A photograph of a field of purple flowers, possibly lavender, with a dirt path winding through them. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Literacy and Language Revitalization Redefining and Recontextualizing

Emily Comeau
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
ICLDC 6 March 2, 2019

Final MA thesis: <https://dspace.library.uvic.ca//handle/1828/9421>

The Research Question:

Does print literacy play a role in language revitalization?

What is ILR?

Efforts “to halt the process of language shift and to promote the usage of [...] heritage language[s]”

Grenoble & Whaley, 2005, p. 2

Indigenous Language Revitalization



A dark grey circle containing a word cloud of language revitalization methods. The words are arranged in a vertical stack, with some overlapping. The colors of the words are: Greymorning (orange), TPR (light blue), WAYK (green), Immersion (green), Mentor-Apprentice (orange), Multimodal (light blue), Bilingual (light blue), and TPRS (purple).

Greymorning
TPR
WAYK
Immersion
Mentor-Apprentice
Multimodal
Bilingual
TPRS

UNDRIP

Article 13:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.”

United Nations General Assembly, 2008, p. 7

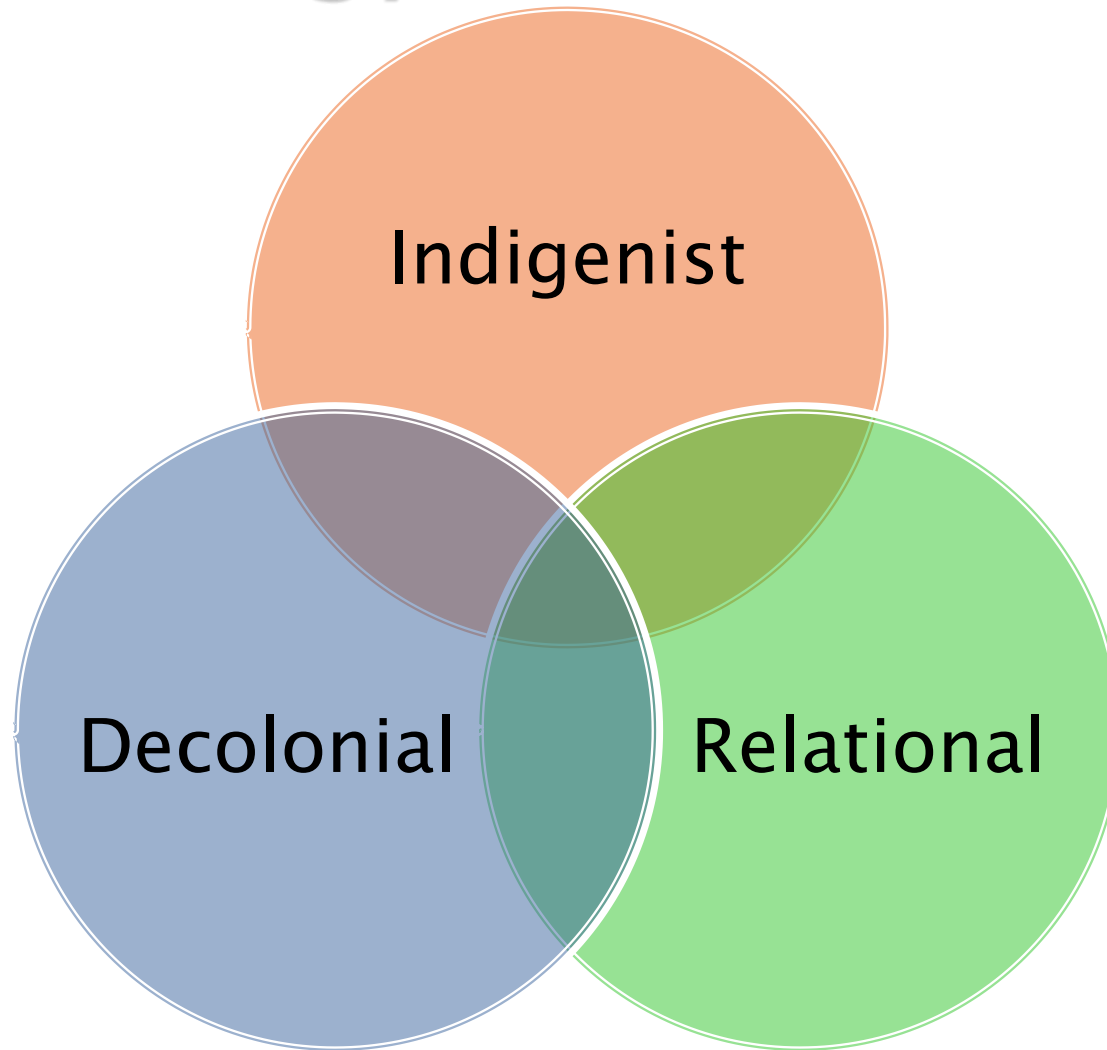
TRC

Aboriginal peoples “have a right to protect and revitalize their cultures, languages, and ways of life.”

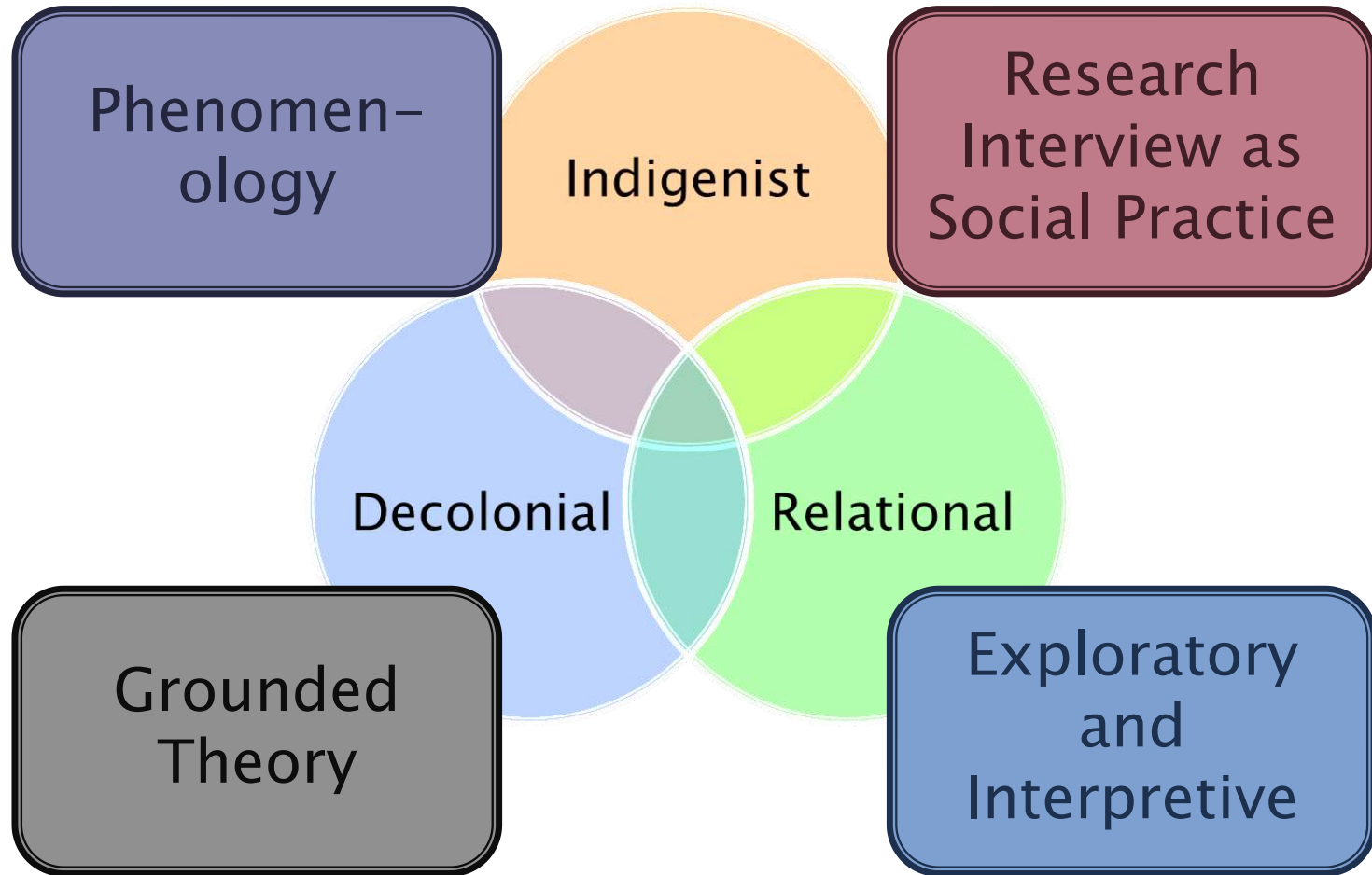
“The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.”

