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The Role of Teacher Professional Learning in Indigenous Language Reclamation

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

Universities must support Indigenous language reclamation; this includes training Indigenous language teachers. Though specialized programs are offered across Canada, they have not provided Indigenous language teachers with the training or support they need to teach languages in ways that will create new speakers, expand language use, and combat the erasure and silencing of Indigenous languages. This article triangulates findings from an environmental scan on professional learning for Indigenous language teachers, a literature review on good practices in Indigenous language teacher training and Indigenous language pedagogies, and the self-study (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) of faculty members and an Indigenous organization lead involved in the development and delivery of the University of Winnipeg's Indigenous Languages programs. We explore evidence of the need for Indigenous language teacher training; examples of relevant programs; as well as opportunities, challenges and promising practices in Indigenous language teacher training, and implications for language revitalization.



The Role of Teacher Professional Learning in Indigenous Language Reclamation

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Abstract

Universities must support Indigenous language reclamation; this includes training Indigenous language teachers. Though specialized programs are offered across Canada, they have not provided Indigenous language teachers with the training or support they need to teach languages in ways that will create new speakers, expand language use, and combat the erasure and silencing of Indigenous languages. This article triangulates findings from an environmental scan on professional learning for Indigenous language teachers, a literature review on good practices in Indigenous language teacher training and Indigenous language pedagogies, and the self-study (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) of faculty members and an Indigenous organization lead involved in the development and delivery of the University of Winnipeg's Indigenous Languages programs. We explore evidence of the need for Indigenous language teacher training; examples of relevant programs; as well as opportunities, challenges and promising practices in Indigenous language teacher training, and implications for language revitalization.

Keywords: Indigenous languages; language revitalization; teacher education; second language learning; culturally-nourishing education

Résumé

Les universités doivent soutenir la revitalisation des langues autochtones, notamment en formant des enseignantes et des enseignants de langues autochtones. Bien que de tels programmes existent, ceux-ci n'ont pas offert la formation ni le soutien dont les enseignants ont besoin pour enseigner de manière à créer de nouveaux locuteurs, à étendre la langue à de nouveaux domaines et à combattre l'effacement et la perte des langues autochtones. Cet article présente les résultats d'un bilan sur la formation des enseignants de langues autochtones, une recension des écrits sur les bonnes pratiques en matière de formation des enseignants de langues autochtones et les pédagogies des langues autochtones, et l'auto-apprentissage (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) réalisé par des professeures et un responsable d'organisation autochtone impliqué dans le développement des programmes de langues autochtones. Nous explorons les éléments de preuves relatifs au besoin de formation des enseignantes et des enseignants de langues autochtones, des exemples de programmes pertinents, ainsi que des opportunités, des défis et des pratiques prometteuses en matière de formation des enseignants de langues autochtones, et les retombées sur la revitalisation linguistique.

Mots-clés: langues autochtones; revitalisation des langues; formation des enseignants; apprentissage d'une langue seconde; éducation culturellement nourrissante

Indigenous language teachers are central to the reclamation of Indigenous languages. While intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages and their use in homes is declining across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2023), increasing numbers of Indigenous second language speakers is increasingly essential for Indigenous language vitality. Effective second language learning is enhanced by teachers specifically trained in Indigenous language pedagogies. However, the assumption has long been that if someone can speak an Indigenous language, they can teach it. Opportunities to develop culturally-nourishing pedagogical skills in Indigenous language teaching have been rare. This article addresses the need for universities to be part of building the next generation of Indigenous language teachers through Indigenous language course offerings and through Indigenous language teacher training. It explores evidence of the need for Canadian universities to play a role, examines what universities have done to date, what more effective Indigenous language teacher training might look like, and what effects it could have on revitalizing Indigenous languages.

1. Research Question and Objectives

Our research responds to the question: How are universities in Canada supporting the goals of language revitalization through Indigenous language teacher training, and what are the opportunities for and challenges to universities being more effective in this role? Our objective is to understand the current state of Indigenous language teacher training in Canada, and lessons learned thus far, in order to support development and delivery of programs that will lead to greater community connections to the language, new language speakers, and expanded use of Indigenous languages.

1.1 Situating Ourselves

The co-authors include three professors at the University of Winnipeg. Lorena Fontaine is Cree-Anishinaabe and a member of the Sagkeeng First Nation in Manitoba. She serves on the Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy (MALS, n.d.) and is coordinator of the University of Winnipeg's Indigenous Languages program. Heather Souter is a citizen of the Red River Métis Nation and a member of the Manitoba Métis Federation, co-founder of Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle (P2WILRC) and a member of the MALS. Shelley Tulloch is a settler scholar with long-standing relationships with Inuit communities and partnered research with Inuit organizations and governments, including on K–12 language education and culturally-nourishing professional development for Indigenous teachers. We come to this work with an appreciation of the importance of Indigenous languages to well-being. We are committed to working alongside and listening to communities, using our positions to advance the work desired by Indigenous communities, and rebalancing power while recognizing Indigenous sovereignty that was disrupted by colonization.

