

# **Creating a Home Kit for Teaching Tłchq Language: Starting with Input from Parents and Educators**

Nazila Eisazadeh, Erica McDonald, Shannon Wedawin, Suchitra Yadav, Gloria Francis, and Shelley Stagg Peterson

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## **ABSTRACT**

Indigenous Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), who are interns in Aurora College's Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Diploma program, conducted collaborative action research with university researchers to learn about ways to support children's Indigenous language and culture learning and to gain research experience, skills and knowledge. This study was part of their professional learning within the program, and was part of the partnership that the ELCC program has with the University of Toronto's Northern Oral language and Writing through Play (NOW Play) Partnership Project. The research addresses a legacy of the Residential School system and other colonialist policies and practices - that many parents and caregivers of Indigenous children have not experienced intergenerational transmission of their ancestral language and are not fluent speakers. We present the findings of interviews with 18 Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, parents and ECEs in Denendeh/ Northwest Territories. Inductive analysis of interview transcripts revealed four types of language learning strategies that interview participants used with children or used themselves to learn a language: Singing that focuses on actions, rhythm and melody; accessing language through environmental print; accessing a language speaker; and hearing language in context in media and digital apps. From these themes, the ECEs developed experiential-based home kits for teaching and learning of Indigenous languages at home.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Language reflects ways of viewing the world and the culture of communities. In previous centuries, when all adults within Indigenous communities were fluent speakers of their Indigenous languages, children learned their community's language and culture through everyday social interactions with family and community members (McIvor, 2020). Through natural intergenerational language transmission, Indigenous languages remained strong across North America until assimilative policies and practices, such as the forcible removal of Indigenous children to attend residential schools, led to a drastic decrease in the number of fluent speakers of Indigenous languages (McIvor, 2020). In residential schools, Indigenous children were punished for using their Indigenous languages and separated from siblings and others that they knew well, resulting in having no opportunity to interact in their language, nor to experience and learn their community's worldviews and cultures (Baskin, 2016).

Three of the authors of this paper have experienced and observed the devastating impact that failures to support Indigenous languages and cultures have had on Indigenous children's identities and learning (Rameka & Peterson, 2021). These authors understand firsthand the socio-emotional barriers that prevent parents and other family members from using their ancestral language in order for intergenerational language transmission to occur (Rosborough & Rorick, 2017). Erica, the daughter of Tim and Alma McDonald and the granddaughter of Boniface and Adeline Trippe-de-Roche and Joseph and Ethel McDonald, was raised in Treaty 8 territory and is a member of the Athabaskan Chipewyan First Nation, known as the K'ai Taile Dene. With the loss of her grandparents, along with her mother's forced attendance at residential school and the societal norms of the time, rarely was Dene spoken in Erica's home or to her. Erica did not have the opportunity to learn her Dene language, something she wishes she had. Shannon, the daughter of Barry Franklin and Doreen Wedawin, was raised in Treaty 11 territory and is a member of Tłıchǫ (Dogrib-Rae band) First Nation. Shannon was born and raised in a small rural community of Behchokǫ, Denendeh/Northwest territories. Shannon has little memory of hearing her mother speak their Indigenous language at home. She remembers being taught her Tłıchǫ culture/language in school, but this was never continued at home. Gloria was born and raised in Corner Brook, Newfoundland until she moved to Yellowknife, NWT in 2007. Her family descends from the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation band in Newfoundland, but she was never exposed to the traditional language of Mi'kmaq.

They and the three non-Indigenous authors of this paper recognize that Indigenous children in northern communities of the area known as Denendeh/Northwest Territories, the communities featured in our paper, are more likely to have a strong sense of their Indigenous identities and a sense of belonging to their community when they can continue speaking and understanding their Indigenous communities' language(s) (Reedy, 2003). The official language status within Denendeh/Northwest Territories of nine Indigenous languages (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, 2018), provides evidence of the importance of Indigenous language revitalization within Denendeh/Northwest Territories. However, the three Indigenous authors can identify only a few early learning centres in some of the smaller Indigenous communities where Indigenous languages are beginning to be used in limited ways (e.g., writing labels on objects around the room and teaching children to count in the community's Indigenous language). Their observations mirror those of Rosborough and Rorick (2017), in identifying the following challenges that must be overcome: "few fluent speakers available to teach the languages, the passing of elder speakers who hold specialized cultural and grammatical knowledge, limited availability of language resources, and social-emotional barriers resulting from colonization and assimilation policies and practices" (p. 120).