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, pp. 190 & 157

Methodology & Methods



Methodology & Methods



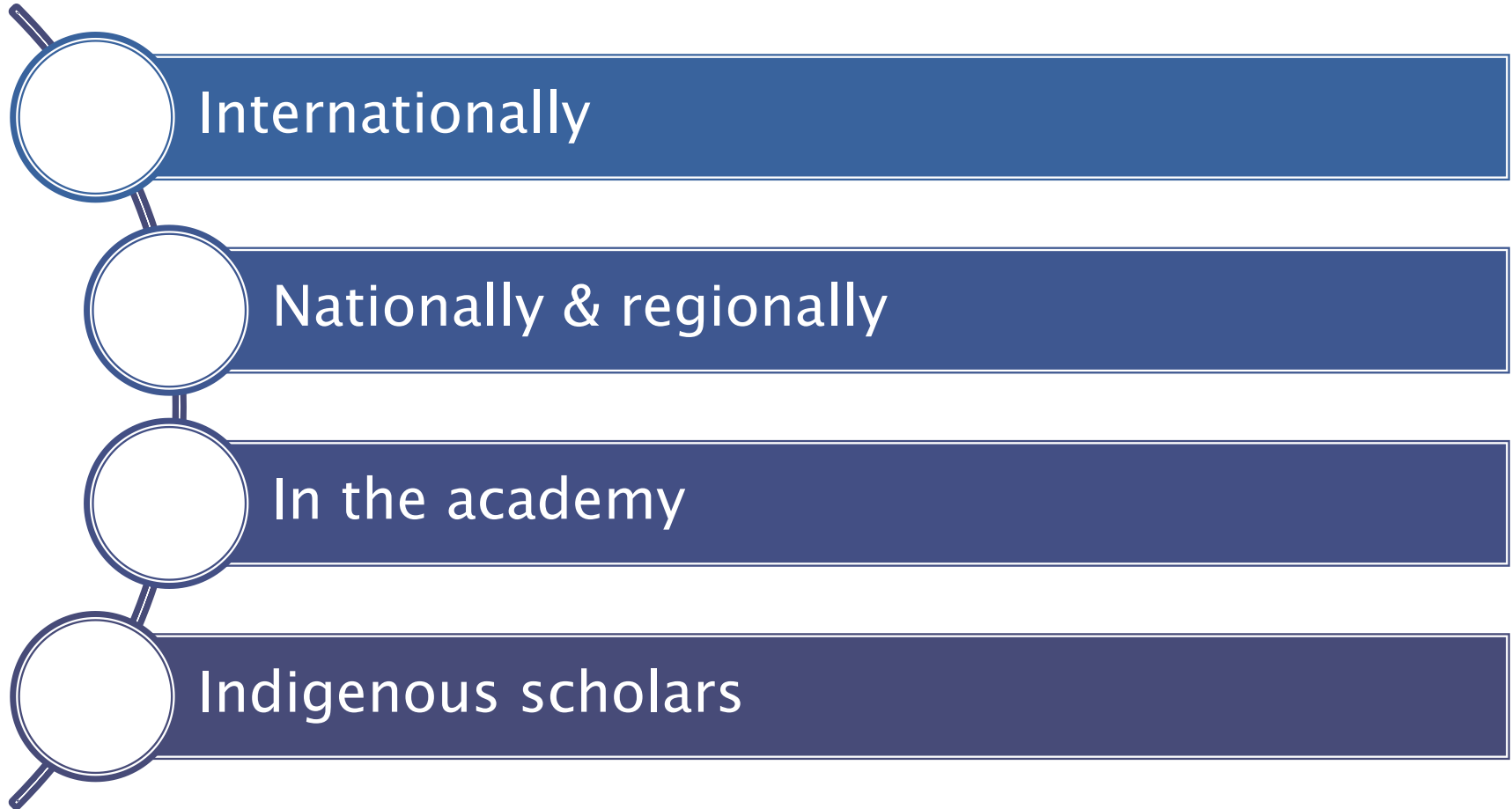
The Literature

Defining literacy

Literacy as political

Literacy in ILR

Defining literacy



Defining Literacy: Internationally

“...over the past few decades, the conception of literacy has moved beyond its simple notion as the set of technical skills of reading, writing and calculating – the so-called “three Rs” – to a plural notion encompassing the manifold meanings and dimensions of these undeniably vital competencies.”

UNESCO, 2004, p. 6

Defining Literacy: Regionally

“the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities” which is “fundamental to improving individuals’ lives and a society’s economic prosperity.”

“A commitment to learning throughout life leads to a society characterized by more literate, healthy and productive individuals, families, communities and workplaces.”

Office of the Auditor General of BC, 2008, pp 3 & 1

Defining Literacy: In the Academy

“The pastness of the past, then, depends upon a historical sensibility which can hardly begin to operate without permanent written records; and writing introduces similar changes in the transmission of other items of the cultural repertoire.”

Goody & Watt, 1962, p. 311

Defining Literacy: In the Academy

“...a set of discourse practices [...] tied to the particular world views (beliefs and values) of particular social or cultural groups”

“...different societies and social subgroups have different types of literacy and literacy has different social and mental effects in different social and cultural contexts.”

Gee, 1986, p. 719

Defining Literacy: Indigenous Literacy

“Literacy is not new to Indigenous peoples.”

“However, because Indigenous literacies are framed within oral societies, they are often neglected or viewed as inferior versions of literacy unsuited for modern life and society.”