1.3 Defining Terms

Our reference to Indigenous (Aboriginal) peoples in Canada includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. The Indigenous languages spoken in Manitoba, where we work, are Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe, Ojibway), Ininimowin (Swampy Cree), Anisininemowin (Oji-Cree), Southern Michif (Métis), Dakota, Dene, and Inuktitut. The current and future language teachers with whom we are working at the University of Winnipeg currently are Anishinaabe, Ininew (specifically N-dialect or Swampy Cree), and Métis. Throughout this paper, we use the language and group labels used by the organizations doing the work and/or the authors writing about it, thus a combination of the terms and bracketed terms are used.

2. Research Context

In Canada's 2021 Census, 1,807,250 people self-identified as Indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2022). Of these, 184,170 people (10%) said they learned one of the over 70 Indigenous languages in Canada as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2023). Intergenerational language transmission was decimated by the federal government's policy to eradicate Indigenous languages and cultures in the mid-nineteenth century. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), which documented residential school experiences concluded that: "residential schools are a tragic part of Canada's history. But they cannot simply be consigned to history. The legacy from the schools and the political and legal policies and mechanisms surrounding their history continue to this day. This is reflected in the significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians. It is reflected in the intense racism some people harbour against Aboriginal people and in the systemic and other forms of discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country. It is reflected too in the critically endangered status of most Aboriginal languages" (p. 135).

The trauma of residential schools has an impact on the ability and willingness to transmit Indigenous languages as one's mother tongue. Indigenous language vitality now relies on second language learning. Thirteen percent of Indigenous peoples in Canada (237,430) can hold a conversation in an Indigenous language: 28% of these (65,765) are second language learners (Statistics Canada, 2023). Second language learning is a hopeful option for Indigenous communities with the lowest numbers of speakers (Norris, 2007). As one example, the number of Michif speakers increased by 45% between the 2016 and 2021 censuses, all of whom would be second language speakers of the language (Statistics Canada, 2023). In some communities, second language learners are a younger generation of speakers, creating the possibility of reinvigorating intergenerational transmission once they become parents.

Indigenous second language learning takes place through informal, non-formal, and formal opportunities, and across all ages. These include community-based programs such as language nests and Master-Apprentice (e.g., Jenni et al., 2017), online programs (e.g., Chew et al., 2023), nursery schools and head start programs, K-12 (e.g., Heimbecker, 1997; Nikkel, 2006) and postsecondary language classes (e.g., Sterzuk & Fayant, 2016). Effective Indigenous language learning programs require effective Indigenous language teachers (Marlow & Siekmann, 2013). The assumption that speakers can teach their language without training places unfair burdens on Indigenous language teachers who are expected to produce new speakers when they have no first-hand experience of class-based Indigenous language learning (Nikkel, 2006). The teachers doing the work at the heart of language reclamation often have little to no fulsome understanding of its scope and fundamentals.

Indigenous language (and culture) teachers in K-12 schools support reclamation of Indigenous educational sovereignty and create culturally-nourishing learning contexts, in addition to providing students with access to an Indigenous language (Marlow & Siekmann, 2012; McIvor & McCarty, 2017). Indigenous peoples have advocated for Indigenous languages in schools as subjects and mediums of instruction since at least the 1970s (Indian Tribes of Manitoba, 1971; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Some schools have initiated Indigenous mother tongue programs, immersion, bilingual or core Indigenous language as a second language programs. Universities have delivered teacher education programs targeted at future Indigenous teachers. However, these specialized Indigenous Bachelor of Education programs have not provided adequate training on how to teach Indigenous languages, nor on how to use Indigenous language as a medium of instruction (Blair et al., 2003; Johns & Mazurkewich, 2001; Nikkel, 2006; Okemaw, 2019). As a result, many Indigenous language teachers have not had the training or support they need to teach the languages in ways that will create new speakers, reclaim former domains of use, expand the

language into new domains, and combat the erasure and silencing of Indigenous languages (Laurin, 2021; Okemaw, 2019; Robin & Wilson, 2021). Calls to Action #16 and #62 of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) assert that universities have a critical role to play in supporting the revitalization of Indigenous languages through degree programs and the education of teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms. Our work examines how we can move from the identified needs to a transformative praxis aimed at revitalizing Indigenous languages (Smith, 2005).

3. Theoretical Framework

Language revitalization is part of broader movements reclaiming Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination (Makokis et al., 2010; Pitawanakwat, 2009). Its outcomes and processes are reflective of Indigenous rights, and are fundamentally relational. The Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan explain that according to Indigenous peoples' creation stories, language originates from the Creator, as a sacred gift that is necessary to develop relationships with other human beings as well as the living environment (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000). According to Indigenous law, languages are considered a gift from the Creator and important to the cultural identity of the people; there is therefore an implied responsibility of language transmission onto the next generation occurs (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000). Article 13(1) of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes that "Indigenous peoples have the right to (...) transmit to future generations their (...) languages (...)", and Article 14(1) affirms "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning." Subparagraph 5(b)(iv) of Canada's *Indigenous Languages Act* (2019) recognizes immersion as a fundamental means for supporting Indigenous peoples' efforts to reclaim, revitalize and maintain Indigenous languages, and yet Indigenous teacher training in language teaching methods has not been explicitly identified as a priority.

Miami scholar Wesley Leonard (2021) defines language reclamation work as driven by and reflective of community needs, cognizant of and responsive to the power structures and systems that have oppressed and attempted to erase Indigenous languages. Cherokee scholar Bri Alexander (2018, pp. 98–100) emphasizes that "Having access to language, then, is (...) about being in control of one's history, present, and future in a holistic way. Language learning (...) is an act of decolonization and empowerment. (...) [and] a reclamation of histories, values, and cultural knowledge." Opportunities to know, learn, and use Indigenous languages contribute to individual and community well-being (Jenni et al., 2017). Language revitalization work is inseparable from the task of building right relationships with oneself, within and across communities.

