe?ic ?ah qwe?ilqin łah ?uyi. hupii?in ?uu?uukwa?atha,.

*Well Creator, you see how we're gathered here now. Help us to speak our language, because*

??ihcamisqa qwaa?apqin

*what we're doing is important.*

niiwaas?amite?ic ciqyák.

*You made this language ours.*

?ah?aa waamin suwa łalakwın Һawıl hinaayıl?ath. čuu, łeekoo łeekoo.

*We ask this of you, Creator. Amen, thank you, thank you.*

(Һawiihtu?is (Nookemis), 2016, p. 4)

## Abstract

A constant decline of nuučaañuł fluent speakers indicates an urgency to develop effective tools to support adults to gain proficiency in the nuučaañuł language. The goals of this project were: to identify principles of peer-support for adult nuučaañuł learners; to outline implications of this research for learners, instructors, and program coordinators; and to create an online resource outlining the principles identified. The research was grounded in a Nuu-chah-nulth worldview, and was specifically conducted using the Theory of Tsawalk, provided by Umeek (Richard Atleo) (Atleo, 2004). With a Nuu-chah-nulth theory guiding the inquiry, the values of interdependence, respect, and generosity framed both the methods and analysis of this work. Methods were rooted in the practice of storytelling, using a narrative inquiry approach through interview and reflection. Chapter 3 provides a review of the literature and highlights the necessity for adult learners of a second language to spend thousands of hours on language learning in order to gain proficiency. The role that peers have in learning Indigenous languages is absent in the existing literature. Chapter 4 provides a peer-support evening session plan that was developed, along with the ten principles of peer-support that emerged from the research. The outcomes described in this inquiry contribute to the vital efforts of Indigenous communities to strengthen their languages by offering peer support as an important tool in the Indigenous language revitalization toolbox.

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## **Dedication**

This project was developed with consideration and acknowledgement of all of the adult language programs offered in nuučaanuḥ hahahoolii (territories). This research is dedicated to all the devoted people who plan, organize, implement, support, and participate in these important learning opportunities. I raise my hands in admiration to their role in igniting a passion for language, and motivating learners to seek out creative ways to build their abilities in the languages of their grandparents.

**ʔaaph̄isilameʔicuu hupii siʔa  
(You all have done something kind helping me)**

Learning is the most important journey I will ever take whether it is my language or completing the Masters of Indigenous Language Revitalization (MILR) program. Importantly, these adventures are not mine alone and I would like to acknowledge all the people who joined me in my MILR canoe. Thank you to all of those who were so kind to give me their time, support, and patience throughout my learning and growing process, so that my destination could be realized.

To my friend, research collaborator, and learning peer, yaacuʔisaqs (Linsey Haggard) for your willingness to participate in this research, your profound insights, and for your ongoing, unwavering encouragement in our language learning and throughout this research project.

To our ancestors and all the fluent speakers of nuučaanuł for your courage and strength to hold on to our language so that the next generations can have the opportunity to live a life in understanding and deep connection. Especially to my language teachers ʔawiihtuʔis (Benson Nookemis) and weemtis (Hilda Nookemis) who are so generous.

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To my family: my mom, Deb Foxcroft and dad, Mike Foxcroft for instilling the value of learning and social justice; my sister and her family, Kelly, Mike, Kaylen, Mackenzie and River Poirier for your enthusiasm for everything I do; and my husband, Martin Vliegthart for your encouragement, understanding and most importantly for the much needed hugs and snacks.

To my friend Erin Ryding for shepherding me through my graduate experience with wise council and excellent proofreading skills.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### čišaaʔaqsup (I am Tseshah)

ʔuklaamah taaʔisumqa, čišaaʔaqsup histaqšiih nuučaanułath. histukšiih čumaaʔas.  
mamałni ciic ʔimtii Dawn Foxcroft. ʔuumiiqsakah Deb Foxcroft čišaaʔaqsup ʔaħaħaħ Ukrainian,  
ʔuhukwitaħ naananiqsu Jim ʔahʔaaʔaħ Jan Gallic. nuwiiqsakah Mike Foxcroft mamałni,  
ʔuhukwitaħ naaniqsu Earl Foxcroft.

My name is taaʔisumqa, I am a women of Tseshah<sup>1</sup> of the Nuu-chah-nulth<sup>2</sup> Nation. I am from Port Alberni. My English name is Dawn Foxcroft. My mother is Deb Foxcroft. She is a Tseshah women and of Ukrainian decent; my grandparents were Jim and Jan Gallic. My dad is Mike Foxcroft. He is non-First Nation; my grandfather was Earl Foxcroft.

I was born and raised in Port Alberni, B.C., and after a handful of years of growing and learning in the world, it is where I reside and where I plan to remain. Port Alberni is where both my parents grew up, met, married, started their family, and still reside. It is where my sister, aunties, uncles, and cousins on my mother's side live. From Port Alberni and the Barkley Sound is where I can trace back my family for generations. I am deeply rooted and committed to this place through my family and my culture.

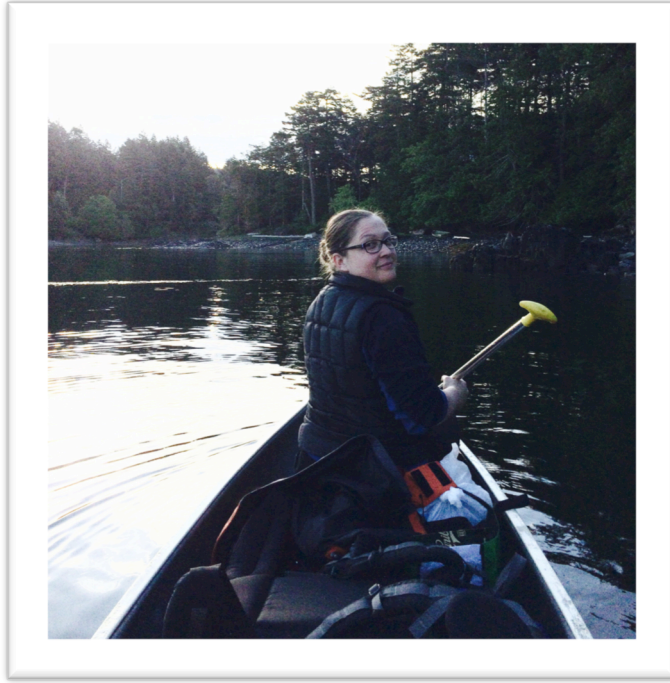
My nuučaanuł name, taaʔisumqa, means 'guidepost on the beach' or as I recently heard it described 'the anchor of the family.' I believe the names we are given are themselves guideposts directing our approach to life and how we conduct ourselves. I work to live up to my name and

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<sup>1</sup> When referring to the Nation I use the spelling, Tseshah. When referring to the language I use the phonetic convention

<sup>2</sup> When referring to the Nation I use the spelling, Nuu-chah-nulth. When I make reference to the language I use the phonetic convention, nuučaanuł.

to learn from my name on a daily basis, especially with the work that I do with my community, and in language revitalization.



*Figure 1:* This is me paddling in a canoe as a part of my writing journey.  
(Source: Erin Ryding, 2016)

### **A čapac<sup>3</sup> (Canoe) For Our Journey**

For me, language learning is truly a journey filled with dynamic waterways, inspiring experiences, and self-discovery. Throughout my paper I used the čapac and a čapac journey as a framework to talk about my research. I have purposefully chosen to use the nuučaañuḥ word, čapac instead of the English version 'canoe' in my paper as a way to demonstrate and deepen the connection between the framework, the research, and our language. Nuuchahnulth Nations have a long and rich relationship with the čapac. Through the čapac, in its various forms and uses, we become connected to our environment, our resources, each other, and the spiritual

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<sup>3</sup> Pronounced chapats

realm. For this reason, I could not think of a better framework to carry my research; holding the value of peer support and representing the essence of the Theory of Tsawalk. Admittedly, I am a recreational puller but I was able to draw upon my personal experiences traveling in a č̣apac and my profound respect and appreciation of our Nuu-chah-nulth č̣apac makers and pullers to frame my inquiry.