Romero-Little, 2006, p. 399

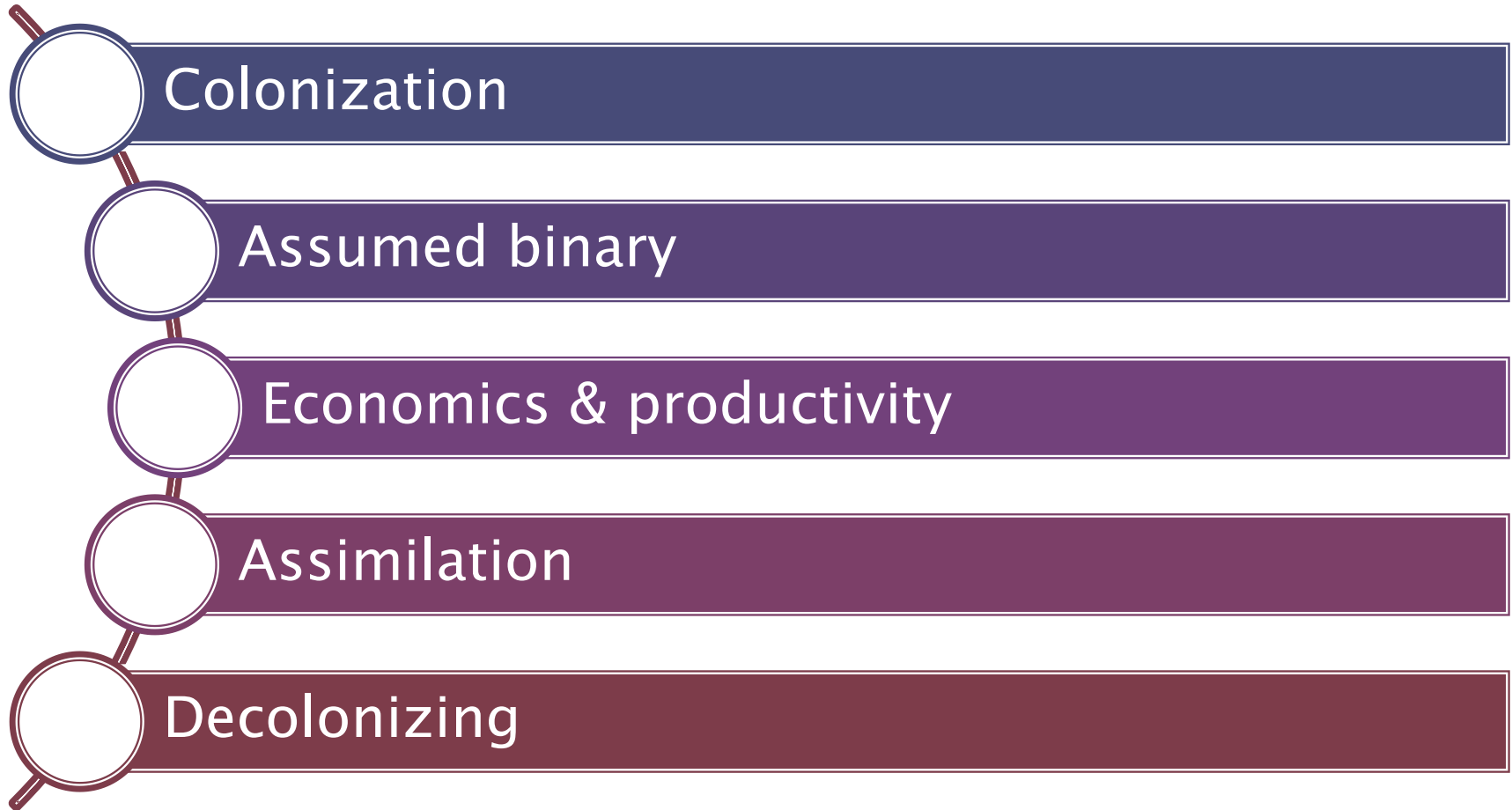
Defining Literacy: Indigenous Literacy

“Literacy is a relative social concept more reflective of culture and context than of the levels of formal instruction by which it is usually measured.”

“Recent studies of literacy have shown, however, that literacy has not been used in the same way in all cultures, nor have its results been the same.”

Battiste, 1984, p. 2

Literacy as Political



Literacy as Political: Colonization

Colonies established by “the primacy of the written word and the power of pens wielded in the service of empire.”

...and “maintained by notaries and their minions, who penned the numerous legal documents that oiled the Spanish bureaucratic machine.”

Rappaport & Cummins, 2012, pp. 13–114

Literacy as Political: Assumed Binary

Reinforced by a “binary categorization of primitive and civilized societies based on the Euro–Western conceptualization and practices of literacy.”

Romero–Little, 2006, p. 400

Literacy as Political: Assimilation & Economics

Residential schools in Canada: expected to “provide Indigenous people with skills that would allow them to participate in the coming market-based economy,” and to “further their political assimilation.”