4. Methodology

This article examines the role of teacher professional learning in Indigenous language reclamation, and more specifically the role of universities in providing such professional learning opportunities. Based on our positionality and commitment, each of the co-authors has community-anchored partnerships working toward Indigenous language revitalization. Since 2018, we have worked together and with community partners and colleagues to see how and if we can leverage our university positions to support more efficient language learning through Indigenous language programs and professional learning for Indigenous teachers. This has involved working with the federal and provincial governments, a school division, community members, and consulting documents they have produced, to understand locally-identified needs for Indigenous language

teacher training. We also conducted an environmental scan of Indigenous language teacher training programs in Canada, and a literature review of promising practices in Indigenous language teacher education. We used this learning as a foundation for work with other faculty members, deans, the registrar and student advisors, consultants, and others with experience developing and delivering postsecondary courses in Indigenous languages for Indigenous language teachers, in order to develop and pilot university programs in Indigenous languages and to support Indigenous language teaching. Here, we present the results of the environmental scan and literature review. We also use self-study (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009) to reflect on our processes of learning and working together as scholars of language revitalization with responsibilities to communities. Our findings are discussed below, under these three headings: Evidence of the Need for Indigenous Language Teacher Training; Indigenous Language Teacher Training Initiatives at Postsecondary Institutions; and Indigenous Language Teacher Training Considerations.

5. Research Results

5.1 Evidence of the Need for Indigenous Language Teacher Training

5.1.1 Lack of Language Pedagogy Courses in Indigenous B.Ed. Programs

Indigenous language teacher training is needed to bring more teachers into schools, improve Indigenous language learning outcomes, and to fulfill language policy and legislation. Following Wahbung: Our Tomorrows (Indian Tribes of Manitoba, 1971) and Indian Control of Indian Education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972), teacher training programs for Indigenous education assistants and future Indigenous teachers were launched in the early 1970s (for a history of such programs see Okemaw, 2019 and McGregor & McGregor, 2022). The goal was to bring more Indigenous educators into schools to support and serve Indigenous students and to improve the educational experiences of Indigenous children. These teachers were to staff mother tongue programs where the language was still strong; and immersion, bilingual or second language programs where the language was no longer transmitted at home. These programs rarely addressed how to teach an Indigenous language, or how to teach in immersion, bilingual or mother tongue programs (Johns & Mazurkewich, 2001; McGregor & McGregor, 2022; Okemaw, 2019). Some required entrants to speak the Indigenous language (e.g., Nunavut Arctic College's Nunavut Teacher Education Program). Some taught the language, or linguistic analysis of the language (Johns & Mazurkewich, 2004; Okemaw, 2019). However, second language teaching methods were largely absent, and the teaching approaches future teachers were taught to use modeled practices in Western schools, with little attention to Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. The result is that some language teachers are less effective than they could be (though some are also intuitively phenomenal teachers), Indigenous language teachers are burdened with unrealistic expectations, burn out and high turnover rates are frequent, and the numbers of teachers are far too low to meet the demand.

5.1.2 National and International Law

The huge gaps in Indigenous language teachers are counter to the objectives of Canada's *Indigenous Languages Act* (2019) which include to “support Indigenous language learning and cultural activities — including language nest, mentorship and immersion programs — to increase the number of new speakers of Indigenous languages” (Subparagraph 5(b)(iv)). The gaps are also counter to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (2021) which requires that all federal laws comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Article 14 of UNDRIP recognizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to

provide education in their own languages. These objectives require effective, culturally-appropriate Indigenous language teacher training.

5.1.3 Manitoba Case Study: The Need for Indigenous Language Teachers

Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy (MALS) has been working to address the need for more fluent speakers and Indigenous language teachers in Manitoba. Established in 2015, MALS formalized a partnership between Manitoba's Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning's Indigenous Inclusion Directorate, the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, the University College of the North, and Indigenous Languages of Manitoba. Grandparents from each local language group as well as leaders from First Nations, Métis and Inuit organizations, provincial schools and postsecondary institutions provide direction on how to best support Indigenous language revitalization. Since 2017, MALS has been supporting the development of Indigenous language teacher training. A number of surveys documented the need for more Indigenous language teachers (MALS, 2016), the need for training programs for Indigenous language teachers (Laurin, 2018), and the challenges school boards face in staffing Indigenous language programs (Passey & Laurin, 2019).

A Manitoba-wide survey on current practices and needs in Indigenous languages in K–12 schools found that only 10% of Manitoba's public K–12 schools were offering Indigenous language programs, due in large part to a lack of Indigenous language teachers: over one thousand Indigenous language teachers are required to meet the need (Manitoba Department of Education and Education and Early Childhood Learning: Indigenous Inclusion Directorate, 2021). Many more Indigenous language educators are needed for community-based and university-based programs.