### **Language Background**

Our Nuu-chah-nulth community's languages were severely impacted by colonization and assimilation efforts. Efforts like the residential schools removed children from their homes and through brutal force stopped them from speaking their own languages. My grandfather was one of these children. I do not know the extent of my grandfather's experiences; it was not something he talked freely about. I do know that one of his survival strategies during his difficult childhood and for the rest of his life was to shy away from his indigenous roots. Many Nuu-chah-nulth have had similar experiences and strategies; not speaking their language or passing the language to their children or grandchildren; wanting to protect their families from the trauma they had to endure. This has resulted in language decline in our Nuu-chah-nulth communities.

Nuuč̣ạạnuł consists of the Northern, Central, and Barkley Sound dialects and is the Indigenous language of 13 Nations whose territories span the west coast of Vancouver Island. These dialects are different but can be understood amongst the speakers of the various tongues (First People's Heritage, Language and Cultural Council, n.d., nuuč̣ạạnuł section). According to the First Peoples Cultural Council's (FPCC) *Report on the Status of BC First Nations Languages* (2014), the nuuč̣ạạnuł language reported a population of 7,681 with 1.7% fluent speakers, 2.6% semi-speakers, and 5.5% learners (2014). Although these numbers have only changed slightly

from the FPCC 2010 status report, they paint a clear picture of the urgency to develop effective language revitalization programs that can create fluent speakers of the nuučaanuł language.

Nuučaanuł has a variety of resources available to adult language learners including printed material, online tools, and classes. Nuučaanuł has adopted the International Phonetic Alphabet, which is the system used in a comprehensive dictionary developed in 1991 called *Our World-Our Ways: T'aat'aaqsapa Cultural Dictionary* (Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, 2013). Resources are available through the First Voices website for nuučaanuł and specifically for the čišaaʔath dialect (FPCC, 2000-13). Additionally, kwistuup dot net ([www.kwistuup.net](http://www.kwistuup.net)) offers an extensive collection of online resources including: curriculum, recordings, and PDF documents for all of the nuučaanuł dialects. In 2012, the quuquatsa Language Society (QLS) became a legal entity with the goal of revitalizing nuučaanuł languages by coordinating accredited evening classes in the various nuučaanuł dialects (QLS, n.d.). This is not an extensive list of resources as there are also small community initiatives throughout the Nuu-chah-nulth territory.

### **My Language Journey**

Learning my great-grandparents indigenous language is important to me and evokes in me many emotions. I believe these strong feelings are the voices of my ancestors calling me into the čapac and asking me to take this important journey. I began learning as a child at our Nation's elementary school, haahuupayak. I then seriously engaged in learning as an adult in 2011 by taking evening classes and participating in a learning circle. This led to sitting with elders in their homes and then volunteering at a local language nest.

I realized early in my journey that as an adult learner, in order to learn my language and move myself forward, I would have to work hard as an individual to find and create my own opportunities to learn. I am now well underway on my journey and I can visualize my

destination. Most importantly I recognize that the journey is not mine alone. All I have to do is look around me to realize the reason my čapac has been moving forward. It is because of the generosity of our fluent speakers and the help of my fellow adult language learners, my peers, my friends, and my language family.

I have found inspiration, motivation, and support from my peers in all of the language-learning environments I have participated in including: an ḡuḡuḡaaḥuk Language Nest, a Mentor-Apprentice relationship, and one-on-one peer learning.

The ḡuḡuḡaaḥuk Language Nest has now completed its second year. The nest takes place for three days every second week and there is an additional planning day for parents and adult volunteers before each nest week begins. I have participated in the nest since it's beginning and also participate in the planning days where we develop resources and activities.

Mentor-Apprentice (formerly known as Master-Apprentice) is an informal language learning method where a fluent speaker (the Mentor/Master) is paired with a language learner (the Apprentice) (Hinton, Vera & Steele, 2002). In our own version of Mentor-Apprentice (we are not a part of the formal First Peoples Cultural Council program) over three years, myself and another learner have been spending one to two evenings a week with a fluent speaking couple who have generously opened their home for us to learn nuučaaḥuḥ's Barkley Sound dialect. Initially our time with our speakers was spent reviewing material from evening classes we attended. During the summer of 2015, we participated in a Mentor-Apprentice training hosted by the University of Victoria and the quuquatsa Language Society. Since this session, we have been implementing some of the tools we learned with a focus on language used in the kitchen and for cooking.

My one-on-one peer learning takes place with one of my peer Barkley dialect learners. Together we plan and participate in our own Mentor-Apprentice learning. We help each other to learn through: reviewing vocabulary and grammar concepts; practicing and using the language we know with each other; and helping each other in the Mentor-Apprentice environment. Through the language nest, our own Mentor-Apprentice, and one-on-one learning, peer-learning relationships have been instrumental in advancing my language abilities.

### **Goal of My Project**

*“The best indicator of this continued adherence to ancestral ways was the preservation of the Nuu-chah-nulth languages” (Umeek, 2004, p.98).*

I feel like I am finding my way as a learner of the nuučaanuḥ language. Even though I am moving along in my čapac, I have many moments when the boat tips to one side a little too far or large waves approach the bow. For me these moments are when I am with a speaker and cannot find the words because I have not learned them or I do not remember them yet. They are the moments when I try to use the language I know but I just cannot get the pronunciation right. They are the times when people are speaking around me and I have no idea what they are saying but so desperately want to understand them. In these moments I feel awkward, silly and extremely humble, like my čapac might flip over at any moment. Despite this, my čapac remains stable and afloat because my paddling companions help me to keep balance and navigate the sometimes-difficult waters. They encourage me, motivate me, and keep me moving forward.

According to Umeek, developing and preserving our connections with one another is at the core of being Nuu-chah-nulth (2004). The goal of my project was to explore and highlight the important relationship adult language learners have supporting each other on their language-learning journeys. In the spirit of relationships, the research was done in collaboration with one

of my long-time čišʔaaʔaqsuma (Tseshaht woman) language learning peers yaacuʔisaqs (Linsey Haggard). I address my research questions through this important collaboration and through reflection on my language-learning journey so far.

### **Research Questions.**

This project undertakes the following inquiry: What are the principles of peer-support that can help advance adult language learners of nuučaanuł on their learning path as found in the three learning contexts I am participating in: ʔuʔuʔaałuk Language Nest, Mentor-Apprentice, and peer one-on-one learning? What are the implications of these learnings and how can planners and students of indigenous languages become more aware of peer-supported learning, and consciously integrate it into their models for learning and teaching?

### **Sharing Knowledge Through VideoScribe.**

As researchers we have to demonstrate accountability for the work we undertake by ensuring it is accessible to our communities. Smith explains, “Sharing is a responsibility of research...For indigenous researchers, sharing is about demystifying knowledge and information and speaking in plain terms to the community” (2012, p.162). As a way to bring forward the outcomes that emerged, beyond this paper, I created an online illustration called VideoScribe. This VideoScribe allows me to offer my findings; highlighting the principles of peer-support in an engaging and accessible way to my Nuu-chah-nulth and language revitalization communities. I explain the VideoScribe further in my Outcomes and Analysis section, Chapter 4.

## Chapter 2: Observations and Rationale

The nuučaañuł language-learning opportunities in Port Alberni vary. Every effort towards language revitalization is valuable, as discussed above, very few people know the language, and it is critical that we develop proficient adult language speakers of the nuučaañuł languages. However, efforts such as evening classes will not accomplish this goal alone. Below the literature identifies the limitations of classroom instruction; past research tells us that we need a more diverse approach to support us as adult learners to become proficient in our languages.

In my community I have witnessed adult nuučaañuł learners advance in their language learning. These individuals are working hard to move their čapac forward, using every tool or opportunity available to them, and really taking responsibility for their own learning. From my own experience as an adult learner I know I have to take responsibility for my own learning and my advancement in learning would not possible without the support of my peers. For me, the role of my peers is critical in my language journey, but there is a lack of information available on the importance of our peers in learning our nuučaañuł languages. This is what lead me to my research topic. I would like to shine a light on this valuable aspect of adult language learning.

To investigate how adult learners of Indigenous languages can be supported it is useful to explore some of the considerations for gaining proficiency as an adult second language learner. The literature can help to illustrate some important factors including:

- the time it takes to learn a second language;
- the limitations of classroom language instruction;
- the importance of self-directed learning; and
- the value of peer support.