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 61

Literacy as Political: Economics & Productivity

The *literacy crisis* “is predicated on the need to train more workers for occupational jobs that demand “functional” reading and writing skills.”

Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 2

“Economics is perhaps the most formidable remaining sanctuary of an open or coded colonialism.”

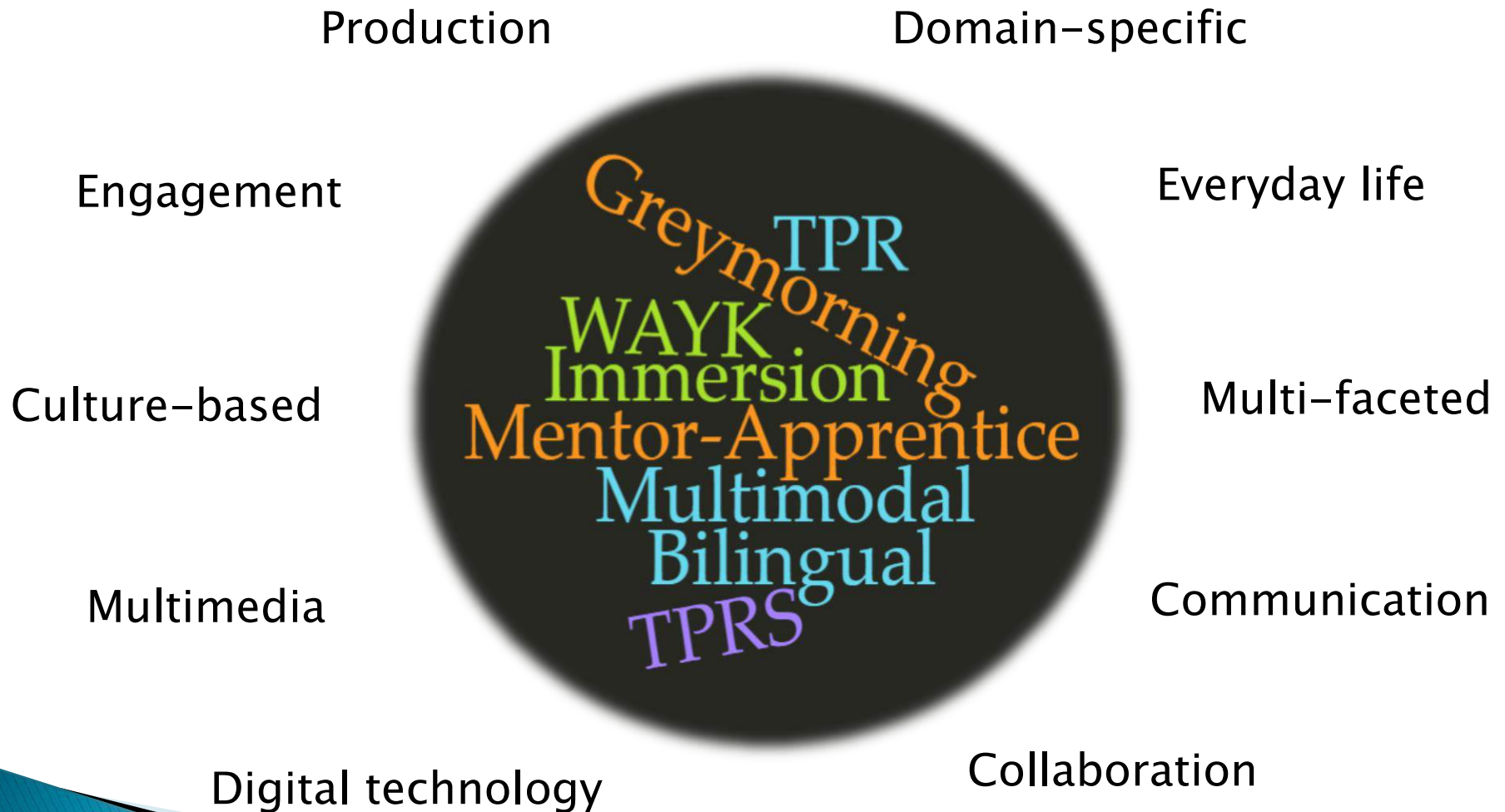
Battiste et al., 2002, p. 89

Literacy as Political: Decolonization

Decolonization: “...a process which entails identifying and resisting the imposition of Western values and knowledge systems that contribute to the subjugation of Indigenous peoples.”