With the research purpose of gaining a better understanding of how early childhood educators can support intergenerational passing-on of Indigenous languages, we collaborated on a research study guided by the following research questions:

1. How do participants describe their experiences learning their languages and the opportunities available in their communities to learn their languages?
2. What principles and practices can be derived from our analysis of the interview data?

Erica and the interns in the second-year (Diploma) class decided to create home kits for participants in order to show appreciation to participants, but also in order to apply and deepen their learning from the research they had conducted.

In the following sections, we provide background information about the overall partnership project and the Aurora College Early Learning and Child Care program within which this research project took place. We then review relevant literature, describe our research methods, and present the findings and their influence on development of language learning materials as part of the Aurora College Early Learning and Child Care program.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **NOW Play Project and Collaborative Action Research**

Our interview research is an initial collaborative action research project of the Northern Oral language and Writing through Play (NOW Play) Partnership Project. Early childhood educators and teachers (who are positioned as research practitioners) in northern Canadian partner institutions and school boards collaborate on small-scale research projects with university researchers. Research questions start with the issues identified by research practitioners and research methods are collaboratively designed by university researchers and research practitioners (Bradbury-Huong, 2010; Cain, 2011; Cowie et al., 2015). Shelley Stagg Peterson, University of Toronto professor and NOW Play project director, and her university-based research team (which includes Nazila Eisazadeh) contribute research experience, knowledge and skills, and provide resources, such as recording devices, as needed by research practitioners. Research practitioners' action research projects are geared towards the overall goal of the NOW Play project, which is to develop experiential-based ways to support Indigenous children's writing and Indigenous language and cultural learning, leading to development of a toolkit of teaching practices and tools that can be adapted for use in local contexts. Additionally, in alignment with research showing the relationship between conducting action research and developing research skills with professional learning (Bleicher, 2014; Jaipal & Figg, 2011; Peterson et al., 2017), an important goal of the overall NOW Play project is to support northern educators' development of research experience, skills and knowledge. The research we report in this paper, thus, contributes new knowledge about teaching and learning Indigenous languages, and at the same time, supports the research practitioners' professional learning within their Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) program at Aurora College.

### **Early Learning and Child Care Program of Aurora College**

For over thirty years, Aurora College has offered a part-time, distance education Certificate in Early Childhood Development to prepare students to become educators of young children from birth to 11 years of age. In the last five years, this program has grown. In-person programs leading to an ELCC Certificate (one-year program) and an ELCC Diploma (two-year program), are now offered at the Yellowknife campus. Students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to work with families, community stakeholders and other professionals to support children's learning and development. Emphasis is on the development of an inclusive play-based curriculum for children with a focus on adapting Indigenous languages, cultures and traditions.

The ELCC program is one of three northern Indigenous ECE Certification and Diploma programs that are partnering with the University of Toronto team. Because of the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions on face-to-face classroom activity within the three programs, and thus, on opportunities to gather data in classrooms, the only research conducted within the NOW Play over the past two years is the interview research reported in this paper. As part of the coursework of the ELCC program and as a means to achieve the overall NOW Play project goals, Shelley, the NOW Play project director, provided training sessions on interview development, ethical conduct of researchers, note taking while conducting interviews, and data analysis. Shelley and Nazila,

the Postdoctoral Fellow of the project, mentored the Aurora College ELCC program-based authors of this paper (also including Suchitra, who was born and raised in a rural community in the Indian State of Bihar and has lived in Yellowknife since 2009), on the writing of research papers and interpreting the literature on Indigenous language revitalization (briefly summarized in the following section) as we collaborated on the writing of this paper.