### **Time as a Factor**

Time is an important aspect in learning a second language. Jackson & Kaplan review fifty years of second language teaching in the Foreign Service Institute, a program where over sixty languages are taught to adult learners with the goal of gaining proficiency at an expert level. They explain that 1,100 hours are needed during the forty-four week intensive program for a highly proficient level in a second language to be achieved (Jackson & Kaplan, 1999). As a result, prioritizing time to learn is fundamental. “There is no substitute for simply spending time using the language” (Jackson & Kaplan, 1999, p. 76). These authors argue that adult learners need thousands of hours to build an aptitude in a second language. This is no doubt also true for our indigenous languages.

McIvor offers time as one of the key considerations for adult second language learners of indigenous languages in her doctoral dissertation, outlining the need for “thousands of hours of exposure to a new language in order to build familiarity to point of high functioning” (2012, p. 53). S7imla7xw Johnson’s dissertation focuses on the amount of time it takes to gain proficiency in an Indigenous language and is entitled *N’l̥aqwcin (clear speech) 1000 hours to mid-intermediate N’syilxcn proficiency*. As the title suggests, S7imla7xw recommends 1,000 hours of concentrated language study with serious practice in order to reach a mid-intermediate level of language proficiency as an adult learner (Johnson, 1998). It is an imperative for adult learners of nuučaanuł to find ways to attain up to and beyond 1,000 hours of language, however, the current programs in our community such as evening courses, will not be able to meet this need alone.

### **Classroom Language Learning**

The challenges of classroom instruction to build proficient adult second language learners are found throughout the literature (Cantoni, 2007; McIvor, 2005; Rifkin 2003). McIvor (2012)

outlines the fact that although adult second language learning classes provide motivation for learners and community members to increase their language revitalization efforts, they are not successful at generating speakers. Classroom courses are a valuable part of language efforts in indigenous communities but can be limited in how far they are able to take adult learners. The *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposia* (SILS) is a gathering that brings together indigenous language advocates, linguists, indigenous leaders, and teachers to discuss language revitalization efforts and strategies. In their report for the 2007 gathering, the participants also identified that school programs by themselves are not adequate for language preservation (Catoni, 2007).

Comparably, Rifkin (2003) examines an average second language setting in college courses and finds that due to its limited amount of time, even if the courses are over a period of 4 years, it is challenging for students to obtain a high level of proficiency in these classes. He continues by stating that these classes can help to build a foundation for students in the language but will not create proficient speakers (Rifkin, 2003). As adults who want to build proficiency in our indigenous languages it is essential that we look outside of the classroom, to ourselves and to other avenues in our lives in order to create the opportunities necessary to meet our language goals.

### **Self-directed Learning**

Initiative and determination are factors in Indigenous second language learning (Jackson & Kaplan, 1999; McIvor 2012). In order for adult learners to obtain the appropriate amount of concentrated time learning their language, these factors need to be considered and supported. In addition, students do not always have access to high caliber instructors who are able to support them with their individual learning requirements (McIvor, 2012). As a result, self-directed learning can be an important tool in the adult language learning toolbox. Littlewood (1996) states

that self-sufficient language learning requires students to be able to develop their own learning strategies that make sense for their own educational backgrounds. Learning objectives of a classroom setting can be met by language learners through the development of their ability to learn on their own (Littlewood, 1996).

### **Peer-supported Learning**

Support from other language learners can help us to be successful in a self-directed learning approach. Using language with, and learning from others is an important element of adult language learning (McIvor, 2012). There are several benefits of a peer supported approach including the fact that learners are able to help each other through shared struggles and questions (Boud, 2001). Another benefit is that individuals that are on the same level have the ability to support each other to gain important knowledge and understanding of a topic (Topping, 2015). Through a group approach, individuals learn to coordinate their own learning, support other learners to do the same, and assess themselves and the group's progress while helping each other emotionally (Boud, 2001). The Puyallup Indian Tribe (puyaləpabš) in their unpublished *Teaching txʷəlšucid Language Certification Program* provides a guide for individual learners to assess their abilities and shape their learning (n.d.). A model such as puyaləpabš's offers a structured approach to self-directed learning but would require a significant amount of initiative and determination, which could be attained through a peer supported process. Reaching out to connect with others to practice the language can be a challenge for many learners. Because of this challenge, establishing a support system with our language-learning peers is so important as it provides learners with an important source of encouragement and ideally helps to establish a language community for the long-term.

**Summary**

In my review of the literature in this chapter, I have outlined the requirements, limitations, and possible tools for adults to be successful at learning their indigenous languages. The literature highlights the fact that for adult second language learners it is essential that we be exposed to our indigenous languages for over a thousand hours in order for us to gain proficiency (Jackson & Kaplan, 1999; McIvor, 2012; Johnson, 1998). Classroom programs are limited and alone will not be able to meet this requirement (Cantoni, 2007; McIvor, 2012; Rifkin, 2003). The literature offers self-directed learning as a useful tool for learning languages and for providing beneficial learning opportunities to be used outside of the classroom setting (Littlewood, 1996). As a part of self-directed learning, our peers play an important role offering support, sharing understanding, and helping us to build a community where language is used. Through this review I identified an important gap; the literature I unearthed did not explicitly speak about the value and role of our peers, particularly in the context of supporting our indigenous language learning. Although I did an extensive search on this subject, there may be literature that I did not discover. I welcome these discoveries and the opportunity to have this literature brought to my attention. In light of this review of the literature it is my hope that my research about peer-support in adult indigenous language learning is a contribution towards filling this gap in the literature.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

### Methodology

The č'apac (č'apac) is an exquisite vessel capable of taking us long distances, but we must put the work in to propel it forward. Although we need to do work ourselves to reach our destination, we have an important relationship with the other pullers in order to move ahead and maintain course. The approach of my inquiry was based on Umeek's (Richard Atleo) theory of Tsawalk, rooted in the Nuu-chah-nulth principle of heshook-ish tsawalk<sup>4</sup> (everything is one). "The theory of Tsawalk always assumes a meaningful relationship between variables" (Umeek, 2004, p. 131). The premise of Tsawalk is that there is a connection between all things, from spiritual to physical. Similarly, Absolon speaks about indigenous scholarship being based in every aspect of our existence including spiritual and physical elements, resulting in a worldview that honours its connection to everything (2011). This is unlike the common scientific practice of assuming there is no meaningful connection between variables unless confirmed through scientific inquiry (Umeek, 2004). Fundamentally Nuu-chah-nulth - Tsawalk is based in an indigenous understanding of the world. Having a Nuu-chah-nulth theory to ground my research in was an incredible gift that not only guided my inquiry and analysis but also helped me to deepen my understanding of the theory and, ultimately, myself as a Nuu-chah-nulth person.

The Nuu-chah-nulth principle of heshook-ish tsawalk (everything is one) is one I have heard many times in my life. I have thought about this principle, especially how it applies to my work and my approach to life. I chose Umeek's Theory of Tsawalk (Umeek, 2004) as a methodology because as a Nuu-chah-nulth researcher it was important for me to do my work in a

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<sup>4</sup> heshook-ish tsawalk is the spelling Umeek uses in his book *Tsawalk*. This is different than current Nuu-chah-nulth phonetic conventions which would see it spelt, hiišukiš č'awak.

good way<sup>5</sup>. Absolon supports this: “Indigenous holistic theory is the most appropriate to use when doing research with First Nations communities...wholistic worldviews reconnect and remember us to each other again in process and in practice” (2011, p. 59). Grounded in a Nuu-chah-nulth worldview, the nature of and approach to my work was rooted in the Nuu-chah-nulth principles of heshook-ish tsawalk (interdependence), respect, and generosity as outlined by Umeek in *Tsawalk*.

## Methods

I cannot talk about čapac travel without also acknowledging the important tools necessary to make a journey possible. From prayers to paddles, these tools are all equally important in making a journey successful. Prayer is often used in preparation, to seek guidance, and to give gratitude, acknowledging our important relationship with the spiritual realm. The paddle is fundamental not only for maneuvering but also in connecting each individual puller to each other and to the environment. These tools allow the journey to go smoothly and with care. In unison and methodically, paddles are dipped into the water and together are pulled alongside the čapac. Through each stroke, the principles of interdependence, respect, and generosity materialize; relationships grow stronger and the destination gets a little bit closer. In the čapac, individuals become one and a connection with the environment is made in a way that is unique and transformative.