As a case in point, this same 2021 survey identified only four schools in Manitoba that were offering bilingual or immersion programming, two of which were in Winnipeg: Isaac Brock School and Riverbend Community School. Launched in 2016, in response to Indigenous community demand for programs to ensure children became proficient in Cree or Ojibwe language and culture in school, Isaac Brock offered full immersion in Cree or Ojibwe in Kindergarten, then 50/50 instruction in Cree or Ojibwe and English in Grades 1 and 2. Riverbend Community School offers 50/50 instruction in Ojibwe and English originally from Kindergarten to grade three and currently up to Grade 5. Over sixty children registered in the first year. The goal was to add an additional grade level each year up to grade twelve. Both schools incorporate cultural teachings into the curriculum for all students, such as naming ceremonies, full moon ceremonies, sweat lodges, feasts, and land-based activities (Riel, 2020; Sinclair, 2018).

In program reviews, teachers say the bilingual programs improve the lives of Indigenous students. They notice an increase in pride in their cultural identity, as well as improvement in their mental and physical well-being. Parents say their children are engaged in classroom activities and healthy relationships with classmates and teachers (Riel, 2020; Sinclair, 2018). These bilingual programs are managing but face challenges in their day-to-day operations. One threat is that of finding qualified teachers as the programs expand: "We were aware of limited human resources and knew it would be difficult to run a full bilingual program with limited fluent language speakers. In an ideal world we will have many teachers but we don't live in that world" (school administrator quoted in Sinclair, 2018, pp. 31–32).

To ensure these programs continue, the development of teacher training programs that are specific to teaching Indigenous languages are crucial. Developing teaching methodologies, evaluation and assessment methods that are culturally responsive in form and process, but also fundamentally as rigorous as those for so-called world languages is essential. Other networking opportunities with Indigenous language teachers from other jurisdictions to gain insight into best practices would also be helpful (Sinclair, 2018). Resources are needed to hire full time curriculum developers who are trained in effective immersion methodologies and other language resources that are necessary for

these programs (Sinclair, 2018). Moreover, expansion of these programs is needed across the province to ensure all children have the opportunity to learn the language of their ancestors, even when the number of speakers is very low. Currently, Indigenous speech communities in Manitoba with very low numbers of speakers, such as Michif, are not presently represented through Indigenous language classes in K-12 schools.

5.2 Indigenous Language Teacher Training Initiatives at Postsecondary Institutions in Canada

A 2019 environmental scan (Fontaine & Wodtke, 2019) identified at least sixty-two postsecondary institutions in Canada offering Indigenous languages courses. Of these, thirty-two list full degree, diploma, or certificate programs in Indigenous languages,¹ with 36.7% of these being offered by Indigenous or community colleges and 75% offering a diploma or certificate. Many ladder into degree programs, or provide transfer credit to degree programs.

A number of Canadian universities have developed and delivered programs to respond to the need for Indigenous language teachers. Some provide a language learning or linguistic approach, others focus on language revitalization. Some are developed and delivered with or by Indigenous organizations and/or delivered in Indigenous communities or online. Information on their structure and content below is based on the Universities' websites' descriptions of the programs, and reflect what is possible at the university or college, but not necessarily what is currently happening.

5.2.1 British Columbia

The University of Victoria and Simon Fraser University offer programs in Indigenous Languages at the certificate, diploma, bachelor, and graduate (graduate certificate and master's) levels. Both work in close partnership with diverse Indigenous communities to offer programs on campus and in communities. Both focus on building proficiency, as well as linguistic analysis of the languages, but also include courses on pedagogy and materials development.

The University of Victoria's diploma and degree programs in language revitalization require some proficiency (courses taken) in an Indigenous language. The University of Victoria's B.Ed. in Indigenous Language Revitalization focuses on language proficiency and general teaching excellence. The master programs focus on Indigenous approaches to research and practice, and language revitalization strategies more broadly.

The University of British Columbia offers an interdisciplinary BA (major and minor) in First Nations and Endangered Languages. The program was developed and is delivered in partnership with the Musqueam Indian Band, with a focus on language learning, documentation, and conservation. Indigenous language courses are delivered in the community and documentation/conservation/revitalization and cognate courses are offered on campus. This program does not focus on teaching language learners how to teach their language to others.

5.2.2 Alberta

The Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Institute (CILLDI) is the most thoroughly documented postsecondary program for Indigenous language teachers (Blair et al., 2003; Blair et al., 2018, Blair et al., 2021). Established in 2000, at the University of Alberta, this Institute is for current and future advocates and teachers, including speakers and non-speakers. An annual in-person summer school offers courses in Cree language for beginners, linguistics of Indigenous languages, language revitalization, and courses relevant to teaching Indigenous languages. Students can earn a Community Linguist Certificate or ladder their courses toward a B.Ed. degree.

University Blue Quills ladders certificate, diploma, and BA programs in Nêhiyawêwin (Cree) and Dene languages include classes to build oral and written proficiency (tailored to incoming proficiency levels), as well as classes in second language acquisition and language revitalization methods. It also offers an MA in Indigenous languages focusing on linguistics, with second language acquisition and language revitalization courses.

5.2.3 Saskatchewan

The University of Regina and First Nations University offer a certificate in First Nations language instruction. It is a 30-credit-hour, part-time program that combines general courses in education and linguistics, with courses in an Indigenous language and on immersion and bilingual Indigenous language education and curriculum. It is intended for students who are fluent² in an Indigenous language and have some teaching experience. B.Ed. students can also choose to focus on Cree immersion as a specialty within their degree program. The University also offers a Master of Indigenous Language Education.