### **Language Learning and Indigenous Language Revitalization**

Revitalizing Indigenous languages is “part of a larger movement restoring the value that all citizens can see in Indigenous ways of knowing” (McIvor, 2020, p. 79). Language revitalization begins with acknowledgement, and deconstruction of generations of assimilative and oppressive colonial policies and practices that have led to marginalization of Indigenous languages and cultures and a decline in the number of fluent Indigenous language speakers (Battiste, 2013). The aim of Indigenous language revitalization is generational continuity of Indigenous languages and cultures, as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people value and respect Indigenous knowledge and ways of being that are holistic, spiritual, relational, and always connected to and informed by the land (Battiste, 2013; Gaudry, 2015; Simpson, 2011).

Successful initiatives aim to develop children’s receptive and expressive language (Peltier, 2017). A study by Peterson et al. (2018) underscored the need for ongoing and multiple opportunities to hear and use the language in context, in order to develop express language. In this study, Indigenous children in an Aboriginal Head Start classroom enacted cultural practices familiar to their Anishnaabe educator in dramatic play over a few weeks. The children did not use Anishnaabemowin to describe cultural materials and practices in their dramatic play, but they did show their understanding of some words in songs by picking up a stuffed animal when it was named.

Within Indigenous communities where there are few adults who are fluent in speaking the language(s), children are not provided the needed ongoing and long-term exposure to their ancestral language(s), nor do they have plentiful opportunities to use the language(s) at home or school (Hinton et al., 2018; McIvor, 2020; Rorick, 2019; Rosborough & Rorick, 2017). Initiatives to develop adult fluency are thus necessary in order to provide the fluent adult models that children need (Hermes et al., 2012; Hinton & Hale, 2001; Rorick, 2019). Intergenerational language teaching approaches, including initiatives that involve the whole school and/or the community, are recommended to strengthen Indigenous language (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Government of Northwest Territories, 2020). The Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program is an example. Employed in a number of countries over the past 20 years (e.g., Canada, America, Mexico, Brazil, and Australia), this project matches a fluent speaker of the ancestral language (often an Elder) and a younger adult apprentice or, as has been done more recently, to multiple apprentices (Hinton et al., 2018). The Elder and apprentice(s) speak only in their Indigenous language whenever they get together.

The NWT offers a similar approach under the Mentor-Apprentice Program (Government of Northwest Territories, n.d.). In this program, northerners who reside in the NWT have the opportunity to work with a fluent Indigenous language speaker (approximately seven to ten hours weekly) in hopes of increasing new learners’ ability to understand and speak the target language. The mentor and apprentice must agree to spend this amount of time together through an immersion model to “live life in the language” (Government of Northwest Territories, n.d., para. 2) and do everyday activities while using only their Indigenous language. In the current

2022-2023 year, the program will be available to a maximum of ten pairs for the following six languages: Inuvialuktun, Gwich'in, North Slavey (also known as Dene K'ede), Dene Zhatié, Tłıcho, and Dëne Sų́ı́né.

Indigenous language revitalization initiatives should follow a holistic teaching/learning model that honours relational learning (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, 2018). Several suggested teaching approaches include: the use of Indigenous oral language wherever possible (e.g., to reference pictures in storybooks using names for objects or places); storytelling; Story Circles; and inviting Elders into the classroom to demonstrate and talk about land-based and culture-based practices (Peltier, 2017). It is recommended that such strategies be used across all teaching subjects throughout the school day, not just in one subject area such as literacy or cultural class (Todal, 2018). There is also growing interest in the use of technology to support Indigenous language revitalization, as recordings of Elders' storytelling and cultural practices preserve Elders' specialized cultural and grammatical knowledge for the next generations (Galla, 2016). It is important to ensure that natural language use in authentic land-based contexts is recorded to mitigate some of the tension surrounding learning language(s) through technology (Todal, 2018).

