

Annotated Bibliography 2021 - 22

Indigenous language revitalization connections to health and wellbeing

Introduction

Indigenous languages are critical to our health and wellbeing. The purpose of this annotated bibliography is to continue the collection of resources that support the inclusion of Indigenous language learning, teaching and revitalization for our personal, family and community health and wellbeing. Without our Indigenous languages, the unique cultural footprints of our ancestors in the landscape of kikāwinaw askiy are difficult to find let alone follow. It is our hope that this reference document will help to contribute to a better understanding of Indigenous language use and learning and, more importantly, their connection to health and well-being. It is not meant to be exhaustive but rather to be an introduction and includes sources from other world Indigenous language groups. We are including print publications including journal articles, book chapters, and reports as well as YouTube videos, podcasts and websites that highlight Indigenous language revitalization and health or well being. We hope you enjoy the resources – please feel free to share any sources that you are aware of with us by email to the Project Coordinator, Charlotte Ross at charlotteross2010@yahoo.ca.

The citation format used is the APA (American Psychological Association) which includes the author(s), year, title, journal article (if applicable), volume number, issue number and page numbers. If it is a chapter in a book, then the title of the book is included. If the source is available in an online format then the url is included for easy access. We used Google Scholar as well as Google and university library searches to locate sources that pertain to the topic.

Berry, S. L., Crowe, T. P., Deane, F. P., Billingham, M., & Bhagerutty, Y. (2012). Growth and Empowerment for Indigenous Australians in Substance Abuse Treatment.

International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 10(6), 970–983.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-012-9393-2>

This paper outlines a study carried out at an Indigenous residential substance abuse centre in Australia. The researchers explored the impact of cultural components during treatment and examined their success rates. Cultural components included the use of “traditional languages, practices, spirituality, and cultural identity” (p. 971). Many of their clients indicated that part of their grief which led to alcohol dependencies was rooted in “cultural alienation, loss of identity” and loss of language (p. 970). The clients chose to decide how much of their treatment program would focus on cultural teachings. The researchers concluded that, “a return to traditional Indigenous cultural practices is sufficient for effecting recovery from substance abuse for many Indigenous individuals” (p. 980). These findings are hugely valuable when discussing the importance of language revitalization to Indigenous health maintenance and recovery.

Biddle, N., & Swee, H. (2012). The Relationship between wellbeing and Indigenous land, language and culture in Australia. *Australian Geographer, 43(3), 215-232.*

In this paper, the authors explore factors associated with three measures of sustainability and wellbeing. They used national cross-sectional survey data of the Australian Indigenous population and found a positive relationship between the sustainability of homeland, language, culture and a person’s subjective experience of emotional well-

being. Their findings show that maintaining a connection to one's homeland (through harvesting activities or acknowledgement), learning an Indigenous language, and participating in cultural activities are associated with higher levels of happiness.

Clark, N., Walton, P., Drolet, J., Tribute, T., Jules, G., Main, T., Arnouse, M. (2013).

Melq'ilwiye: Coming Together — Intersections of Identity, Culture, and Health for Urban Aboriginal Youth. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 45(2), 36–57.

This article details the community-based participatory action research project that explored how “urban Aboriginal youth identify their health needs within a culturally centred model of health and wellness, to create new knowledge and research capacity by and with urban Aboriginal youth and urban Aboriginal health-care providers” (p. 37).

The research explored talking circles and surveys to better understand the Aboriginal youth experience that is impacted by intergenerational trauma. One of their key goals was to develop a list of strategies that address Aboriginal youth needs and desires regarding their health care. They found that this was expressed in pride for their Aboriginal identity and the significant interest in learning traditional ways of self-care and medicine. The researchers identified that health care professionals could look to the rich narratives of resistance and strength as a way of informing their care practices instead of viewing these as a deficit. In doing so, this returns to a strength-based approach that is empowering for Aboriginal youth (p. 51).