The University of Saskatchewan offers a certificate in Indigenous languages. This 30-credit-hour program is only available for students in the B.Ed. program, or who are taking it as a post-graduate program. Students take courses in second language pedagogies, including specific courses in established approaches such as total physical response, immersion, master-apprentice, root-word method, and others. The program is specifically for Cree language teachers, and includes Cree immersion camp to advance proficiency. The University of Saskatchewan B.Ed. students may also choose to take the Cree stream in the Language Teacher Education Program, which includes Cree language proficiency courses and four courses in teaching core subjects through Cree.

5.2.4 Manitoba

The University College of the North offers a certificate program in teaching Ininimowin (Cree). This program focuses on Cree language pedagogies and advanced language learning. Courses are taught in Cree and students entering the program must be speakers. The focus is on training teachers that work in northern Manitoba communities.

Red River College previously offered a 2-year Aboriginal language specialist program. Following a program evaluation, it offered two pilot programs starting in 2017 in Cree and Ojibwe language (Chartrand, 2019). These 1-year certificates, with two, three-week practicum placements, aim to train educational assistants for Indigenous bilingual programs in the K–12 system or in community-based programs that emphasize language learning. The certificate is available to fluent and non-fluent speakers and assists with learning how to read and write using the double vowel system in Ojibwe.

In 2020, the University of Winnipeg launched a bachelor program in Indigenous languages, an interdisciplinary major drawing on language courses in Indigenous studies and language revitalization courses offered through linguistics and anthropology. The program development was informed by the goals and concerns of Indigenous communities, organizations and school boards, and programs were established in collaboration with community partners such as the Indigenous Languages of Manitoba and the Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy (MALS). Cree and Anishinaabe learners can now take beginner, intermediate, and advanced language courses, as well as get credit for language mentorship and community-based learning. Michif is also offered, and Dakota learners can take courses through Brandon University and transfer them back to the University of Winnipeg.

The BA was followed by the development of two 30-credit-hour certificate programs building on state-of-the-art knowledge around second language acquisition, bilingualism, and Indigenous education. The Certificate in Teaching Indigenous Languages for Vitality focuses on culturally-

responsive language pedagogies such as task/project based immersion, and the impact of context in teaching and learning Indigenous languages (social justice and trauma-informed lens). The program responds to a pressing need for teachers who will transmit the language in ways that lead to increased community use of Indigenous languages. It is offered part-time, online, to a cohort of learners. The second certificate, which has been approved but not yet offered, would teach other school staff and teachers (principals, subject and homeroom teachers) how to support Indigenous languages in schools, including cross-curricular Indigenous language learning and creating a positive atmosphere for Indigenous language use.

5.2.5 Ontario

In Ontario, Lakehead University and Nipissing University offer an Indigenous Language Teacher Diploma (ILTD, formerly Native Language Teacher Diploma) and a Teacher of Indigenous Language as a Second Language Program (TILSL), respectively. In both programs, entrants must be fluent in a designated Indigenous language. Graduates are eligible for the Certificate of Qualification and Registration from the Ontario College of Teachers to teach an Indigenous language from Kindergarten to Grade 12, and can ladder their courses toward a B.Ed. degree. In Lakehead's ILTD program, established in 1981, students take general teacher education courses in the fall and winter, and summer courses that focus on the structure of Algonquian languages (Cree, Oji-Cree and Ojibwe) and second language teaching methods. The program is completed over four summers and three fall-winter terms. Additional courses in Indigenous languages are available at the University.

For Nipissing University's TILSL, courses are offered online in fall, winter, and spring, and in person in North Bay every summer. It is a 60-credit-hour program which includes courses in curriculum; pedagogy and assessment; Indigenous language learning and language assessment; three practicum courses, and courses in one of five Indigenous languages.

Six Nations Polytechnic offers a Bachelor of Arts in Ogwehóweh Languages (major and honours options) which includes learning the language, language revitalization, and critical reflection on language learning processes.

Carleton University offers a PhD in Linguistics, Language Revitalization, and Documentation as well as an MA in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies. These programs are not specifically geared toward Indigenous students, nor future Indigenous language teachers or Indigenous scholars of language education, but they have optional course work in language curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and are taught—in part—by faculty with research expertise in Indigenous languages.

5.2.6 Quebec

McGill University offers a 30-credit-hour Certificate in Indigenous Language and Literacy Education. It is also offering an ad-hoc (student-designed) MA in Indigenous languages which students can adapt to be a language teaching and pedagogies program through available courses.

5.2.7 Other initiatives

As listed in footnote 1, seventeen other relevant postsecondary programs are or have been taught across Canada. Indigenous language teacher training is also available in non-degree,³ non-accredited or non-formal programs and initiatives. For example, as part of the Yawenda project in Huron-Wendat language revitalization, Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue partnered with the Huron-Wendat First Nation to provide a 15-credit-hour program that would support future Huron-Wendat language teachers (Sioui et al., 2008). Queen's University offers a 12-credit-hour Certificate in Mohawk Language and Culture, delivered in Tyendinaga, Mohawk Territory, in

partnership with the Tsi Tyónnheht Onkwawén:na Language and Culture Centre. The focus is to develop speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in Mohawk. Six Nations Polytechnic offers 12-week professional development courses for certified teachers in teaching Mohawk, teaching Cayuga, and teaching Ojibwe.