## METHODS

The NOW Play project, an example of collaborative action research, draws on one widely-recognized mode of action research: the practical one, where teachers and university researchers co-design pedagogical practices that are always adapted by participating educators, or the like, to establish what works best in the local context (Peterson et al., 2016). When it comes to community involvement concerning action research, the research is conducted "with" and not "on" participating communities. Community members (usually teachers and early childhood educators) collaborate in, for instance, collecting and analysing data as well as providing cultural knowledge about the community in which they are a part. Additionally, community ethics is obtained alongside any university ethics protocols. In the case of the research reported in this paper, the community is the instructors and interns of the Early Learning and Child Care program of Aurora College, Yellowknife campus. The NOW Play project has received ethics approval from Aurora College's and the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Committees, as well as a license to carry out research from the Aurora Research Institute.

Upon obtaining ethics approval and following an online class where Shelley introduced interview development tips (e.g., be as explicit as possible about the overall research purpose, then create specific research questions related to the purpose, and then develop specific questions for gathering information that addresses each question). Gloria, Shannon, Suchitra and the other five interns who were in the first year of their ELCC program (officially called the "Certificate" year) in 2020-2021, then worked with their instructor to create interview questions related to classroom and home language and culture teaching. Gloria did a trial with four parents within her social network over the summer of 2021 using the initial protocol. When she brought her notes about what participants said in the interviews to class in the second year of the program (officially called the "Diploma" year), Erica and the rest of the class agreed that the interview protocol was not useful to gather the desired information.

After consultation with Shelley, the eight interns and Erica decided to narrow the research purpose to supporting Indigenous children's language learning in the home and developed a new interview protocol when they returned to the ELCC program in their second (Diploma) year in 2021-2022. All eight interns did mock interviews with Aurora College instructors to gain confidence in their interviewing skills and to determine how well the research purpose was fulfilled with the questions. As a group, the class made minor changes to the questions to create the final interview protocol (found in Appendix).

Participant recruitment involved social media. Gloria posted an initial short generic invitation on her Facebook page, which did not generate any interest two weeks after being posted. She and her peers then created a more specific, detailed invitation and posted it on the NWT Foster Family Coalition and Moms to Moms Facebook pages. Twelve women (one is a foster parent, six are parents of young children, and two are childcare providers in a day home) indicated an interest in participating. Additionally, five interns in the first-year (Certificate) program and one Aurora College instructor volunteered to participate after the second-year interns went to their class to invite them. Sixteen participants are from urban communities and two participants are from two different rural communities in Denendeh/Northwest Territories. Eight participants are Indigenous and ten are non-Indigenous.

Interviews ranged from 10 minutes to 1.5 hours. Each intern wrote notes about the 2-3 interviews that they conducted. As a class, Erica, Shelley and all of the interns identified key ideas related to our research purpose. We used inductive analysis (Patton, 2002), identifying key ideas related to the first research question, and then grouped the key ideas into larger themes (e.g., singing focusing on rhythm and melody; accessing language through environmental print and picture books; accessing a language speaker; hearing language used in context and accessing apps.) Environmental print includes labels and signs that are everywhere in children's lives (e.g., print associated with products, stores and other businesses or traffic signs). Environmental print is especially helpful to support young children's literacy because it has a lot of contextual information surrounding it (e.g., the LEGO label is on the box of LEGO blocks) and is everywhere in children's lives (Vukelich, Christie, & Enz, 2008). The interns and Erica then applied what they had learned through this analysis to develop materials for a home kit that they could give to participants as a gift to show appreciation for participating. We then brought Nazila on to the team to contribute her observations and content for the literature review. We met through Zoom to write the research report.

## **FINDINGS: LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Participants said that although they had some limited knowledge of Indigenous languages, they and their children did not have enough opportunities to learn Indigenous languages in their communities. The children who had language classes in school did not have any follow-through at home because parents had not learned the language through intergenerational transmission. Interviewees wanted access to resources to teach and learn the Indigenous languages, and were happy to hear that the interns would be developing home kits, with materials for them to use with children to teach one of the official Indigenous languages of Denendeh/Northwest Territories.

Participants gave examples of language learning approaches that they had found to be useful for their own and their children's learning of the languages. We have grouped the specific approaches using four principles that can guide the development of teaching and learning strategies, as explained below.