The paddles or tools I chose for my research are grounded in the indigenous practice of storytelling, a method that is reflected in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry uses story to bring forward lessons and to develop meaning from our own experiences and the experiences of others. In this type of exploration, the wisdom and reflections of contributors (including the

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<sup>5</sup> “Doing work in a good way” is a saying commonly used by my family and my community. To me it means doing work with integrity reflecting the teachings passed to me from my ancestors through my family.

researcher) are considered both independently and in relation to each other (Clandinin, 2006).

For my research, I used interview and self-reflection as forms of narrative inquiry to uncover the experiences of my research participant/collaborator and myself. Through this exploration, meaning was uncovered by grounding inquiry in the Theory of Tsawalk by framing reflective questions in the foundation of connection offered by Umeek. These questions included:

- a) heeshook-ish tsawalk (Interdependence) - everything is one, everything is connected
  - Do you think the principle of heeshook-ish tsawalk is present in peer-supported language learning of the Barkley Sound dialect? Please explain?
- b) iisaak<sup>6</sup> (Respect) - respect for all life forms
  - Do you think the principle of iisaak is present in peer-supported language learning of the Barkley Sound dialect? Please explain?
- c) huupistał<sup>7</sup> (Generosity) - helping each other
  - What do you think the role of our peer-learners is when learning the Barkley Sound dialect?
  - Can you share a story of huupistał about peer supported learning in this context?
  - Can you name any key principles of peer support that you would consider essential to indigenous language learning?

These questions are rooted in core principles and values of Nuu-chah-nulth as articulated in Umeek's book *Tsawalk* (Atleo, 2004, p. 126-131). I used these principles to guide the interviews and ground my own personal reflections in order to uncover the principles of peer-supported language learning for nuučaanuł.

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<sup>6</sup> I use Umeek's Nuu-chah-nulth spelling for respect, the current convention would see it as ?iisaak

<sup>7</sup> Umeek speaks about generosity as a Nuu-chah-nulth principle. I use the word huupistał (helping each other) to talk about this generosity in the context of my research however, there are many other words and concepts that encompass the Nuu-chah-nulth value of generosity.

I also use these values as a way to ground, organize and present my methods. In the spirit of heeshook-ish tsawalk I acknowledge the connection between all things, in particular the principles of interconnection, respect, and generosity to themselves, to other Nuu-chah-nulth principles, and to all of the methods of inquiry I used. As a result, I have presented my methods in a way to show these connections by including all three principles I use to frame my work in the headings and bolding and underlining the one that helps explain that particular approach.

**Heeshook-ish Tsawalk (everything is one): Interdependence, Respect, and Generosity.**

Acknowledging and honouring our relationships to each other, the environment, our ancestors, and our creator is significant to a successful journey. These relationships can be recognized through prayer which is an important part of doing work in a good way as a Nuu-chah-nulth person. In my own experiences prayer can be very personal and solitary, but also prayer can be communally shared during meals, meetings, and ceremonies. To honour this, throughout my research I practiced prayer in a personal and solitary way, the way taught to me by my family. Wilson states, “Research by and for indigenous peoples is a ceremony that brings relationships together” (2008, pp.8). To clearly identify my research as a ceremony I open and close my paper with a prayer. The opening prayer is from my language teacher ḥawiihtuʔis (Benson Nookemis). I conclude my ceremony by offering a prayer of my own, created with the guidance of both ḥawiihtuʔis and his wife weemtis (Hilda Nookemis). Through the practice of prayer I acknowledge the connection that my research and I have to everything; heshook-ish tsawalk.

One essential connection to my research is with my language-learning peer, research participant and research collaborator yaacuʔisaqs (Linsey Haggard). ʔuklaama (her name is) yaacuʔisaqs, čišaaʔaqsup (Tseshaht women) descendent of Hughie Watts, čišaaʔaht (a Tseshaht

man), and Gracie Watts (nee Hamilton) Hupačasʔaqsup (a Hupacasath women). Our language-learning journey has connected us; our destination is the same and we support each other to move the čapac ahead. An important part of my inquiry was to take note of this relationship (a relationship we have never given much thought to) and to honour its value. In our journey together, we paused for my inquiry to look at the landscape around us, the tools in our hands, and the direction we both wanted to go. Collaboratively, we identified ways to work on this journey together more effectively and efficiently to get us to where we ultimately want to go.

During our pause, yaacuʔisaqs and I put structure to our time together. Over tea, we co-developed our plan for peer support for our language learning together. Then over four evenings for approximately one and a half to two hours per session we put this plan in action. Our co-developed peer language-learning plan can be found in chapter 4. Through this work together, captured through the method of interview, principles of peer-supported language learning emerged.

**Heeshook-ish Tsawalk (everything is one):** Interdependence, **Respect**, and Generosity.

An important part of my methods is making space for individuals to share teaching stories and personal anecdotes (Kovach 2009). Through my inquiry, to show respect towards yaacuʔisaqs (Linsey Haggard) and her contributions, it was essential to include her voice. To do this I used the tool of interview. Just as the paddles connect the pullers to each other in the čapac, so does making space to hear and process the reflections of our peers.

Connections can develop through family relationships, shared experiences, and common passions. My relationship with yaacuʔisaqs is important and exists in multiple realms. Our families have always been close and as a result we have known each other since we were children. We grew up with a similar experience of attending Haahuupayak elementary school,

where we were provided opportunity to learn our language. Later as adults we were both drawn to the opportunity to learn our nuučaaḅuḅ čišaaʔath (Barkley Sound dialect) language through an evening language class offered at North Island College in Port Alberni. It has been since 2011 that we have been consistently working to learn our language together through attending language classes and sitting with fluent speaking elders.

As a key person in my language-learning journey, it has been vital to have yaacuʔisaqs as a participant and collaborator in my research. I value yaacuʔisaqs' knowledge, experience, and perspectives with peer support in language learning. She carries an important role as a leader in her family and she is also deeply committed to our language. To show respect to her and her knowledge, I have captured her reflections about peer-supported language learning through two interviews; one at the beginning of our sessions together and one at their conclusion.

The interviews were designed to be semi-structured, allowing the conversation to be guided by the reflective questions (refer above to page 15) but also allowing room for natural conversation to occur (Richards, 2009). After the initial interview, yaacuʔisaqs was asked to journal after each session for 15 minutes using these reflective questions. The journal was for personal use to help yaacuʔisaqs capture her thoughts after our evenings together. The intent of the journal was to assist her to recall her reflections during the second interview at the end of our sessions together. The journal was not shared but rather yaacuʔisaqs' reflections were captured through the use of interview. Through interview I was able to include the important contributions of one of my peer-learners in my research.

In addition, to ensure the utmost respect was shown to yaacuʔisaqs as a part of this process, I reviewed her interview with her during the analysis stage of my research. According to Kovach, the community and community members will have the ultimate say over their

contributions (2009). Not only was it important for me to review the interview with yaacu?isaqs but I also asked for her input on the research as a whole because what emerges from this inquiry is a story that also belongs to her and she has a say in how it is told.

Showing respect for my peer-learner, research participant, and collaborator in this inquiry was accomplished through highlighting yaacu?isaqs' contributions through the use of interview and through the practice of bringing the work back to the community for the final say. With this, I was able to confidently make meaning of our experiences together in a way that continued to honour and support our connection to our language, to our learning journey and to each other.

**Heeshook-ish Tsawalk (everything is one): Interdependence, Respect, and Generosity.**

There is value in generously sharing our stories about the journeys we have been on. We can support others who are seeking to undertake a similar voyage by sharing; helping others to prepare, troubleshoot, and undertake their own expedition. According to Archibald, offering lessons from our own personal experiences is a valuable indigenous practice (2008). I am often reminded how foundational stories are to my own community. This is especially evident in my interactions with our elders. Elders frequently draw upon stories to highlight important lessons from their lives and the lives of others to encourage understanding and learning in their listeners (Wilson, 2008). Similarly, I draw upon my own stories as a part of my research methods as a way to assist other language learners and put generosity into action.

I believe it is vital for students of indigenous languages to share their stories, to hold up our language communities and to help each other with the learning process.