This article is important as it identifies the variety of ways that Aboriginal people identify health that can exist outside a Western concept of medicine. The researchers validated the

need for culturally relevant ways of wellbeing as it has proven to be effective in reducing Aboriginal health disparities (p. 39). Furthermore, they found that “cultural identity is formed through a wide circle of activities, including access to Elders, language, First Nations education, community health spaces such as Friendship Centres and the Internet” (p. 49).

Daniels-Fiss, B. (2008). Learning to be a “Nehiyaw” (Cree) through language. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 2(3), 233–245. doi: 10.1080/15595690802145505

The author reflects on her experience growing up with her grandparents who only spoke Cree to one another but spoke English to her. The process helped in reconnecting to her worldview as a “nêhiyaw—an exact person”. She recalls attending family and community cultural activities where the values of sharing, respect and patience were modelled and learned through experiencing events. As a scholar, Daniels- Fiss reflects on her understanding of Cree pedagogy and epistemology by developing a foundation through language immersion summer camps. When the author attempted to speak Cree as a child, she was ridiculed. While Daniels-Fiss does not use the words “latent speaker” to identify herself, she has identified the conditions of a latent speaker – one who is raised around the language but does not become a speaker.

Eichstadt, K. (2016). “*The Responsibility to Learn*”: *An investigation into the language ideologies of young women speakers of Chinuk Wawa*. Portland State University (Honors thesis, paper 267) <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorsthesis/267/>

In this paper, the author writes about the complex nature of language ideologies which are known as personal beliefs and understandings about language. Her work was carried out in a community working to revitalize their language - Chinuk Wawa which is a language spoken in the Pacific Northwest area of the USA. Eichstadt identifies several themes in language ideology that include identity, authenticity, and responsibility. Within these themes, participants recognize language as being a core component of individual, family identity, tribal identity, and pan-Indigenous identity. Language reclamation is found to combat shame and promote healing from trauma imposed and inflicted through colonialism. Based on interviews conducted, the author shared that learning the language in smaller learning environments often created bonds between the young women and promoted a high level of trust. This observation contributes to a better understanding of how language promotes community healing by strengthening Indigenous concepts of relationality.

First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Council. (2014). Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages 2014. <http://www.fpcc.ca/files/PDF/Language/FPCC-LanguageReport-141016-WEB.pdf>

In the second edition of the *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Language*, First Peoples' Heritage Language and Cultural Council provides an update on the status of B.C.'s First Nation's languages. Some key findings in this report included the following:

- **Speakers:** There was an increase of 3,144 semi-fluent speakers over the 2010 numbers. This is promising as "it indicates that revitalization efforts are paying off" (p. 6).

- **Language in Education (Usage):** “It is crucial that children are provided with the opportunity to learn in their own language, ideally in an immersion environment” (p. 6). Preschool age is the key period for language acquisition (p. 6).
- **Language Resources:** “Only 97 communities (52%) have any sort of curriculum materials for teaching the language” (p. 7). This indicates a substantial need for investment in curriculum development and archival and revival models.
- **Benefits Linked to the Vitality of First Nations Languages:** “There is growing evidence of the link between a strong linguistic and cultural identity and well-being in other areas including social, mental and physical health, a reduction to harmful behaviours (such as alcohol and drug abuse and suicide) an increase in high school graduation rates and other positive educational outcomes, and higher employment rates” (p. 10).

Galla, C., & Goodwill, A. (2017). Talking story with vital voices: Making knowledge with Indigenous language. *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing* 2(3), 67-75.

The authors share their research practice of accessing Indigenous knowledge systems and understandings of well-being from Indigenous language speakers. Using Storywork practices, they show it is language that revitalizes its people, rather than people that revitalize language. The Storywork procedures involved working with two Indigenous language speakers (Hawaiian-English and Anishinaabemowin-English) who shared their stories of well-being in their language and then transformed, not translated, their stories to English. This paper focuses on the benefit of this methodology towards decolonization

and healing. The authors demonstrate the methodology of centring the Indigenous language itself, promotes forms of well-being within the participants by connecting the head and the heart. The practice of centering the language and storytellers allows the listeners to participate in an opportunity to learn and share that is in alignment with Indigenous percepts of knowledge making. The authors conclude that the language and process of Storywork creates well-being in both storytellers and listeners. This work foreshadows that language has the capacity not only to promote individual well-being of the speakers, but also to repair and enhance relationships with others, indicating that language may be a facilitator for relational repair contributing to community well-being.