### **Singing that Focuses on Actions, Rhythm and Melody**

Participating first-year (Certificate) interns gave examples of how they sing with children to teach Indigenous languages. Miranda Currie, an Indigenous author, musician, educator, and filmmaker, taught them songs in Indigenous languages that she had written for children (<https://www.mirandacurrie.ca/>). She recommended that interns teach a few words at a time and repeat the words many times. She gave an example of making a game by having children sing phrases in rounds. In this way, children would learn how to pronounce the words and phrases. She also advised that actions, rhythm and melody be used when teaching the language through song.

Participants who were learning English said that they listened to children's music in English many times in order to learn pronunciations and meanings of the words. They sing along with the music to practice saying the words. Limited access to recorded songs in an Indigenous language make this strategy challenging for learning an Indigenous language, especially in the Denendeh/Northwest Territories where there are nine Indigenous languages and many dialects of each language.

### **Accessing Language through Environmental Print and Picture Books**

Participating first-year (Certificate) interns and educators working in day homes talked about the importance of providing print-rich environments for the children. Specifically, they talked about environmental print, that is, providing children with visual access to the target language in print within their physical environment, such as on walls or on toy bins. Specifically, interns and educators talked about having labels and pictures and of adults pointing to the words and saying them in order for children to become familiar with the Indigenous words for everyday objects. This environmental print provides a context for children to associate the written words with the objects that they represent. For example, participants created posters with Tłıchq̓ words for days of the week, colours, numbers, seasons, months of the year, and body parts, with illustrations to show what the words mean. Tłıchq̓ was chosen because student interns were able to easily access materials to support their learning and understanding of the language (e.g., UVic linguistic department, n.d.). The posters are on the walls of the early learning centre. Routines and games can be played with small groups of children to introduce and practice the language that is printed on posters and labels. For example, the educator points to a picture and says the word, inviting children to say the word with her. They read the words many times and the children repeat after them, looking at the picture to learn the meaning, as well as the pronunciation of the word. Educators use the same process with flash cards. Additionally, Tłıchq̓ labels for types of clothing are placed by children's cubbies and labels for objects in the classroom are also posted. During small-group or whole-group time, educators say a word in Tłıchq̓ and the children are asked to find the word label, say it, and point to the object it represents.

Participating educators and parents gave examples of library books that are written in both Cree and English, and have an accompanying CD that they read with children to teach the language. One participating parent described books written in Dene K'ede online (Dene Godøe North Slavey, n.d.) that she reads with her children. Participants, including parents who were learning English, said that the print/audio/digital books helped them to learn the target language alongside their children.

### **Accessing a Language Speaker**

Participating interns and parents talked about the importance of connecting with the land and with Elders, Knowledge Holders and other fluent speakers as the best ways to connect young people with the language. Participants said that they had learned their Indigenous language through listening to Elders' stories about their culture and the family and community history. Whether they took place in the kitchen, on the land or in any other setting, Elders' stories and conversation were invaluable for learning the language. Elders would give teachings to children (e.g., about parts of a gun or about fishing) and, when there were many Elders together, they would talk to each other in the language. Elders gave instructions to children in the language, so children were actively showing that they understood the language. The children heard the language being spoken in a natural conversational context (e.g., in culture camps on the land); learning in the moment.

One educator participant, who does not speak the language but whose husband is a fluent speaker of his Indigenous language, asked him to share stories and speak the language to the children in their day home. Children observed him cleaning and cutting moose after the hunt. He was showing children and giving teachings in English and in Inuvialuktun. All of the food provided in the day home came from the land.

### **Hearing Language Used in Context in Media and Language Apps**

Participants identified YouTube videos on how to say words as being very useful to teach themselves and their children Indigenous languages. Especially during the pandemic lockdown, teachers posted YouTube videos that they recommended their students watch. Participants also talked about viewing media, such as watching movies with subtitles, and watching television shows with subtitles, to learn languages beyond their mother tongue. For example, one Indigenous participant identified Molly of Denali as an Indigenous television show that she and her children had watched about a Gwich'in / Koyukon / Dena'ina Athabascan girl living in Alaska (WGBH Educational Foundation, 2019). They also talked about using audiobooks to hear the sounds of the language while reading the words.