Leonard, 2017, p. 16

Literacy in ILR



The Interviews

“knowledge derived from experience and revealed through stories”

Kovach, 2006, p. 61

Themes from the interviews



Literacy as a tool for language learning

Representing Indigenous thought

Redefining literacy

Distance, diaspora, and situating literacy on the land

Themes from the interviews



The future of literacy in communities


Identity, reconnection, making a political statement

Localizing the context of literacy


Being cautious with literacy



S.I.: Secwepemctsin



Indigenous
thought



Defined by
community

“If the children are not speaking, they’re not writing. So they need to be speakers of the language first. And not just mimicking or rote memory or anything, it really needs to be their thoughts that they’re saying.”

“Who will dictate what literacy we’re going to...what form it’s going to take, you know? [...] We need to be the ones to put down our perspective in written form.”

Trish Rosborough: Kwak'wala

Language
and place

“We often talk about working and learning in place. That that’s where the languages live and so that’s where they’re best learned...There are always times when what we’re learning brings us right back to where our languages come from, because there are things about how we talk about things that show what’s important in our way of seeing the world.”

“If we’re to recover Kwak'wala, I want to recover it in the ways that it was born and where it comes from, and what it’s connected to.”

PENÁC: SENĆOᑦEN

Reflect
the
language

“...so long as we can speak from SENĆOᑦEN first, to speak from SENĆOᑦEN thought, or get to that place where that’s possible, then the threat of what could happen to our language, in terms of compromising its integrity, is really being reduced, you know. And it’s funny, because I think orthography has really been one of the ways that I’ve been able to engage in SENĆOᑦEN thought, to think of things from SENĆOᑦEN.”

Lorna Williams: Ucwalmicwts

Not
replace
face-to-
face

“...the people who had literacy skills [in English and/or French] were able to use literacy as a tool, you know, for memory, to help them remember, to record...to have it organized and visible, and that they could refer back to. And the people who were fluent speakers but didn't have really strong English literacy skills, became confused by the literacy...Because they knew the language so well, they didn't need the literacy to help them.”

Peter Jacobs: Skwxwú7mesh

Used
cautiously

“I try to be really cautious about giving people a sense that this is all there is about these words, right. Like the authority versions of a dictionary. And that comes with writing, you know, and so some people are very cautious about writing things down for that reason, because they become the authority, and it kind of goes against our traditional ways in our community, where there’s a lot of give and take between different families and different parts of the community. And so writing sets up an authority that never existed before.”



The Research Question:

Does print literacy play a role in language revitalization?

The Role of Literacy

Language revitalization can disrupt colonial power and assimilation by “opposing dominant discourses and asserting local educational and linguistic rights”

McCarty, 2005, p. 47

...through literacy that is situated in local contexts and that “emerges from an Indigenous reality.”

Browning, 2016, p. 308

“So, you know, the symbol system of an alphabet is not the only literacy. And it’s really important, I think, that in any language work, language programming, that the idea of literacy has, if it’s going to mean anything to us, it has to be expanded.”

Lorna Williams, Aug. 25, 2017

A photograph of a vast field of purple flowers, likely irises, with a dirt path winding through them. The text "Thank you!" is overlaid in the center.

Thank you!