It is a commonplace to note that human beings both live and tell stories about their living. These lived and told stories, and talk about those stories are ways we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist each other's help in building

our lives and communities (Cladinin, 2006, p.44).

By sharing our successes, our struggles, and our strategies as learners we can make important contributions to our communities towards strengthening our languages.

Honouring the indigenous practice of storytelling and following the example of my elders, my methods included sharing my story. “A product resulting from research using a tribal-centered indigenous methodology ought to have a strong narrative component as a part of its method and presentation of findings” (Kovach, 2009, pp. 35). I used personal reflection as a form of narrative inquiry to discuss the principles of peer-support that emerged through my experience with peer one-on-one learning. I then use story to show how these principles show up in other learning contexts that I participate in including the ʔuʔuʔaałuk Language Nest and our own Mentor-Apprentice.

As a community member and as a language learner I am a fundamental part of my research. Through the method of reflection and storytelling, I can meaningfully present my research honouring my role as researcher and community member. It is important that as researchers we are continuously reflecting on ourselves in our projects, our process, and our communities (Smith, 2012). Telling my story is an important way for me to: reflect on myself within my inquiry; build my understanding of heeshook-ish tsawalk; and provide accountability for my experiences.



*Figure 2: A modern Nuu-chah-nulth čapac. (Source: Uu-a-thluk, 2016)*

## **Chapter 4: Outcomes and Analysis**

In the čapac, adventuring in new waters towards destinations imagined but not yet realized is where the paddles truly meet the water. It is where we as travelers navigate the unknown waters, and carry each other in the čapac to where we need to go. The ways we build and maintain our relationships with each other and all things in our čapac is integral to the success of our journey on the water; this is also true for our language-learning journey. By identifying, understanding, and practicing principles of peer support for learning our languages, we can ensure our learning process respects our elders and holds-up our languages.

“To our elders, being quu?as means treating people with dignity, respect, friendliness, and using good, kind words to uplift a person’s spirit. It meant being hospitable, sharing and helpful - being generous with whatever you have to offer” (Nuu-chah-nulth Community Health Services, 1995, p. 21).

The answer to the question - What is it to be quuʔas<sup>8</sup>? - as described by our elders, helps us to know what it is to learn language as a Nuu-chah-nulth person. In this chapter I address my research question by outlining the principles of peer support for learning the Nuu-chah-nulth languages and specifically the Barkley Sound dialect that emerged through peer one-on-one language sessions. I then draw upon reflections from yaacuʔisaqs, my peer learner, and myself, sharing our insights and learning stories in an effort to deepen the understanding around these principles.

Before introducing the principles it is important to highlight the plan for our evening sessions that I co-developed with yaacuʔisaqs. This plan and the following activities are what allowed us to take an important moment on our journey to pause, resting our paddles on our laps to look around at the scenery, look at each other, and concentrate on how we were going to work together to move forward as peers in a focused way. The plan that emerged is an important outcome from this research and can be used or adapted by other language learners who wish to add peer-support to their language learning toolkit.

### **Peer One-on-One Evening Plan**

During our evening sessions yaacuʔisaqs and I came together for four evenings over a month for one and a half to two hours, with the purpose of supporting each other to learn the language of our grandfathers, čišaaʔaṭḥ (Tseshaht people). This plan was based on our mutual and independent goals for our time together and could be used as a model for others to follow when planning peer one-on-one sessions. The following list outlines the areas of focus that framed our peer-support sessions and how, through these sessions, we ended up addressing these elements:

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<sup>8</sup> First Voices offers the translation of quuʔas as “person.” However, in my experience quuʔas is commonly used in my community to refer to being First Nations or more specifically Nuu-chah-nulth.

1. *Staying in the language*: in order to practice and build our confidence to speak, we strived to have a conversation with each other for 5 minutes, increasing the time with each session. This took place during the first part of our evenings upon my arrival to yaacuʔisaqs' residence. We both had previously learned survival phrases in an intensive language class. For this part of our session we were able to practice and use language we had already learned around greetings, serving tea, and telling a brief bit of news.
2. *Mentor-Apprentice Practice, Review, and Preparations*: once a week yaacuʔisaqs, myself, and other adult language students sit with a fluent speaking couple to learn our language. Yaacuʔisaqs and I wanted to use our time together to support these sessions.
  - a) *Re-claiming the kitchen*: as a part of our Mentor-Apprentice sessions with our elders, we had been working on language in the kitchen focused around cooking and the dinner table. This was inspired by the work of Zalmai ʔəswəli Zahir (2015) in reclaiming domains. Together we had developed čišaaʔaḥ labels for words and phrases associated with the kitchen to support ourselves and other language learners. This sparked the development of flashcards for these same kitchen items. For this part of our session we would play a game similar to “go fish” using just our language with these cards to help us review and practice.
  - b) *Reviewing teachings*: although the focus of these MA sessions was to re-claim the kitchen, we were always generously gifted with language lessons beyond the kitchen. We both wanted to honour these gifts by making sure to spend time reviewing these teachings. Our language mentors would also sit us down before we left and offer words of appreciation and support in our language. I recorded these offerings and in some of our evening sessions we would re-listen, attempt

to transcribe, and identify words we did not know so we could ask about them the next time we were with our mentors.

3. *Reviewing past material:* we have a collection of language notes from evening classes and a language learning circle that we have participated in over the past two years. We took the opportunity to re-visit this material. To do this, we would each bring something forward that we wanted to look at again and practice. In some cases either myself or yaacu?isaqs would have a better understanding of the word or language concept that the other one had brought forward. In these situations, we were able to teach each other about the language. This reinforced our awareness that through our years of learning together we have each understood and retained different items to do with our language.
4. *Taking it outside:* we wanted to be able to encourage each other to use our language during our everyday lives. To do this we would take a word or phrase we were trying to remember and commit to each other that we would use it in our interactions with other people.

### **Principles of Peer-supported Language Learning**

Principles are the grain in the cedar log that makes our čapac strong. They materialize at the beginning of a tree's development and strengthen over time; just as principles of indigenous language learning are always there but unfold through years of learning. They cradle the pullers keeping them comfortable, safe, and moving ahead. There is value and purpose in identifying principles of peer-support for learning our nuučaanuł languages. Principles provide us with helpful strategies and guidelines to build our learning and instruction; they are part of the foundation of how to do learning in a good way together. So far, in my experiences, learning our

nuučaanuł language, the principles of peer-support have gone unspoken. However, it is important to bring these principles forward as another tool we can use to learn and strengthen our language. These principles, like the grain, give structure to the cedar log we intend to carve our čapac from.

Principles have been identified in the literature about indigenous learning and second language acquisition. For Indigenous learning, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)(2008), offers “*First Peoples Principles of Learning*.” Here they outline nine principles geared specifically to indigenous learning. They range from articulating how learning supports wellness to acknowledging that some information requires special consent and approvals to share. These principles are useful as they speak directly about *indigenous* learning, however, they do not speak directly about *language* learning. For second language acquisition, Carol J. Orwig in *Language Learning Principles* provides an extensive list of principles focused on second language acquisition including principles: of language learning, about the features of learners, about students reasons for learning, about the learning context; and finally offers an extensive list of strategies for learners (1999). However, these principles are not directly about Indigenous *language learning*. The principles outlined by both FNESC and Orwig are useful but are limited, as they do not bring together specific recommendations for learning indigenous languages. In my research, I identify principles for peer-supported language acquisition for nuučaanuł as a contribution to language revitalization in my community, and as a way to bring a structured approach to peer-support to the revitalization conversation. In this way I can participate in the creation of the čapac that will help carry us to our language.

When looking at principles of peer-supported language learning for nuučaanuł, I acknowledge the connection of everything, heeshook-ish tsawalk. In order to build my understanding of the Theory of Tsawalk and to root this research in the theory, I explain my

principles in the following sections using the Nuu-chah-nulth values of interdependence, respect, and generosity. This is done with the consideration that the principles and stories that emerged from my inquiry move between and amongst all three of these values. The fluidity of the principles of peer-support reflects their foundation in Nuu-chah-nulth worldview and the Theory of Tsawalk as interconnection radiates between the principles, our stories, and all elements. I use different learning contexts to explore the Nuu-chah-nulth values. For the value of interdependence, I look at my learning with the ʔuʔuʔaaḥuk Language Nest. For the value of respect, I explore my learning as a part of an environment. Finally, for the value of generosity I illustrate my time with my peer learner yaacuʔisaqs.