Language apps and dictionaries were also identified as helpful in learning pronunciation and meaning of words in Indigenous languages. The Tłıchq Intro app (Tłıchq Intro, 2015) is a tool to help families learn the Indigenous language through 23 categories on different topics such as clothing, body, actions, phrases and directions, etc. The app is a family friendly app that includes pictures and in both the English and Tłıchq language. The app includes a voice pronouncing the words properly. With the app there is an opportunity to learn the language. There is a place to play games and also challenge yourself with the quizzes they provided.

### **APPLYING WHAT WAS LEARNED IN ACTION RESEARCH TO CREATE HOME KITS**

Erica and the interns in the second-year (Diploma) class used the four principles described in the previous section to create home kits for families to use to learn Indigenous languages. The process of creating the home kits was a professional learning experience for the interns, as they applied what they had learned in their action research. The home kits were given to each participant as a token of appreciation for their participation.


Based on the finding that children can learn their community's Indigenous language(s) through singing songs that have lively rhythms and melodies as well as include actions, we created activities such as these two examples from our Home/gokq Kit:



### Singing that Focuses on Actions, Rhythm and Melody and Hearing Language in Context

With the goal of teaching children numbers in Tłıchq̓, we translated the words, with reference to the website (UVic Linguistics Department, n.d.) of the well-known English song for children, Five Little Ducks. We chose the topic of ducks because ducks are part of the land (Rorick, 2019) and, in turn, part of children's lives in the Denendeh/Northwest Territories. This song also includes mothers and their young, which is important in all children's lives, so we feel that the song is most especially relevant to children's experiences. We also suggested that parents and children create puppets by drawing ducks and gluing them to popsicle sticks, so they can actively move the puppets while singing the song.

(Shı) Song: *Five (sı̀lài) little ducks (det'q̓)*  
Five/sı̀lài little ducks/det'q̓ went out to play,  
over the hill and far away.  
Mother duck/àma det'q̓ said quack quack  
quack quack but only four/dı̄ little  
ducks/det'q̓ came back (*repeat to count  
down until: 'but no little ducks came back'*)  
*\*last verse\** Sad mother duck/àma det'q̓  
went out one day, over the hills and far  
away. Mother duck/àma det'q̓ said quack  
quack quack quack and all five/sı̀lài little  
ducks/det'q̓ came back.



Number Translations	
One	ı̀lè
Two	nàke
Three	tai
Four	dı̄
Five	sı̀lài
Six	ek'ètai
Seven	tòhdı̄
Eight	ek'èdı̄
Nine	tòtòtò
Ten	hoòno




FIGURE 1

*Lyrics and translation for the song Five Little Ducks*

We also developed an activity using the well-known folk song, Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes. We chose this topic because knowledge of body parts is important in young children's development. The song is very familiar to children in the Denendeh/Northwest Territories, so they do not have to learn the melody, and can concentrate on connecting the Indigenous words for the body parts. Drawing on Shannon's knowledge of Tłıchq̓, we translated the words for the body parts into Tłıchq̓ and provided a video clip of our singing for children and their families to sing along with. Children touch their head, shoulders, knees, and toes as they sing the song in Tłıchq̓. Recognizing the need to make the learning experience age-appropriate (McIvor, 2020), we recommend scaffolding children's learning of the word for one body part at a time, and then cumulatively adding a new word each day.

When singing we encourage children to touch their (head, shoulder, knees, toes, eyes, ears, mouth and nose) while singing the song and making sure we encourage children to say the Indigenous words in the song.

## (Sh) Song: Head/Gokwı and Shoulders/Eehgò Knees and toes/sekekw'qò

Head/Gokwı and shoulders/Eehgò,  
Knees and toes/sekekw'qò, knees  
and toes/sekekw'qò, knees and  
toes/sekekw'qò.