Gonzalez, M.B., Aronson, B.D., Kellar, S., Walls, M.L., & Greenfield, B.L. (2017).

Language as a facilitator of cultural connection. *Ab-Original: Journal of Indigenous Studies and First Nations and First Peoples' Cultures*. 1(2), 176-194.

This study explores language as a unique component of culture and its contribution to improving health of Indigenous people. The authors measured Ojibwe language proficiency and its relationship to cultural variables. The analysis revealed that greater language proficiency is associated with increased participation in traditional and spiritual activities and promotes associated values. If language proficiency is highly associated with increased participation in traditional and spiritual activities, then there may also be implications for the impact of language on the well-being of the community. Instead of only exploring language as a factor that supports cultural and spiritual healing in individuals, we might consider language as a support for the activities that bring us to wellness both individually and as a community.

Hallett, D., Chandler, M. J. and Lalonde, C. E. (2007). Aboriginal language knowledge and youth suicide. *Cognitive Development*, 22, 392–399. doi:10.1016/j.cogdev.2007.02.001

In this research project based on examining secondary health statistics, the authors found that youth suicide rates dropped to zero in those communities in which at least half the band members reported a conversational knowledge of their own “Native” language. Until this study was done, “there were no previous studies that had attempted to demonstrate a specific link between Indigenous language loss and community-level measures of health and wellbeing” (Hallett, Chandler and Lalonde, 2007, p. 3). This is a preliminary investigation of how community-level variability of knowledge of Aboriginal languages relate to local First Nation community measures of youth suicide. The researchers found that the use of language was a stronger indicator of a decrease or absence of youth suicide than six other cultural continuity factors which were: i) self government, ii) land claims, iii) education, iv) health care, v) cultural facilities and vi) police/fire services. Of greater interest, the researchers found that youth suicide rates dropped to zero in those communities in which at least half the band members reported a conversational knowledge of their own Native language. The authors clearly state that “there are no previous studies that have attempted to demonstrate a specific link between indigenous language loss and community-level measures of health and wellbeing” (p. 3). Results indicate that those bands with higher levels of language knowledge had fewer suicides than those bands with lower levels which would result in a stronger, healthier community with well-being at the forefront.

Jaskwaan (2018). Gyaahlaangee diinaa iijang: Here is my story. *BC Studies*, 200, 111-121.

<https://doi.org/10.14288/bcs.v0i200.191468>

In this article, the author documents her incredible life journey over an approximately two-decade period to learning her Indigenous language. “Gyaahlaangee” (2018) often wondered if she wasn’t a true Haida and lacked the ability to speak the language because her mother was white. In the article, she vocalizes her insecurity about not being a speaker of the language and her self-perception of having a character deficiency. Gyaahlaangee (2018) became an apprentice in the First Peoples Cultural Council’s Mentor-Apprentice program. She found that her years of academic training to write everything down had to be trained out of her as they put the pen and paper away, only writing in their language for a short time at the end of each session. Gyaahlaangee (2018) shares a poignant story about her experience in the Mentor-Apprentice program after she was assessed by a three-person panel after 100 hours of language learning. She was able to understand that her deep soulful grief was for everyone’s historical circumstances that prevented natural language transmission in their homes, families, and communities.

Jenni, B., Anisman, A., McIvor, O., & Jacobs, P. (2017). An exploration of the effects of mentor-apprentice programs on mentors' and apprentices' wellbeing. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 12:2, 25-42. doi:10.18357/ijih122201717783

In this study, participants shared how their involvement in a Mentor-Apprentice Program impacted their own well-being as well as their community’s wellbeing (Jenni, Anisman,

McIvor and Jacobs, 2017). This article documents a research project titled NETOLNEW “one mind, one people” that explored adult Indigenous language learning through the Mentor-Apprentice Program method in British Columbia. The research team carried out interviews and focus groups with participants over a two-year period. The main purpose was to document the experiences of the participants. The study also included interview questions that provided participants a chance to share how participating in the program affected them. Participants made frequent references to strength, strengthened identity, strengthened connections (to ancestors, knowledge, land, and way of length), and strengthening the community. As evidenced in other studies, language use and learning appear to act as a bridge or vessel that connects people (or repairs connections) in order for healing to take place.