The principles outlined below were developed collaboratively with yaacuʔisaqs. Following each set of principles I offer reflections and stories to share our learning experiences, and provide ideas and support to other indigenous language learners.

**Heeshook-ish Tsawalk (everything is one): Interdependence, Respect, and Generosity.**

*Our learning is totally one, and our passion is one passion, our goal is one goal; we want to get to that same place of wanting to know our language and wanting to share our language as much as we can.*” (Yaacuʔisaqs, personal communication, March 22, 2016).

Table 1 below outlines the principles associated with the Nuu-chah-nulth value of interdependence that emerged from my peer one-on-one sessions with yaacuʔisaqs.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Language is a part of everyone</b>   | Learning connects us to each other; we are family. No one is left behind and everyone is encouraged. |
| <b>Language is a part of everything</b> | Learning connects us to: our ancestors, the future generation, the land, the water, and our creator. |

Table 1: Principles of interdependence for nuučaanuḥ peer-supported language learning

***Principles of interdependence illustrated through peer one-on-one learning.***

The principles connected with interdependence clearly speak to how our language facilitates relationships to everyone and everything. One of the key foci of my inquiry has been my relationship with yaacu?isaqs and as a result, I could not think of a better way to talk about the principles of interdependence than to reflect on this connection. It is through the ways our language learning is intertwined and how it connects us to each other and everything that the principles are demonstrated.

**Language is a part of everyone.** This is true for yaacu?isaqs and I. Although we have known each other for most of our lives it was not until we discovered our shared desire to learn our language that we grew closer as friends. It has been this shared journey with language, which has connected us and has supported us to build our language family with each other along with our mentors and other learners. Yaacu?isaqs explains how our language facilitates our connection and how this connection ensures neither of us is left behind because we are learning together. "...We have done this [language learning] on a consistent basis and everything is one, what I learned you learned even if we haven't learned it at the same time we come together and share..." (personal communication, March 22, 2016). We share in this experience of learning in whatever context it is, whether we are learning together or as individuals. We bring this to each other eager to share and build our collective knowledge together, deepening our connection in turn.

**Language is a part of everything.** During one of our evening sessions yaacu?isaqs shared a recording with me of her grandfather speaking our language. Yaacu?isaqs' grandfather had passed long before she was born and this was the first time she had ever heard his voice. We

both did not know what he was saying initially but hearing our language spoken by him, a relative of yaacu?isaqs, hearing his tone and rhythm, was an exciting and emotional moment. Hearing him evoked powerful feelings and thoughts that connected me to our ancestors. I was reminded of how our ancestors used our language as a tool for explaining a Nuu-chah-nulth world through a Nuu-chah-nulth worldview, connecting us to everything.

Overtime yaacu?isaqs and I worked on understanding this recording together with the help of our mentors. Her grandfather's words taught us about our territory, the foods that were harvested, events that had happened, and the ways our community gathered and worked together. Through our language her grandfather was connected to us, the future generation, and we were connected to him, now one of our ancestors. His words and his teachings taught us more about our Tseshaht practices and territories.

Hearing yaacu?isaqs' grandfather or any fluent speaker gives me a desperate feeling. It is a feeling of wanting to understand my world the way our ancestors did, in a way that connects us to each other and everything, knowing that it is only through our language this connection can truly be understood, and feeling like I am not learning our language fast enough to be able to truly see and feel these connections in time. However, the relationship I have with my peer learner yaacu?isaqs, through our sharing of knowledge, experiences, and resources helps me to get closer to the connections I seek to everyone and everything through our language.

**Heeshook-ish Tsawalk (everything is one) :** Interdependence, **Respect**, Generosity.

*"I don't think you can learn if you don't respect each other"*  
(Yaacu?isaqs, personal communication, February 11, 2016).

Table 2 below outlines the principles associated with the Nuu-chah-nulth value of respect that emerged from my peer one-on-one sessions with yaacu?isaqs.

|  |
|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Be kind</b> Don't judge, have patience and understand where each other are at, be aware of each others energy or what is going on in each others' lives.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Be flexible</b> Check-in with each other about learning goals. Make adjustments so goals are mutual. Be open to re-scheduling if needed.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Build and maintain trust</b> Learning can be overwhelming and speaking can be scary; it is important that trust is at the core.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Be committed</b> Respect each others time; be dedicated to learning.</p> |
|--|

Table 2: Principles of respect for nuučaañuḥ peer-supported language learning

***Principles of respect as illustrated through Mentor Apprentices.***

iisaak (respect) is an important Nuu-chah-nulth value. Our elders often speak of respect; respect for our environment, respect for ourselves, respect for each other. As Nuu-chah-nulth, respect is something that has to be lived and practiced especially when learning our languages. The value of respect and the principles of peer-support including kindness, flexibility, trust, and commitment are best explained through the time we spend learning with our mentors.

Our mentors embody and create a space where respect is cultivated and demonstrated. Our mentors welcome us every week into their home, offering us teachings, words of encouragement, and čamus (treats). As learners (apprentices), we reciprocate by cooking a meal to share and by honouring our mentors, the expertise of our peers, and the learning process.

As learners, we prepare for our time with our mentors by checking in with each other online each week. This communication practice is one of the ways as peer learners we demonstrate the principles of kindness and flexibility. Yaacu?isaqs comments about the value of

respect within our own Mentor-Apprentice learning context, "...[you] have to respect people's time, feelings, everything. I think it is a major role in all of it" (personal communication, March 22, 2016). Every Sunday we connect online to identify who will be attending the upcoming evening and what each person will be contributing to the meal. This has been helpful for the purpose of planning but has also become a helpful space where as peers we connect with each other and let each other know where we are at personally. It is a place we use to connect with each other about our learning goals, schedules, and our energy levels each week. These online conversations help us as peers determine if we need to re-focus our learning or re-schedule our sessions. It brings forward for each other the important reminder that we all have lives outside of our learning together and sometimes this affects our participation. Being able to connect online facilitates good communication amongst us and in turn, promotes understanding without judgment.

Within our own Mentor-Apprentice sessions, the principles of trust and commitment are interrelated and are demonstrated in the ways that we support each other's learning. Yaacu?isaqs describes how trust is built and maintained amongst our peer learners during our time with our mentors.

"Trust the people that you are learning with because it is really, really scary to learn.

Myself I don't have the confidence all the time to speak in front of other people. With our small group we have that respect for each other and make each other comfortable...I think we help each other around the table all the time and are encouraging and comfortable with each other" (personal communication, February 11, 2016).

As expressed by yaacu?isaqs, trust has been built through the respectful way that we treat each other. This provides us with a comfortable environment to practice speaking.

One way trust is built is through the commitment we have for each other's learning and time together. This commitment is reflected in the way we hold space together for each other to learn and how everyone contributes to making our evenings successful. "You have to respect that we are all learning, have to respect what we know and what other people know" (yaacu?isaqs, personal communications, February 11, 2016). During our sessions, the more advanced learners help to carry the conversation with our mentors, which provide an important learning opportunity for less advanced learners. I have found this tremendously beneficial because our advanced peers are able to make conversations flow with our mentors but speak at a level that can mostly be understood by others, which deepens everyone else's learning. This type of "space holding" ripples throughout the group where learners like myself, who are less advanced, can support beginners creating an environment we all learn together with respect at the core.

As peers, the principles of peer-support associated with the important Nuu-chah-nulth value of respect are exemplified through our own Mentor-Apprentice sessions. The principles of kindness and flexibility are demonstrated in the ways we communicate and plan together, while the principles of commitment and trust are exhibited in the ways we support each other and contribute to the learning environment. The principles of respect guide us and ground us as peer learners, allowing us to learn and speak together in a good way in our Mentor-Apprentice sessions.

**Heeshook-ish Tsawalk (everything is one):** Interdependence, Respect and **Generosity**.

*"I think we help each other around the table all the time and are encouraging and comfortable with each other."* (Yaacu?isaqs, personal communication, March 22, 2016).