Head/Gokwı and shoulders/Eehgò,  
knees and toes/sekekw'qò, eyes/  
sedaà, ears/sedziikhw'o,  
mouth/sewa and nose/siigho.

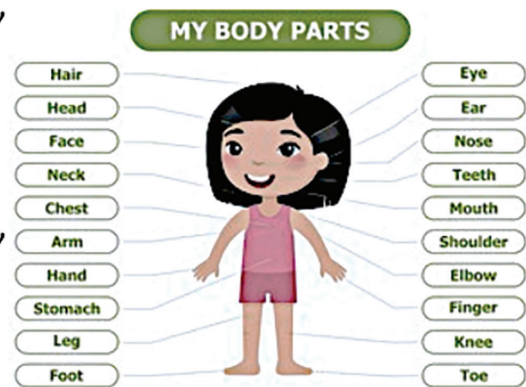


FIGURE 2

*Lyrics and translation for the song Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.*

### Accessing Language through Environmental Print

As an extension of the singing activity to learn Indigenous words for body parts, we created an activity that involves print. We suggest having individual printable images of body parts accompanied with the Tłıchq word for that particular part of the body. Each image of a body part should have sticky tack, tape or velcro strips on the backside for children to be able to either attach on a wall or match the images of each body part to themselves on their clothing in its respective place. If children are expected to place the images on the wall, we recommend having an image of the entire body on the wall for children to be able to match each body part in their respective place while simultaneously hearing and using the Tłıchq word for each body part in context. Based on their individual interests (McIvor, 2020), children are encouraged to take the lead in picking which body part to attach to themselves or the wall and in what sequence. As they handle each body part, parents are encouraged to use the Tłıchq word for the body parts all the while encouraging children to also use these words in context.

Also using the principle of having environmental print accessible and aiming to teach numbers 1-5" (łte-słàl) so that children can use the words when they count, we created the following counting activity. Recognizing the importance of using materials in the home, this activity involves children/chekoa counting kitchen/mbò kàeht'ée objects, such as: spoons/echìlìlì, cups/łìbò, bowls/kw'àyjā, etc. Blocks, books/etèts'eele, toys, clothing/gozhii, socks/łìbà, buttons/mqòla on shirts/kw'ìhəeh. While counting/ts'ehtà aloud using Tłıchq words, parents point to the objects. Since repetition over extended periods of time is important for learning language (Johnson, 2017; McIvor, 2020), we recommend that parents make counting a natural part of interactions with their children (chekoa). As an example, when handing a child a spoon to eat with at the

table, the parent(s) might say, “This is one spoon/echìlìlì.” Another example is playing Hide and Seek. The parent(s) might cover their eyes and count/ts’ehtà to 5/sìlài in Tłıchq while children hide and then encourage individual children/chekoa to count in Tłıchq while others hide. The child opens their eyes and tries to find the hidiers. The first one that is found is the next seeker and the last child found is the winner.

## CONCLUSION: FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH

The home kits will be given to interview participants with an invitation to participate in a second phase of our research. We will ask participants to use the home kits for six weeks, engaging in whatever activity they choose from their home kit. We are discussing incentives to encourage participants to use the kits on a daily basis and to keep a record of their experiences on tracking sheets. Follow-up interviews will focus on finding out what parts of the kits participants used, how they used the activities in the kits, and what they observed about their and their children’s language learning when using these resources. We hope that action research projects such as ours will be catalysts for professional learning and development for the participating parents of this study, the Aurora College ECE interns and university researchers. Additionally, we hope that our research will contribute to greater understanding of effective and culturally responsive Indigenous language teaching, programming, and resources for children.

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**Nazila Eisazadeh**, the postdoctoral fellow of the Northern Oral language and Writing through Play project, was born in Tabriz, Iran and arrived in Canada as an Azeri-Iranian refugee. Her ancestral language is Azeri, however, Farsi is the dominant language spoken in Iran and the only language permitted to be taught at school. To prevent language loss, her family passed down their ancestral knowledge of Azeri at home through natural intergenerational language transmission. Despite their best efforts to preserve Azeri, language and cultural loss resulted. It is for this reason Nazila holds projects relevant to language revitalization close to her heart.