References

- Baker, C., & Lewis, G. (2015). A Synthesis of research on bilingual and multilingual education. In W.E. Wright, S. Boun, & O. García (Eds.), *The Handbook of Bilingual and Multilingual Education* (pp. 109–126). Malden, MA: Wiley– Blackwell.
- Battiste, M. (1984). Micmac literacy and cognitive assimilation. Paper presented at the International Conference of the Mokakit Indian Education Research Association (London, Ontario, Canada, July 26, 1984).
- Battiste, M., Bell, L., & Findlay, L. (2002). Decolonizing education in Canadian universities: An Interdisciplinary, international, Indigenous research project. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 82–95.
- Browning, P. (2016). The Problem of defining 'Indigenous literacy:' Lessons from the Andes. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, 21(3), 301–312.
- Cantoni, G. (1999). Using TPR–storytelling to develop fluency and literacy in Native American languages. In J. Reyhner, G. Cantoni, R. N. St. Clair & E. Parsons Yazzie (Eds.), *Revitalizing Indigenous Languages* (pp. 53–58). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word & the world*. London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Gardner, E. (2010). How does WAYK teach reading and writing?
- Gardner, E. (2011). 16. "Just in time" – the top 20 WAYK techniques.
- Gee, J.P. (1986). Orality and literacy: From the savage mind to ways with words. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(4), 719–746.
- Goody, J. & Watt, I. (1962). The Consequences of literacy. *Comparative studies in society and history*, 5, 304–345.
- Grenoble, L. A., & Whaley, L. J. (2005). *Saving languages: An Introduction to language revitalization*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Greymorning, S.N. (2011). A language warrior's eighteen years of running a gauntlet for Indigenous languages. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 31(1), 193–203.
- Greymorning, S. (1999). Running the gauntlet of an Indigenous language program. In J. Reyhner, G. Cantoni, R. N. St. Clair, & E. P. Yazzie (Eds.), *Revitalizing Indigenous Languages* (pp. 6–16). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.
- Hermes, M. (2007). Moving toward the language: Reflections on teaching in an Indigenous– immersion school. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 46(3), 54–71.
- Kovach, M. (2006). *Searching for arrowheads: An Inquiry into approaches to Indigenous research using a tribal methodology with a Nêhiyaw Kiskêiyhtamowin worldview* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada.
- Leonard, W. (2017). Producing language reclamation by decolonising 'language.' *Language Documentation and Description*, 14, 15–36.
- McCarty, T.L. (2003). Revitalising Indigenous languages in homogenising times. *Comparative Education*, 39(2), 147–163.
- McCarty, T. L. (2005). *Language, literacy, and power in schooling*. London, UK: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- McClay, E., Little, C., Wysote, M.–B., Vicaire, S., Wysote, T., Metallic, M., Metallic, J., & Coon, J. (2013). Student perspectives on Mi'qmaq language–learning through multi– modal teaching: A Community–linguistics partnership. *International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation*, February 2013. Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i.
- OECD, & Statistics Canada. (2000). *Literacy in the information age: Final report of the international adult literacy survey*.
- Rappaport, J. & Cummins, T. (2012). *Beyond the lettered city: Indigenous literacies in the Andes*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Reyhner, J., Cantoni, G., St. Clair, R. N., & Yazzie, E.P. (1999). *Revitalizing Indigenous Languages*. Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.
- Romero–Little, M.–E. (2006). Honoring our own: Rethinking Indigenous languages and literacy. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 37(4), 399–402.
- Sarkar, M., & Metallic, M. A. (2009). Indigenizing the structural syllabus: The Challenge of revitalizing Mi'qmaq in Listuguj. *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, 66(1), 49–71.
- Smith, L. T. (1994). In search of a language and a shareable imaginative world: e kore taku moe e riro i a koe. *Hecate*, 20(2), 162–174.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*.
- UNESCO Education Sector. (2004). *The plurality of literacy and its implications for policies and programmes*.
- United Nations General Assembly. (1993). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- Virtue, H., Gessner, S., & Daniels, D. (2012). *Language–Apprentice Language Program Handbook*. First Peoples' Cultural Council.