Many postsecondary institutions across the country are also offering Indigenous language courses within, for example, Indigenous studies or other majors. These are not focused on Indigenous language teacher training, but make a contribution to augmenting the environment in which more people have access to learning and using Indigenous languages. Some universities (e.g., St. Francis Xavier) offer one or two Indigenous language pedagogies courses within their B.Ed. program Indigenous languages as a teachable focus without offering a full-fledged Indigenous languages teaching program like the ones described above. All of these programs form an important part of the picture of Indigenous language teacher training and certification in Canada.

5.3 Indigenous Language Teacher Training Considerations

The work of universities in training Indigenous language teachers can give more children, youth, and adults access to learning and using an Indigenous language, consistent with the inherent right acknowledged by elders. Universities, as Western institution with colonial histories, face challenges in developing and implementing programs in such a way as to avoid recolonizing language learning, and in facilitating the fluency of future teachers and students. Additionally, they struggle to reinforce language transmission in a manner that supports community goals, belonging, strong relationships and connectedness, and community well-being.

In this section, we present considerations regarding opportunities, challenges, and promising practices in Indigenous language teacher training that are consistent with language reclamation as a decolonizing process focused on well-being and relationship. Our reflections build on published literature about Indigenous language teacher training, rationales in proposals for Indigenous language teacher training programs that were collected in the University of Winnipeg's 2019 environmental scan (Fontaine & Wodtke, 2019), presentations by program developers outside of the University of Winnipeg given in our 2019 Indigenous languages planning workshop (Fontaine & Wodtke, 2020), and reflections and discussions among the University of Winnipeg team, and between faculty members and community organizations and individuals, over the past four years.

We also draw on two evaluations of a pilot certificate on the teaching of Indigenous languages. This program was comprised of four courses (12 credit hours) that were modeled after the University of Winnipeg's English as a Second Language program, conducted by Indigenous Languages of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. The goal of the first evaluation was to receive feedback from students, teachers, and community members to determine how the program could be improved in a postsecondary context (Laurin, 2021). The second evaluation consisted of feedback from Indigenous language and education specialists to gain insight into where such a program should be offered (Robin & Wilson, 2021).

5.3.1 Community Collaboration

A key theme in discussions around successful Indigenous language teacher training is that of ensuring community involvement in program development (Passey & Laurin, 2019), materials development, and program delivery (Czaykowska-Higgins et al., 2017). In the British Columbia programs considered above, the universities partnered directly with specific communities to adapt and deliver the program with and in the community, and with community members as instructors and co-instructors, paid at the same rate as part-time instructors hired by the university (McIvor et al., 2018). The Government of British Columbia also defers to community language authorities, which must recognize Indigenous language teacher candidates as sufficiently fluent and

appropriate candidates to teach the language prior to licensure in British Columbia (Government of British Columbia, n.d.).

As the University of Winnipeg developed its programs, it partnered with Indigenous Languages of Manitoba, the Manitoba Aboriginal Languages Strategy, and the Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle. The perspectives of these organizations, which represent diverse Indigenous communities across the province, were essential for identifying community needs and priorities in program development and delivery. The tangible role of Indigenous Languages Manitoba as the administrator of the first Teaching Indigenous Languages Pilot Program also contributed to students feeling welcome and supported in the program, and maintaining Indigenous ownership and control.

Considerations around community collaboration include understanding that communities are not homogenous, and different stakeholders and individuals might have different needs and priorities. Also, the faculty members consulting with communities are not necessarily the ones with the power to approve and administer programs, which can lead to confusion regarding communication and expectations. Ongoing community involvement can create local communities of practice that foster well-being, relationships, and local control, consistent with goals of language reclamation.

5.3.2 Overcoming Hegemonies

University involvement in professional learning for Indigenous language teachers needs to be deliberately decolonizing, and explicitly address the hegemonies and colonial attitudes and practices that led to and have perpetuated the silencing and erasure of Indigenous languages. Hegemonies include the normalization of monolingualism and linguistic conformity, versus the global norm of diversity and multilingualism (Bear Nicholas, 2009), as well as Western beliefs prioritizing degrees and credentials over lived experience in determining expertise.

Current and pre-service teachers need critical professional development that makes space for them to question the system, think and work outside the box, and become equipped as advocates and change-makers (Tulloch et al., 2018). Part of their job in schools and communities involves combating attitudes and folk knowledge about language that continue to marginalize Indigenous languages, and that come from within as well as from outside (Mercredi, 2021). Current and future Indigenous language teachers often know only Western styles of language learning, with a focus on literacy, or linguistic analysis, as they were taught in school, and as they may have been taught to teach in Western teacher education programs. Cree teacher and CILLDI instructor Belinda Daniels explains:

I was working through Western ideologies of thinking, and things were not making sense for me (. ...) Later, I came to realize that ceremony is critically important in teaching our languages (. ...) We cannot really learn an Indigenous language without recognizing that land is part of the learning process.

Blair et al., 2021, pp. 65, 67

Current and pre-service teachers also need support to rethink language-as-an-object biases, and teach for oral communication, relationship, and connection, consistent with community goals. The teachers who taught in the University of Winnipeg's Teaching Indigenous Languages Pilot Program emphasized that:

The goal of any language program should be to support and re-establish Indigenous relationships with the language, not only for practical purposes but for the overall health of communities and to help alleviate shame that many non-language speakers experience in not knowing their native tongue.