**Erica McDonald**, the daughter of Tim and Alma McDonald and the granddaughter of Boniface and Adeline Trippe-de-Roche and Joseph and Ethel McDonald, was raised in Treaty 8 territory and is a member of the Athabaskan Chipewyan First Nation, known as the K’ai Taile Dene. Erica was born and raised in the Denendeh/NWT. Currently she lives in Yellowknife and is an instructor at Aurora College in the Early Learning and Childcare Program. Erica did not have the opportunity to learn her Dene language, something she wishes she had. For this reason, she has personal ties to the importance of Indigenous language revitalization.

**Shannon Wedawin**, the daughter of Barry Franklin and Doreen Wedawin, was raised in Treaty 11 territory and is a member of Tłıchq (Dogrib-Rae band) First Nation. Shannon was born and raised in a small rural community of Behchokq, Denendeh/NWT. Shannon has little memory of hearing her mother speak their Indigenous language at home. As part of her program at Aurora College, she has been advocating for the importance of Indigenous language revitalization and how crucial the early years of childhood are to learning Indigenous ancestral languages.

**Gloria Francis** was raised in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, moved to Yellowknife, NWT in 2007. Her family descends from the Qalipu Mi’kmaq First Nation band in Newfoundland. Gloria was never exposed to the traditional language of Mi’kmaq people, but she wished she had. She has, however, had a number of opportunities to hear and learn the traditional languages of the Dene People of the Denendeh/NWT. Having a daughter who is now a member of the Dogrib-Rae band, Gloria hopes she can provide opportunities for her daughter to hear and learn her ancestral language in ways Gloria, herself, could not.

**Suchitra Yadav** was born and raised in a rural Indian State community, Bihar, immigrated to Canada in 2006, and has been living in Yellowknife, NWT, since 2009. She believes that by participating in research projects such as this one, it will bring her closer to implementing the most optimal strategies for Indigenous language(s) and cultural learning in the classroom. Suchitra also believes that early childhood education is the most valuable space for this to occur because it has the potential to incite positive social change for a brighter and more equitable shared future.

**Shelley Stagg Peterson**, the daughter and granddaughter of farmers of Dutch, Scottish, and Irish ancestry, was born in Treaty 4 territory. She moved to Treaty 6 territory where she spent her school years and later worked as a primary teacher in rural communities. Her grandparents, who emigrated from the northern province of Friesland, in the Netherlands, spoke English to their children after moving to Canada, so her family's European language has not been transmitted through the generations. She is now working as a literacy professor at the University of Toronto, living on the ancestral land of many nations.

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. *Have you or anyone in your family learned or do you practice a second language at home? If no, are there reasons you want to share as to why? (\*)*
2. *I am interested to know about how you as a caregiver currently promote language and literacy in your home? Can you provide some examples on things you might be doing?*
3. *How do you feel about how traditional language(s) and literacy is taught and promoted in your child's classroom/ school and if you see this learning transferring to your home.*
  - a. *Yes? - How has it transferred home?*
  - b. *No? - What do you think could be improved on?*
4. *What do you feel is the most important way to teach children traditional language and literacy either at home or on the land?*
5. *Do you feel it's important for children to participate in any on the land play that helps support their learning of traditional language and culture? Can you tell some stories about how you have done this as a child or how children in your life play on the land?*
6. *Do you feel your community offers different opportunities (such as on the land programming, language workshops, family workshops) for the children to learn traditional languages and culture of the NWT? Has this knowledge transferred home?*
  - a. *Yes - how has it transferred home?*
  - b. *No - what do you think could be improved on?*
7. *How do you feel traditional oral storytelling plays a role in children's learning of an Indigenous language and culture? Are you interested in resources to support oral storytelling?*
8. *How do you use technology at home (computers, iPads/tablets etc.) to promote language, culture and literacy with your children?*
9. *Would you be willing to continue your participation in our research by engaging with a home language kit and completing another interview a few months after having the kit?*