



Question and Answer Summary
Navigating the development of the Paul Creek Curriculum in Lingít
with K'èdukà Jack
December 10, 2024

Q: I'm curious about the adult involvement you talked about - making it accessible. Something that stood out to me with the Salish School was that their accounting department and all that are required to take language lessons. **I'm wondering what kind of incentives are in place within your nonprofit or other groups that you work with to engage adult learners?**

I can tell you that in the beginning stages of doing work like this, where you are either in the development stages of the methodology and curriculum, or you are just trying to build highly fluent speakers through this program, you're going to want to focus on the ones who want it. Any sort of program that's holding people accountable to fluency track is at the beginning stages is going to be very painful for everyone involved.

Imagine people in high school who hated a subject and then showing up to a language class. That is who they will show up as even into their 50s and it's really important that you're just prioritizing the individuals who feel grateful, lucky and honored to be able to learn the language as a part of their job. Then when you're building fluency, you're starting to generate a desire and an interest in people to want to shift and move to take these classes and become fluent. This is the interesting part but I think it is relevant to what you're saying too.

We're starting to consider a similar circumstance where we are providing the structure for people to be able to learn the language so that we can then hold individuals accountable to learning even within their position in the language.

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The Salish School of Spokane provides 90 minutes of language instruction every single day to every single staff member. It's your job if you're working in a language speaking school, no matter which position you're in, to be taking those courses.

As I said, the fluency transfer system is set up so well for people to be accessible. People should be able to move sequentially through and become more and more fluent to be able to exist in those environments.

In terms of incentive, I think we all need to be moving towards paying people to learn. Above and beyond that, building it into the positions expectations is something that we're moving in the direction of when considering how to create language domains.

Q: We talked about being able to assess the programming that you're offering and being able to assess proficiency because, I know there's different models out there like the Mentor Apprentice panel and then the Where Are Your Keys methods uses oral proficiency interviews. I'm curious what the fluency transfer system uses to assess.

That's a really good question. The gains are really, really obvious. When I first started doing this work, I was working with someone who was writing her PhD thesis, and she was going through recorded assessments where we were going through a process of just looking at a picture from the beginning and the end of the class and talking about what we were seeing. Really simple processes like that.

But the truth is, there are many language assessment tools out there that you could be using that other people have built. I can't remember the name of it right now but there's, like a common one that everybody knows about. We've gone through that assessment process before, and we've also gone through an assessment process with a highly fluent Tlingit language specialist.

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As well, the assessment processes are actually built into the methodology because you're learning in a classroom format and there are quizzes and there are other recognition assessments, oral and written, that people are going through.

That's an important part of the fluency transfer system. I know that there can sometimes be resistance to that from individuals who are like, "oh, I don't want to go through that colonial process of existing in a classroom and having to be tested." But what I have differentiated is, it's really important for people to understand what they're signing up for. I want to be tested, and I want to know that I'm moving forward. I want to have the motivation of having that sort of recognition, so that I know that I'm progressing. That's been really important for me to become a fluent speaker. I think that once you build capacity, you can have a community casual learning circumstance and there will be individuals who want to teach and learn in that environment. But right now, for me as an individual, I would not be facilitating or participating in anything that wasn't on the fluency track.

So just so you know, it's built into the program and all of those systems in place. If you worked with Children of the Taku Society, for example, we would be providing you with all of the templates of everything we've ever used. It's not just the curriculum we provide for free, but when we support other organizations, I would be giving you grading schemas and all the other things that we provide to people, so that you're not having to start from scratch in these areas.

We haven't actually needed to go above and beyond and start building all of those externally developed assessment tools into our process because the language acquisition is very clear. It's very obvious.

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More and more groups are starting to pick this up, and there's beginning to form a network of individuals who are doing this work and can support each other. There may even be other individuals in your language group who are creating something that you're able to pick up and just make a few adjustments to. It's been a really beautiful thing to witness. I can tell you that the last time we had teacher training, (which we're not doing again), I think we had something like 35 language groups sign up. We tried to accommodate everyone we possibly could. It was very overwhelming for us, but we had people reaching out to us. This is a growing movement and as one of the groups that's leading the development of and replication, we're one of the first groups that's separate from the Salish School of Spokane, who are successful in this. We're really feeling that weight so I'm really hoping we can streamline some of these processes for individuals and make sure that there's more information accessible for people who are needing that desperately. We all as Indigenous language revitalizationists are really needing that information.

Q: Do you have any advice for implementing this strategy in the school district, which consists of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and educators?

Yeah, it's a question that we get a lot. I'm going to point you back to the slide where Fishman recommends and outlines strategies that will kill stage seven and eight languages. My advice to you would be to just go through some of those recommendations, getting really honest about where you're at, getting really honest about whether or not you're seeing second language programs in schools produce highly fluent speakers. If producing highly fluent speakers is your goal, then you're going to want to prioritize a program that is immersion schooling and connected to an adult fluency transfer system.