Robin & Wilson, 2021, pp. 21–22

Designing programs that support future and current teachers as they train to pass on their language, by adopting a decolonizing, social justice, trauma-informed lens is part of training teachers in a new way, acknowledging the contexts in which they are teaching their language (cf. al-Bataineh et al., 2022; Blair et al., 2021).

Undoing hegemonies also involves universities rethinking or being flexible within their own power structures in terms of who develops, delivers, and evaluates programs. For example, the processes adopted by the University of British Columbia (above) show how the role of the university and professors as experts needs to and can be questioned, recognizing communities and knowledge-holders as the most appropriate place to start developing evaluations of language proficiency and language teachers. Negotiating roles in ways that are culturally appropriate, acceptable to the university, and lead to effective language learning is also complicated when mother-tongue speakers learned their languages through natural immersion as children (Alexie et al., 2009). The second language learning methodologies needed today stem from a different context, complicating the question of criteria for language teachers. The question to be asked is: Who is actually trained in immersion-based pedagogies that address the needs of speech communities with diminished vitality?

5.3.3 Indigenous Language Proficiency

In the programs considered, some require fluency (see footnote 2) in the language as an admissions requirement (or practical requirement to take the coursework in the language), others required some initial learning (e.g., one course), and still others require only a commitment to learning the language. For some, proficiency is a gatekeeper to the program, and for others it is an outcome. The University of Victoria offers a scaled approach, starting with a community-based, 15-credit-hour program in Indigenous language proficiency, with a focus on supported and self-directed language learning, which can then be used toward a diploma and/or degree in language revitalization. This multiple entry and exit system has been a success factor in its programs (McIvor et al., 2018). Lakehead University's program requires fluency, but has mechanisms (e.g., through coursework at Lakehead, and through a feeder agreement with Georgian College) for potential teachers to gain fluency prior to the program. The University of Winnipeg's Teaching Indigenous Languages Pilot Program was offered to current K–12 Indigenous language teachers with some degree of fluency; the revised Teaching Indigenous Languages for Vitality program requires only a commitment to learning the language, and the first cohort received support for concurrent language learning, where needed or desired. Prairies to Woodlands ILR Circle Inc. ran both a team-based and a group-based mentor-apprentice program that supported some of the students, and university-based language courses were also available. Concurrent to developing professional learning in Indigenous language pedagogies, the University of Winnipeg has been working to increase the number of Indigenous languages taught (Michif was added in 2023), as well as the level to which each language can be taught and learned (an articulation agreement with the University of Manitoba allows students to take advanced courses seamlessly at either university to reduce the demand for limited instructor availability and increase student access).

Language learning is an essential part of Indigenous teacher education programs, although it does not need to take place at a university. The current fluent teaching population is aging (Okemaw, 2022), and communities have fewer speakers who could become teacher candidates (McIvor et al., 2018). Some communities might be willing or need to accept individuals teaching the language while they are still language learners as the need for teachers and for opportunities to access language is urgent (e.g. Hinton, 2003; Moore & Dicker, 2024; Tulloch et al., 2022). Also, language learning is lifelong. Speakers may need to learn new uses or forms of the language to teach. For example, Red River College focused on writing a particular orthography to support its use in schools. Finally, it is challenging to understand language learning perspectives without having experienced language learning: incorporating language learning into Indigenous language teacher programs gives teachers a model of, and first-hand experience in, teaching and learning a second language.

5.3.4 Accreditation

A tension in the development and delivery of professional learning for Indigenous language teachers is between accredited programs (such as university certificate, diploma, and degree programs) and non-accredited programs (such as one-off not-for-credit university initiatives, professional development workshops, and non-formal programs offered by Indigenous organizations). Potential students in Indigenous language teacher education programs are a diverse group, and have diverse wants and needs in terms of accreditation. Many potential participants for such programs are teachers. In a 2001 survey, Manitoba school principals and superintendents were most supportive of workshops and in-services (76% of respondents), and conferences (62% of respondents) to support the professional development of Indigenous language teachers. They strongly supported university involvement through Indigenous language proficiency courses (90%), and courses in Indigenous language teaching (76% of respondents), but were less supportive (38% of respondents) of full university or college programs for their teachers (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2001, p. 5). These preferences are echoed in informal reflections on the University of Winnipeg's first roll-out of the Teaching Indigenous Languages for Vitality Certificate, where full-time teachers found it difficult to find time for classes, reading, and homework, despite the school board providing time off, because there were no other teachers to cover for them (as well as other reasons). On the other hand, the Prairies to Woodlands Indigenous Language Revitalization Circle cohort of five potential Michif teachers, who have tuition covered and are paid to attend class, do homework, and engage in master-apprentice language learning, has seen no attrition in spite of the rigour of the program.

Half-day professional learning workshops can provide an opportunity for teachers to learn from each other, build a community of practice, and learn small chunks that they are able to implement prior to the next workshop. These require a commitment to sustained ongoing workshops. Professional development workshops provide short-term support for language teachers, but they do not address the bigger picture of overturning the hegemony of English in schools and across Canada.