Jim, J. (2016). *WSÁNEĆ SEN: I am emerging*. (Master’s project, University of Victoria).

<https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/9849>

The author is a second language SENĆOFEN learner who has documented her learning journey over a two-decade period using narrative inquiry as a framework. She has allowed the reader into her personal language learning experience as she reflects on how the learning impacted her from an elementary school level to being a SENĆOFEN language immersion teacher. She has used the Mentor Apprentice Program as well as technology and writing systems to support her learning. Among the recommendations she suggests for future adult second language learners is to establish a strong foundational relationship with a mentor who is preferably a first language speaker. In addition, she

suggests attending professional development for language learning and to be familiar with technology that can aid in language learning.

King, M., Smith, A., & Gracey, M. (2009). Indigenous health part 2: the underlying causes of the health gap. *The lancet*, 374(9683), 76-85.

This foundational paper discusses the intrinsic connection between identity, language and health, saying that, “Balance extends beyond the individual realm such that good health and healing also require that an individual live in harmony with others, their community, and the spirit worlds” (p. 76). But for an Aboriginal person to have the tools needed to do this, there must be a certain level of cultural continuity that comes from a strong sense of cultural identity. The authors explain that ancestral language use is crucial in developing this identity, and language shifts or language loss because of colonization is contributing to the devastating health deficits (p. 78).

McIvor, O., Napoleon, A., & Dickie, K. M. (2009). Language and culture as protective factors for at-risk communities. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 5(1), 6-25.

The authors conducted an extensive review and analysis of the literature related to the role of Indigenous language and culture in maintaining and improving the health as well as reducing the risk factors for health problems of Indigenous people (p. 6). The authors found that most of the existing literature focused on culture and its effects on health while there remained scant literature, at the time, that directly connected Indigenous language and its effect on health.

Mackay, G. (2005). *The City as Home: The Sense of Belonging Among Aboriginal Youth in Saskatoon, Final Report. Department of Native Studies; Prepared for the Bridges and Foundations Project on Urban Aboriginal Housing.*

<http://www.bridgesandfoundations.usask.ca/reports/McKayTheCity.pdf>

In MacKay's report, she discusses her research on the connection between Aboriginal youth in Saskatoon and their sense of belonging, i.e., sense of *home*. The report is based on data collecting in summer and fall of 2004, with the participation of 16 Aboriginal youth (ages 16-29) that lived in Saskatoon and participated in programs assisting them with skill development (p. 4). The research found that the youth described a sense of belonging within a collective, or a community, based on "shared physical features, ancestry, history, residence, lived experiences, cultural practices and values, language, or [a] legal definition" (p. 5). Furthermore, "The researcher heard the youth speak of great benefit of programs within their community that are based in Aboriginal cultures, that build meaningful relationships with elders and children, and that challenge them to explore and achieve their individual potential" (p. 4).

Morcom, L. (2017). *Self-esteem and cultural identity in Aboriginal language immersion kindergarteners. Journal of Language Identity and Education, 16(6), 365-380.*

The author explores "the impact of Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe) immersion education on the personal and collective self-esteem of kindergarteners" (p. 1). The study used both self-esteem assessments as well as academic and linguistic assessments to gain insight

into the impact of language immersion on the overall experience and success of Indigenous children between the ages of 4-6 years old. Morcom found that children who participated in language immersion had higher self-esteem compared to those who did not participate in such a program. The author describes that the children who participated in this study had a strong sense of themselves as Anishinaabek. Morcom concludes that the high personal self-esteem also supports increased collective self-esteem where race is not a factor determining the worth of others. The author concludes that other research has highlighted the importance of self-esteem for health, and so understanding how language promotes self-esteem can provide directions for program development aimed at improving health outcomes of Indigenous people.