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This is a really hard one for some people to wrap their heads around because the structures in the colonial world are focused on checking a box. They want to make space for indigenous languages, but they're not really that concerned about whether our languages are thriving. They want to make sure that they are adhering to the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations maybe, but it's not an important outcome that we as indigenous people, are empowered by our languages.

And I personally think that's slightly strategic. I think that it's not their biggest dream in the world to have us showing up as negotiators at governance tables and have all our laws written in our languages where only our people can interpret them. But that's just my personal opinion.

Q: Have you had to deal with individuals who have refused to teach because they only want to focus on their individual fluency?

I could only speak from the understanding of my team and in my community. Everyone on my team is willing to do whatever it takes.

I think that there is an important oversight to understand what people feel safest, most comfortable in and where their natural skill sets lie.

Initially when I reached out, I put out a public poster for a teacher training and I had a number of individuals sign up who were just desperately starving for the language. Those individuals were the ones who showed up. One of them, who is one of my co-teachers to this day, maintains that I was advertising for a Tlingit language class, and she thought she was signing up to be a student.

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But when the call happened, she was willing to sign up to be a teacher because she knew through me explaining the development of this program, that it was what was available for her to be able to access her language right now.

I think that helping your community and your people to understand the theory behind what you're doing can work wonders. It can really support people's buy-in.

And then when it has come to community members who have said, "hey, when are you teaching your next class?" I've let them know our capacity is really low for that right now.

We're really focusing on developing the materials, which takes a lot of time, and I've looked at how much funding is available out there in the world and this is what we need to focus on. Sometimes I have received a little push back from people saying, hey, well I really want to be able to learn and why aren't you prioritizing me in some way? I always recommend to them that you can apply for the funding to start your own classroom. That's the beauty of this methodology, that you can become a teacher yourself. And then those people sometimes will just be like, oh, I didn't really want to actually be a teacher in it.

We also are first-come, first-served. Whenever we have an opportunity, we try to make sure that we prioritize people having a desire to learn the language, it's the most important thing to us. Blood quantum is not one of the standards that we hold for people to be able to become students. So anyone can sign up for our classes when we provide them.

Q: Thank you for leading with honesty, truth, encouragement and support. I too, am tired and burnt out, but our small team is growing. **Does your team meet frequently to take care of each other?** I treasure my team so much and I think that's managed to keep them with me but I want to prioritize our wellness more in 2025. **Curious if you can share what can be built into policy (appreciate the echo of not allowing colonial laws to supersede our tribe's laws).**

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I really am hoping that there's going to be an opportunity for a knowledge sharing hub within FPCC. FPCC has always been so willing to meet me where I'm at as a community individual in a small remote indigenous community who's doing this hard work. Whenever I advocate for that understanding, Aliana and FPCC have really met us where we're at. So, I just want to hold my hands up to you guys for that.

I'm working hard on this right now from the beginning. Our team has spent a lot of time being really intentional about how we connected with each other. You need to keep an eye on burnout and there are very specific things that we're learning right now. As the lead of a team, I would recommend that you focus on some of your own capacity development and make sure that you're prioritizing that. That can work wonders. There are many different methodologies that I use personally in my own life that have changed how I show up as a leader. I use non-violent communication, and we've learned a lot about building restorative systems, which is another way of saying conflict resolution. It's making sure that there's a restorative system for our team to be able to exist within.

Right now, I'm reading a book by Brené Brown called Dare to Lead and her teachings around vulnerability are astounding to me and I just regret that I didn't read this book much earlier. It's really important that no matter what you're doing, you're always pointing yourself back to connection and to safety and well-being.

Despite our team all being like-minded in a collective growth mindset, we were allowing ourselves to exist in an urgency of this work that was creating a bit of toxic productivity. We were, just like, "Oh my God, whatever we need to do, sacrifice everything." Because every couple months we're witnessing our Elders decline in their health and their well-being and how much time they can spend with us. So, when you are locked into a reality like that, it can be very hard to make health- and wellness-based choices and use that as your lens.

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We've really started as a team to collectively focus on sustainability and that's as individuals making sure that when you are connecting in person whenever you can, which should be regular if not every week, every second week at the very least monthly. Make sure that when you are spending that time together that you are checking in using a process where people are just talking in a vulnerable way about what's happening in their life in that moment can work wonders. All of those processes that you start to establish can really create small shifts and changes that are going to accumulate over time.

I could talk about this all day but I think that it would be probably most helpful if there are some spaces and hubs where maybe there is a wellness focus and there's a skilled facilitator who can just help us to be talking about some of what we've seen that works for us. You can be showing up in a bit of a teaching capacity or in a student capacity where you're really looking for some of these solutions. I think we can come up with some good titles for that, like, "I'm tired and burnt out." This is the hub for people who are tired and burnt out from doing the hard language revitalization work of their ancestors. You know how many people would show up for that? It's a passion of mine on an individual level, but I hope to hear from people. I'm not on social media for mental health reasons, but you're welcome to reach out to me by e-mail. And of course I'll be prioritizing the work of my people, but wherever I can reach out and make connection points and support individuals, I will do that for sure.

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