Table 3 below outlines the principles associated with the Nuu-chah-nulth value of generosity that emerged from my peer one-on-one sessions with yaacuʔisaqs.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Create a safe environment to learn</b> | Practice speaking together, be inclusive, be comfortable making mistakes and feeling silly. |
| <b>Have fun and bring ideas</b>           | Laugh together; plan fun learning exercises and activities.                                 |
| <b>Be supportive</b>                      | Always be patient with each other, bring motivation and encouragement.                      |
| <b>Share your knowledge</b>               | Take the language and lessons you have learned and be open to sharing them with each other. |

Table 3: Principles of generosity for nuučaanuḥ peer-supported language learning

***Principle of generosity as illustrated through the Language Nest.***

As learning our languages is incredibly rewarding but can also be overwhelming at times, the generosity of our peers can help to reinforce our learning while building our confidence. My experience as a volunteer and student at the ʔuʔuʔaakuk Language Nest has illustrated to me the value of generosity and the principles associated with generosity found through my inquiry. The language nest has afforded me opportunities to engage and learn from various peers, where each bring their knowledge and creativity to the space, creating an environment that is safe, fun and supportive.

The adult volunteers of the nest are a committed and resourceful group. Wanting to maintain our momentum after the language nest schedule ended for the year, a small group of us decided to each host immersion activities at our homes. During these sessions we would use toys or laminated images as props to help us teach and learn new words and phrases. These immersion activities were always fun and involved passing objects, throwing them to each other,

throwing them into a basket, and seeking out items that had been hidden. Bringing this type of creativity to learning was a real gift we brought to each other as learners. Often lively activities are reserved for children but in my experience being silly is a valuable tool for generating a safe and fun learning environment for adults as well. Spending time with our peer-learners is a great way to support and enhance our learning.

In 2015, a few committed language nest volunteers and one of our fluent elders had the opportunity to attend the First Peoples Cultural Council's Language Nest training in Richmond, B.C. This provided us with a significant opportunity to spend time speaking in the language and speaking about our languages as we traveled, ate, and socialized. Together, with a lot of laughter, we created a safe place for each other to speak and learn. During our time together I was able to practice language I already knew, I was able to ask questions without apprehension, and I was able to generously offer the knowledge that I had. Through the generosity of my peers I was able to move further faster on my journey towards our language. There was a significant moment when I finally understood a language concept, because of the explanation provided to me by one of my peers, offered from their own experiences with learning our language. As the days passed together, I felt much more confident to speak our language. Spending time with my learning peers has allowed me to practice speaking without the personal judgment I impose on myself; a judgment that sometimes invites a thick coastal fog to surround my čapac impeding my momentum forward and my ability to stay on course. During my learning journey my peers create a safe, supportive space as they generously give what they have in order keep everyone journeying ahead.

### **Summary.**

Through my research the principles of peer support for adult learners of the nuučaanuḥ language were brought forward. The Nuu-chah-nulth values of interdependence, respect, and generosity grounded these principles in the Theory of Tsawalk and offered a vessel in which to apply an analysis to the research data. The value of interdependence carried the principles **language is a part of everyone and everything**, which were explored through an examination of my peer one-on-one learning sessions with yaacuḥisaaqs. The value of respect carried the principles **kindness, flexibility, trust, and commitment**, which were explained by reflecting on my Mentor-Apprentice learning environment. Finally, the value of generosity carried the principles **create a safe learning environment, have fun and bring ideas, be supportive, and share your knowledge**, which were illustrated through an exploration of my ḥuḥuḥaaḥuk Language Nest learning context. Through applying these Nuu-chah-nulth values, the principles of peer-support for nuučaanuḥ language learners emerged. It is because of these values, language learners can support each other in their language learning journey, rooted in the teachings of their grandparents.

### **Putting Principles into Practice with VideoScribe**

*“Generosity is the utterances you make, the small things you do, your smile, the laughter you create around your person. Generosity radiates from your person. Do be generous to all people”*  
(Clutesi 1990, p.109).

In his book *Stand Tall, My Son* George Clutesi offers this Tseshahḥ teaching about generosity. In this same spirit I wanted to create a product from my research that would reflect these characteristics of generosity outlined by Clutesi. To be generous with my research meant to create an outcome from my inquiry that would be accessible and engaging for my community,

other nuučaaḥ language learners, and language program planners. To accomplish this I used VideoScribe as a tool to share my research in a generous way.

VideoScribes are online “whiteboard-style animation videos” (Sparkol, 2015, homepage, para.1). The use of video is an impactful method of engagement illustrating a story and engrossing many senses at the same time (Onita, Ciuclea, & Vasiiu, 2015). Using video is a valuable way to demonstrate research for indigenous communities. The VideoScribe I developed delivers a summary of my inquiry, highlighting the principles of peer-support for adults learning the nuučaaḥ language. I say ‘my research,’ but truly this work belongs to my community, my research collaborator, and all language learners, instructors, and advocates. It is through the creation of a VideoScribe that I try to demonstrate this ownership by providing the research in an open and accessible way. To view VideoScribe go to <https://vimeo.com/178110331>.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Theory of Tsawalk

My research was grounded in the Theory of Tsawalk, which allowed me to assume the connections between all elements of my inquiry. It was a gift for me to be able to use a Nuu-chah-nulth theory to guide my work as not all indigenous scholars have an opportunity or an option to use a theory that was developed from their own community's worldview. The Theory of Tsawalk has both comforted me and confronted me. It is a worldview that is familiar to me, although in this familiarity I do not claim to be an expert but rather I am a humble student of our teachings. I do, however, have strong beliefs around the idea of connection instilled in me over the years growing up in my community, and now as an adult working to support our ḥawiiḥ (hereditary chiefs) in fisheries. As a result, it was not difficult for me to assume that these connections were implicit and inherent in my study. The challenge for me was to find the best way to apply the theory to my inquiry and present it within the realm of academia. Taking something that is a belief I hold, and often more of a feeling, and making it resonate throughout my research was awkward at times. Umeek does this artfully in *Tsawalk*, using stories to make the theory tangible. I have struggled with making something that is so beautiful in its complexity fit with the containers I have created to place my research within. In the process of conducting my research, I often worried that my approach was counter to the theory, minimizing its universal nature. At the same time, this challenge has helped me deepen my understanding of Nuu-chah-nulth teachings in their application to language revitalization. I believe that part of the magic that the Theory of Tsawalk embodies is that there are unlimited opportunities for discoveries and truths. I imagine the Theory of Tsawalk will continue to inspire and challenge

me while at the same time it will build my understanding of it throughout my journey in language and in life.

### **Research Limitations and Future Applications**

The focus of my research was to highlight the important role our peers have in our language learning and to articulate some structure to an otherwise intuitive practice. The main question for my inquiry was: What are the principles of peer-support that can help advance adult language learners of nuučaanuḥ on their learning path as found in the three learning contexts I am participating in: ḥuḥuḥaaḥuk Language Nest, our own Master-Apprentice, and peer one-on-one learning? To bring out the principles of peer-support I worked with my long-time peer learner yaacuḥisaqs where we spent time together to support, each other's language learning.

After our first session together I felt uplifted, motivated, and confident. I found that I carried these feelings from our one-on-one session over to our time with our mentors the following week. Even though our time together provided me with motivation and confidence there were times during our sessions together when we both lacked energy and motivation. When you are with a friend it is easy to fall into a 'hang out' mode, especially if you are meeting in the evening after a long day of work. We found ourselves spending time discussing what we wanted to focus on next instead of using the time solely for learning. In order to use our time most efficiently and stay focused during our sessions, we could have benefited from identifying more specific actions for each area of our plan and having one of us lead each session, alternating back and forth. This would have allowed for a more robust peer-support plan that could have included a variety of activities we could have drawn on when energy was low which would have provided each of us with practice facilitating language learning.

We would have also benefited from changing the location and time of our sessions. Going to a coffee shop or going outside to a park on a nice day would have not only kept it interesting but also supported our use of language together outside our usual peer-support environment. In addition, changing the time from evening to a morning or afternoon during the weekend may help with focus and energy levels.

### **Research Implications**

The second question in my inquiry was to explore what implications the principles identified have on students and planners of nuučaanuḥ language programs and how we can purposefully include these principles in models for learning and teaching. I attempt to answer this question by offering applications of peer support for learners, instructors and administrators. In addition, I make an important connection to how everyone's work towards our languages, including my research, contributes to the larger language revitalization movement.