Oster, R. T., Grier, A., Lightning, R., Mayan, M. J., & Toth, E. L. (2014). Cultural continuity, traditional Indigenous language, and diabetes in Alberta First Nations: a mixed methods study. *International journal for equity in health*, 13(1), 1-11.

The authors conclude that traditional First Nation languages are fundamental to cultural and spiritual health. In this study, participants described traditional language as a crucial and inseparable component of culture and further, that without language, First Nations were deemed incapable of succeeding since language is at the center of culture (Oster et al., 2014, p. 3). The authors found that individual First Nations in the study that appeared to have more cultural continuity (measured by traditional Indigenous language knowledge) had significantly lower diabetes prevalence.

Reyhner, J. (2011). Indigenous Language Immersion Schools for Strong Indigenous Identities. *Heritage Language Journal*, 7(2), 138–152.

<http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/jar/Heritage.pdf>

This article looks at language immersion schools for Indigenous people as an integral piece of healing from the impacts of colonization. Language loss has been one significant way that settler colonial government regimes have forced assimilation onto Indigenous peoples, and the intergenerational trauma that results from those experiences is major. This article calls for support for the revitalization of Indigenous languages as a way to reconnect Indigenous people to their heritage, family and traditions (p. 9). They argue that language programs may hold the key to Aboriginal sovereignty over curriculum development, government reintegration and centering a Nation's value system. Indigenous languages also have the power to build bridges between global communities that are making similar movements of revitalization (p. 25).

Taff, Alice. <https://youtu.be/ivEWXGNFhWs> Sharing our knowledge clan conference.

(2018). Alice Taff - Linking Land, Language and Health

Alice Taff has several video presentations on YouTube regarding language, land and health outcomes especially for the Alaska Native populations that she lives with and collaborates with to support language revitalization through the lens of connections to health.

Taff, A., Chee, M., Hall, J., Hall, M. Y. D., Martin, K. N., & Johnston, A. (2018).

Indigenous language use impacts wellness. In K. L. Reh & L. Campbell (Eds.), *The Oxford*

Handbook of Endangered Languages (pp. 861–884).

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190610029.013.41>

The authors make a case that using Indigenous languages has beneficial effects on the health of descendant language users. Through their research, it draws connections between traditional lands–culture–language and suggests that the oppression of each of these affects the well-being of the people. The writers recognize that language *is* medicine, the health of an Indigenous language is reflected in the health of its people, and further, that *using* a suppressed ancestral language has health benefits for individual descendants and their community. The authors conclude that resources spent for Indigenous language continuity can result in health benefits for Indigenous individuals and communities (p. 2).

Thompson, J. C. (Edōsdi). (2008). Hede kehe' hotzi' kahidi': My Journey to a Tahltan Research Paradigm. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 31:1, 24-40.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/230303279?accountid=14846>

Thompson identifies herself in her language as *Edōsdi*, a member of the Tahltan Nation connected to a territory, clan and crest. *Edōsdi* situates herself as an adult second language learner with a limited background of prior Tahltan language. She shares her journey of searching for a research methodology that resonated with her Tahltan ways of knowing that would honor her ancestors, her family and her community. The Tahltan language is at the core of Tahltan cultural practices and one cannot learn about cultural knowledge without also learning the language. *Edōsdi* articulates her search for a

respectful methodology brought her full circle to knowing more about her identity, her language and her nation. She identifies experiences that placed her in language learning contexts as a second language learner and that her educational journey was also an affirmation for her Tahltan family to release the shame and feel proud to be Tahltan.

Tocker, K. (2017). Living and learning as Māori: Language stories from three generations.