In two evaluations of the University of Winnipeg's Teaching Indigenous Languages 4-course summer pilot, participants emphasized that it should be an accredited program for students who want to obtain a university degree. Some of the participants indicated that they must re-apply for their position every year because they have no formal teacher training, but they are the only fluent speaker at the school. The comments reflected that, currently, there is very little support available for Indigenous language teachers anywhere in Manitoba and that the isolation can be damaging to their self-esteem and advancement.

Accredited programs increase the visibility and respect given to Indigenous language teaching as a career. They also provide a foundation for graduate level work in Indigenous languages pedagogies, which is necessary for building a community of Indigenous scholars who can expand the theory and practice of Indigenous language pedagogies across academia and into schools. The SLATE program at University of Alaska Fairbanks is an example: originally an MA program in Applied Linguistics for current teachers, it expanded into a PhD program. Past Indigenous language teachers with lengthy lived experience in Indigenous classrooms are now the ones creating and publishing theories of Indigenous language learning, and teaching upcoming generations of Indigenous language teachers and scholars (Marlow & Siekmann, 2013).

Conclusion

Indigenous language teachers, especially those who will be teaching in K–12 schools or universities, have an uphill battle to find ways to pass on their language in school settings in ways that are appropriate for their communities, nourishing to the learners, and effective for creating new speakers. The challenge is worth it. There are methodologies (task and project-based language teaching, for example) that can be culturally responsive, trauma informed and decolonizing, and which can be used in classrooms with a focus on bringing the learning to the family, extended family, and community settings and then back into schools for relational, reciprocal learning (e.g. al-Bataineh, 2020, Tulloch et al., 2022).

Universities have an obligation, under the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and in order to help Canada fulfill the purpose of the *Indigenous Languages Act* and comply with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to develop and deliver effective Indigenous language teacher training programs. These programs must be developed and delivered with communities, with conscious attention to question and be willing to reject the hegemonies embedded in Western educational systems.

The Māori scholar of decolonizing education, Graham Smith, states that language reclamation work needs to move beyond identifying problems and needs and actually work to transform structures and systems that have oppressed and attempted to erase Indigenous languages (Smith, 2005). Universities across Canada have taken up the challenge of training Indigenous language teachers. We recognize the irony of using inherently colonial universities to train educators in Indigenous language education. In spite of this, we see the need to respond to an urgent and immediate demand to build the capacity and credibility of Indigenous language workers and provide them with at least some access to power and authority within colonial frameworks that would empower them to contribute to decolonizing Indigenous language revitalization and Indigenous language education in all spheres of life. We have a responsibility to continue to learn from each other, and to create strong working relationships between and within postsecondary institutions, Indigenous communities and organizations, and school divisions and government departments, to offer effective and meaningful Indigenous language teacher professional learning programs. Programs need to be accessible, feasible, and meet the immediate teaching needs of teachers. They also have the potential to recreate and transform the landscape and the way in which teacher training is delivered, with a view to the immediate future and beyond.

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Notes

[1] Postsecondary Indigenous language certificate, diploma, and degree programs across Canada include: Algoma University (Anishinaabemowin), Aurora College (Aboriginal language and culture instructor), Blue Quills First Nations College (Cree language; Indigenous languages), Brock University (Indigenous language), Capilano University (language & culture certificates in Lil'wat, Sechelt, and Squamish), First Nations University of Canada (Cree, Saulteaux, and/or linguistics; First Nations language instructors), Georgian College (Anishinaabemowin and program development), Lakehead University (Indigenous language instructor's program in Anishinaabemowin), Maskwacis Cultural College (Cree language instructor), McGill University (Indigenous language and literacy education), Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (Indigenous language; Indigenous language teaching), Nipissing University (Teacher of Indigenous Language as a Second Language), Nunavut Arctic College (Inuinnaqtun language revitalization), Queen's University (Mohawk language and culture), Red River College (Cree and Ojibwe), Sault College (Anishinaabemowin immersion), Simon Fraser University (Indigenous language proficiency; Linguistics of an Indigenous Language), Six Nations Polytechnic (Ogwehoweh languages), St. Thomas University (Native language immersion teaching), Thompson Rivers University (First Nations languages), Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (Algonquian languages), University College of the North (teaching Ininimowin), Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (professional development in the teaching of an Indigenous language), University of Alberta (community linguist), University of British Columbia (First Nations and endangered languages), University of the Fraser Valley (Aboriginal culture and language support), University of Manitoba (Indigenous languages), University of Northern British Columbia (First Nations language), University of Regina (First Nations language instruction; extended studies in First Nations language), University of Saskatchewan (Indigenous languages), University of Victoria (Indigenous language revitalization), Yellowhead Tribal College (Indigenous languages), Yukon College (Native language teacher).

[2] The term “fluent” is used here because it is the term that the University of Saskatchewan, and other programs considered below use in their admissions criteria. However, we acknowledge that the term “fluent” is problematic because language competencies exist on a continuum, can vary over time and across contexts, and across oral, written, and other genres. Which levels of proficiency are considered “fluent” can change depending on who is evaluating the speaker.

[3] We differentiate here between official certificate, diploma, and degree programs listed in university calendars, and typically 30, 60, and 90–120 credit hours respectively, and ad-hoc certificate of completion programs that may include credit courses, but are fewer than 30 credit hours and are not senate-approved programs in the postsecondary institution's course calendar.

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(<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/teach/become-a-teacher/apply/apply-for-language-certificate#:~:text=To%20apply%20for%20the%20First,complete%20and%20submit%20the%20form>)
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