#### **Models of Peer-Support for Learning and Teaching.**

Through the literature I found that time is an important factor when considering adult language acquisition and that classroom instruction often does not provide enough of it to build proficiency. The amount of time put into learning is critical for adult language learner to gain proficiency in a second language (Jackson & Kaplan, 1999; Johnson, 1998; McIvor 2005). Both Jackson & Kaplan (1999) and Johnson (1998) indicated adult second language learners need around 1,000 hours to become a proficient speaker of a second language. In addition, in the report from the *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposia* (SILS) it was identified that school programs alone are not enough to maintain our languages (Catoni, 2007). Taking our learning into our own hands is imperative. We need to have resourcefulness and resolve to acquire a second language (Jackson & Kaplan, 1999; McIvor 2005). Through my research I offer peer-

support as a mechanism to achieve the amount of time we need to learn our languages outside of, or in conjunction with other programs. In my research I identified principles of adult peer-support for nuučaanuḥ and outlined a plan for peer-support evening sessions as a way to put structure to peer support so that these can be used or adapted by individuals, instructors, and other language communities.

For aspiring language learners who are seeking a place to begin their learning journey, my research offers a safe place from which to depart with peer-support as a first step. A peer-support team can apply or adapt the peer support principles and learning plan to use as a foundation for learning together. From there, with the support of each other, the team can seek out or create learning opportunities through courses or with mentors.

As a part of language programs, instructors can implement a structured form of peer-support for student's time outside of the classroom. Applying a peer-support model to language courses can help students:

- feel more comfortable;
- build their confidence;
- be accountable;
- and ultimately contribute to establishing their language community for the long-term.

This is also true with a Mentor-Apprentice program; adding a peer-support model can contribute to apprentices' success in working with their mentors. A peer-supported approach provides learners with additional comfort and accountability in this learning environment. In addition, peer teams can honour their time with their mentors by preparing and reviewing language on their own time together.

### **Contribution to Language Revitalization Movement.**

Our communities and our grandparents experienced harsh practices of assimilation that, among many other things, tried to destroy our languages. However, our languages have not been destroyed and continue to strengthen and grow. They are an integral part of our identity and hold sacred and important knowledge for the world at large. As a result, there are global and national movements that outline clear actions that nations and citizens can take to recognize the rights of indigenous people. These include specific mention of the rights that indigenous people have to protect, preserve, and revitalize our languages.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) outlines actions for indigenous languages in Articles 13, 14, and 16 and that include the right to: strengthen our languages and maintain our original names for ourselves and our territories; communities having power and representation over our languages in institutions such as schools and government; and have access to and be able to develop our own mass communication in our language (2008).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada outlines five main points associated with our languages in their report *Call to Action*. These invoke our government to: acknowledge our birthright to our languages; legislate an *Aboriginal Languages Act*; employ a position in government that advocates for our languages; remove fees associated with re-claiming traditional names; and ask that educational institutions provide post-secondary opportunities in our languages (2015).

As individuals and as communities holding-up our languages through learning, teaching, or administering language programs, we contribute to the essential global and national action of decolonization. It is a way to honour our ancestors and our grandparents who suffered through

the harsh beginnings of colonization and for those who, despite this, were able to fight for us. My research and my commitment to language is a small and humble contribution to this larger movement. By way of my research I add a war čapac to the fleet of others who are fighting for our languages.

## **Chapter 6: histmaaʔapʔaʔi (let it be done now)**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The air and the water surrounds our čapac; the air filling our lungs, fueling our minds and our bodies, the water carrying us forward with every stroke of our paddle. These elements are always there but often go unacknowledged until we need to catch our breath or need momentum forward. By recognizing how these elements help us and by illuminating the important relationship we have with them, we as pullers can truly harness their gifts.

This is not unlike the gifts of support our peers provide us in our language learning journeys. Umeek, through the telling of *How Son of Raven Captured the Day* explains, “interdependence is considered one of the strengths of a traditional Nuu-chah-nulth community” (2004, pp.12). As Nuu-chah-nulth people, the principles of peer-support have always been there. They are a part of our story, working together and relying on each other is what helped our ancestors be great whalers and great warriors. All we need to do is take a moment to look within ourselves, to our ancestors, to our family and friends who are always helping us and the principles of peer-support become clear. Nuu-chah-nulth values carried the principles of peer support that emerged in my research: interdependence carried the principles **language is a part of everyone and everything**; respect carried the principles **kindness, flexibility, trust, and commitment**; and generosity carried the principles **create a safe learning environment, have fun and bring ideas, be supportive, and share your knowledge** (see Appendix 1 for a complete summary).

In moving forward I have two recommendations for this research:

- 1) First, I recommend testing the peer-support principles and plan with other peer teams from various language communities. Furthering this exploration of peer-support, as a mechanism for adult language learning, will: add to the overall

conversation of indigenous language revitalization; provide further opportunities to explore possibilities; and provide more robust approaches for language programs.

- 2) Secondly, I encourage language learners, instructors, and planners to use and adapt the outcomes of this research including the peer-support principles and the evening plan to help build proficiency of adult second language learners in their communities.

“Being quuʔas means having our own language, being able to communicate with old people and young people using our own powerful, strong words that communicate deep concepts.” (Nuu-chah-nulth Community Health Services, 1995, p. 23)

I am grateful that this research journey allowed me to take a closer look at how, as adult language learners of nuučaanuḥ, we can support each other in our pursuits towards language proficiency and ultimately towards being closer to ourselves as quuʔas. I am humbled to have been able to do this research with my peer yaacuʔisaqs whose constant support and willingness to engage in learning has been a gift not only to my language learning but also to my research journey. Peer support is not a new concept, it is something we do all the time, sometimes consciously and sometimes not. I came to this inquiry because I noticed that I am most successful when I am sharing experiences with my peers. I really started to take notice of how my peers were helping me move forward in language on our trip to the Language Nest Training. During this trip I was struck deeply by how much I was learning and how much fun I was having

doing it. After, my awareness grew towards all the other situations and ways in which my peer learners were supporting me, motivating me, and making me accountable to learn our language.

Like the air we breathe and the water that carries our čapac, our peers are always there to help us on our journey to learn our language. The principles of peer-support identified through this project are one of the tools in the important efforts of language revitalization in our communities. Only by holding-up and recognizing the important learning relationships we have with our peers can we truly harness the power of connection and generate mechanisms to strengthen our languages together.

### **ciciqinkʹak (my prayer for our language)<sup>9</sup>**

łakšiiʹis naʹaa

Please hear me

huhtakšiłmiḥsamin ʹuuʹuuk<sup>wa</sup>ʹaḥa

We want to learn our own language

huhtakšiłmiḥsaminʹaala ciiqciqa

We want to learn to speak

huupistałʹin ʹiičaʹap niʹwa

Let us help each other, hold each other up

łakšiiʹis naʹaataḥ čičiqinq

Please hear our prayer

čuuč

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<sup>9</sup> This prayer was created with the guidance of ḥawiiḥtuʹis (Benson Nookemis) and weemtiis (Hilda Nookemis).

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## Appendix 1

### Summary: Principles of Peer-support for nuučaañul

#### Principles of interdependence for nuučaañul peer-supported language learning.

**Language is a part of everyone** Learning connects us to each other; we are family. No one is left behind and everyone is encouraged.

**Language is a part of everything** Learning connects us to: our ancestors, the future generation, the land, the water, and our creator.

#### Principles of respect for nuučaañul peer-supported language learning.

**Be kind** Don't judge, have patience and understand where each other are at, be aware of each others' energy or what is going on in each others' lives.

**Be flexible** Check-in with each other about learning goals. Make adjustments so goals are mutual. Be open to re-scheduling if needed.

**Build and maintain trust** Learning can be overwhelming and speaking can be scary; it is important that trust is at the core.

**Be committed** Respect each others time; be dedicated to learning.

#### Principles of generosity for nuučaañul peer-supported language learning.

**Create a safe environment to learn** Practice speaking together, be inclusive, be comfortable making mistakes and feeling silly.

**Have fun and bring ideas** Laugh together; plan fun learning exercises and activities.

**Be supportive** Always be patient with each other, bring motivation and encouragement.

**Share your knowledge** Take the language and lessons you have learned and be open to sharing them with each other.