The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 46(1), 115-125.

doi:10.1017/jie.2016.28

Tocker (2017) provides insight on the impact of education on Maori and te reo Maori (the Maori language) as presented through the lived experiences of three generations of Maori women. The author's mother was surrounded by the Maori language and customs growing up with a strong foundation prior to entering a Catholic boarding school. The author was not taught the Maori language as a child and learned English. The author's daughter grew up immersed in the Maori language by attending language nests and a Maori-medium middle years school; she became a strong speaker of the language. As an adult, the author attended a language immersion program where she was introduced to her family and tribal genealogy providing a sense of belonging and identity. In Tocker (2017), the author's daughter was comforted by the Maori language and cultural teachings that she could seek refuge in when confronted with life's challenges. The author's daughter worked with her mother creating a bond that strengthened her mother's knowledge of traditional Maori customs and practices. Similar experiences were shared by Thompson (2008) when the author's educational journey made it 'safe' for her

extended family to start sharing their Tahltan history, language and culture and strengthen their Tahltan identity.

Townsend, C. (2014). Impacts of Hawaiian language loss and promotion via linguistic landscape. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Hawaii at Manoa).

<http://hdl.handle.net/10125/100360>.

Townsend explores the impacts of language loss and language promotion within her own Native Hawaiian community. While her research focuses on the language attitudes toward a Hawaiian-English bilingual environment, she also identifies five themes that speak directly to the connection between language (loss) and health and wellness. The first theme is about the importance of Hawaiian language to the identities of individual, family, and community wholistically. Participants identified that language provides them with a meaningful place in the world. Participants also identified language as a link to the past that provides unity and strength to the community, by passing on information on habits, lifestyles, and values meaningful to the Native Hawaiian community and their well-being. The author's findings show how a bilingual language landscape has increased pride and self-worth and improved health status. One participant commented that the bilingual language landscape validates to Native Hawaiians that they are valued and they have worth.

Walsh, M. (2018). Language is Like Food: Links Between Language Revitalization and Health and Well-being. In *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalization* (1st ed., pp. 5–12). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315561271-2>

A good deal of attention has been paid to the retention and revitalization of Indigenous languages over the past 25 years. But why should we preserve Indigenous languages? One part of the answer is improved health and well-being. There are numerous anecdotal accounts of such links, but recently some studies are emerging that provide more substantial evidence of improvements in physical health (e.g., reduced risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease) as well as mental health (e.g., lower incidence of Indigenous youth suicide). The author also demonstrates that learning an Indigenous language as a non-Indigenous person can lead to a substantial downturn in racism. For this and other reasons, Indigenous languages can be seen as being good for your health, not just for Indigenous people but for non-Indigenous people as well. In Australia with the Aboriginal peoples, an Elder shared, “once you get a taste for your Indigenous language, you can-not get enough of it”. It was one of many such statements encountered during a survey of the Aboriginal Languages of NSW conducted in 1999–2000 with two Indigenous co-researchers (Hosking et al 2000). It became clear that regaining one’s language had a very strong connection with regaining a distinctive Aboriginal identity, and this is reflected in the mission statement of an Aboriginal organization addressing the question:

“Why is language important? Language is important to Aboriginal people because it is a way for them to express their identity and be proud of where they come from and who they are. If a person knows a word in their language he/she is

maintaining a link that has lasted thousands of years, keeping words alive that have been used by their ancestors—language is an ancestral right and it distinguishes something special about Aboriginal people from non-Aboriginal people. Language is a part of culture, and knowledge about culture is a means of empowering people. Language contributes to the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities, strengthens ties between elders and young people and improves education in general for Indigenous people of all ages.” (www.vaclang.org.au/)

Whalen, D. H., Moss, M., & Baldwin, D. (2016). Healing through language: Positive physical health effects of indigenous language use [version 1; peer review: 2 approved with reservations]. *F1000 Research*, 5, 852–. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.8656.1>

This study articulates that there are health-related benefits for Indigenous people to maintain their language and sustain revitalization efforts. The authors firmly support that a focus on ancestral language is an effective means of reinforcing culture, and although evaluation of language programs is challenging, there is great evidence to show that those who participate in them have been effective at improving mental and physical health. “Speaking an indigenous language in and of itself may not be solely responsible for improved health status; rather, community validation of the indigenous knowledge system, community-driven tribal education, comprehending indigenous medicine, and youth empowerment through language and cultural identity all play significant roles in the ability of a minority language to thrive and for the community to experience health outcomes from the collective effort” (p. 4).

