



Continuity of Learning: Indigenous Language Learning Support

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Paul Boucher, sharing the ᑭᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦᑲᑦ "Scramble" Chipewyan board game

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Indigenous Language Learning Supports

The [NWT Education Bulletin](#) (released March 31, 2020), developed in partnership with Northwest Territories (NWT) education bodies and the NWT Teachers' Association (NWTTA), lays out the framework for continued learning for schools and teachers across the territory.

Under the *Continued Learning Opportunities* section, the Bulletin identifies that literacy and language learning will continue to be a focus for all Junior Kindergarten to Grade 9 (JK-9) students. As such, teachers and schools are responsible to deliver curriculum, dependent on their unique circumstances and capacity, whether that be English, French and/or one of the Indigenous languages.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, where possible, Indigenous language teachers and instructors are being asked to continue to support Indigenous language instruction during school closures by encouraging Indigenous language use in the home and in the community. The approaches will look different in each community and possibly for each student, as students may not have access to fluent speakers or the internet during this time.

Many of the resources provided in the *Our Languages Curriculum* (OLC), in the Activity Binder (JK-9) and in the OLC 10-20 resource packages, are adaptable for students to learn at home. All resources are posted on the OLC website at www.ourlanguagesnwt.com.

Additional ideas to help encourage the continuation of learning in Indigenous languages are included for the following groups:

1. Ideas for all students without internet or a language speaker at home;
2. Ideas for students with internet but not a language speaker at home; and
3. Ideas for students with a language speaker at home.

These suggestions can be adapted to specific situations and students.



Ideas for all students without internet or a language speaker at home:

- Create a weekly calendar with a language activity for each day. Print these activities and ideas to be included in the packages you send home.
- If available, use the local radio stations as a call in show to share the ideas and lessons widely. More than just the students will benefit.
- If possible, ask students to call someone they know who speaks the language and practice conversations on the phone or over a video call such as Facetime.
- If children have access to an Indigenous language dictionary – ask them to start a word list of how many words they know – they could try and add a new word or phrase every day.
- Ask students to maintain a journal. For Emergent learners they could write just a word or two; for Beginner learners they should be able to use adjectives with a noun (sky blue, dog brown etc.); and for Advanced and more experienced learners they should be able to have full sentences in their daily journal. If possible, students could record their journal entries as a video or an audio recording. Journal entries could take place while out on-the-land doing traditional activities with a photo or a drawing each day to go with their daily log.
- Use the units provided, such as the Fire Unit, and give the students some possible activities in their package. For example, print the ‘cruncher’ activity suggested in the units.
- In collaboration with a Social Studies or English Language Arts teacher, assign projects that meet different outcomes, such as a research project on an Indigenous language. Remember that the focus needs to be on learning the language, not just learning about the language.
- Where possible, assign projects that allow families to share stories, dances or songs, where the children are expected to learn and practice these creative products and share them with others.



Ideas for students with internet but not a language speaker at home:

- Record a lesson. If possible, use puppets, such as the Elder puppets that were provided as a part of the OLC resources, or other items to have a conversation in an Indigenous language, and post these on social media.
- Post videos on social media, such as Facebook or Instagram, using the Indigenous language. Give students a task and challenge their families to do the same.
- Write students a message – as if it is a postcard – and ‘send’ it to them digitally. Ask them to respond to the question.
- Where possible, invite students to a zoom class once a week (or other platform) and have the lesson together to help keep a sense of community.
- Some of the languages have an online dictionary. Have students start a word list of how many words they know – try to add a new word or phrase every day.
- Students can use the OLC website www.ourlanguagesnwt.com to read books in the language. Six different books can be found under the tool bar at *resources*, then *books* (i.e. Moon book, Berries book, Bones). For most languages there is also an audio file and children can follow along as they read. They should be encouraged to try repeating the words and sentences used in the book. There is also a section at the back of some of the books called *Ideas* – teachers and parents can use those ideas for further use.
- Get students to use the OLC website www.ourlanguagesnwt.com to listen and learn Indigenous language songs with their family as part of a daily routine (i.e. Clean up Song, I Love You). Songs can be found under the tool bar at *resources*, then *songs*.
- Suggest students to watch yoga videos on the OLC website www.ourlanguagesnwt.com and try to do these as a family. For Tłı̄ch̄o speakers, watch the Tłı̄ch̄o Yoga videos on YouTube, such as <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPqnQbKa9zg>.
- Where available, encourage students and families to download and use the [online Applications](#) for Indigenous languages.
- Ask students to go to the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Site (www.pwnhc.ca) to learn how to properly pronounce all the communities in each language and how to greet each other in every NWT language.



Ideas for students with a language speaker at home:

- Ask students to make a family book together with pictures they have. They can use the Indigenous language to describe who everyone is in relation to each other. This will be a wonderful keepsake from this time together.
- Suggest to families to play games they have at home, such as Snakes and Ladders, Go Fish, or UNO, in an Indigenous language.
- Photocopy or print one of the barrier games from the OLC website www.ourlanguagesnwt.com. Encourage families to play the games together. If they are unsure how to play the games encourage them to watch the short videos that explain how to play at <https://www.ourlanguagesnwt.com/game-demonstrations>
- Suggest to families to share stories in an Indigenous language. Remind speakers not to translate, but to use gestures to help children understand.
- Ask students to set a goal of staying in an Indigenous language for a specific amount of time. The first day could be just 5 minutes. Students can try and extend the time each day.
- Suggest to families to do activities together such as cooking and meal time in an Indigenous language. For everything they do, they could describe what they're doing in the language and ask the children to repeat what was said. They could record their conversations and submit their videos to the teacher or on social media.
- If families have magazines, such as UP HERE, ask them to cut out pictures and make up stories (i.e. match pictures with a list of words in an Indigenous language to describe the different clothes for going on-the-land).
- Families could read children's books together. If the books they have are in English, remind parents to have a conversation in an Indigenous language about what they see in the book. They don't have to translate it. They could make up the story from the pictures. Remind families to use verbs and adjectives, not just nouns and to have children using full sentences.
- Suggest to families that as they get ready to go outside, they could play a game to see who can use the most words in an Indigenous language to get ready (i.e. *I am putting on my coat, I have yellow mittens, I can zip up my ski pants, etc.*).



- When they are outside, encourage the play to be in an Indigenous language (i.e. Eye spy, Predator Prey Tag game - Counting in the language to hide and find the other person, talk about the animals who are predators and those who are prey).
- Encourage families to go outside and describe what they see and use an Indigenous language.
- When possible, have speakers take language learners on the land, respecting physical distancing rules, and try to speak only in an Indigenous language.
- If teachers have access to a printer, print out the cards on the OLC website www.ourlanguagesnwt.com and give decks of themed playing cards to families to practice making sentences together or play card games such as Go Fish. Game descriptions are on the website.
- Encourage students to join an active site or create a “Speak _____ With Me” YouTube or video with the students and share on Facebook.

