

**University
of Victoria**

Ucluelet First Nation Research Paper

IED 373
Indigenous Education
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Geographic Location

The Ucluelet First Nation, also known as Yuu-tluth-aht, is a Nuu Chah Nulth Nation located on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. Their traditional territory is centralized around Barkley Sound, but extends east to Port Alberni, south to Bamfield, and northward to Green Point on Long Beach (See *Map of Traditional Territory* in Appendix below). The Nation's territory also includes Ucluelet Inlet, giving inhabitants convenient access to the resources associated with the Pacific Ocean. The Ucluelet people have inhabited this coastline for over 5000 years, and formerly consisted of many independent tribes (before the turn of the 19th Century). However, prolonged warfare and rapid spread of disease after European contact forced the tribes in the area to band together as one distinct Nation (Dewhirst, 2012). This amalgamation was instrumental in the survival of their people. Today, there are 613 registered Ucluelet people, with approximately 230 people living in their traditional village of Hitacu, located across the inlet from Ucluelet (2012). The Ucluelet people's proximity to the Pacific Ocean (and also to Pacific Rim National Park), have provided abundant employment opportunities in the past with the thriving fish and forestry industries. However, economic downturn has brought these working industries to a standstill in today's society (Kalland, 2012). Therefore, many Ucluelet people have turned towards the rapidly growing tourism industry for employment. Ucluelet and the nearby Tofino are popular destinations for travelers around the World, with the flat, sandy beaches being the main attraction to the region. Thus, Ucluelet has turned into a small surfing community where many people thrive on providing tourist services or selling their products, such as traditional First Nation's carvings, to earn a living.

Language

The Ucluelet First Nation is among 13 First Nations on the west coast of Vancouver Island that speak the Nuuča̱a̱nuł (Nuu-chah-nulth) language (First Peoples' Language Map of BC, 2013). There are at least three recognizable dialects of the language, but the difference between them is very slight. Thus, fluent speakers are able to cross-communicate between different First Nations. The dialect for the Ucluelet First Nation is called *Barkley*, although it is spoken fluently by very few in the community (only thirteen fluent speakers). Furthermore, these fluent speakers are all over the age of 45 and currently, there are only seven aboriginal people in the community of Ucluelet trying to learn the Nuuča̱a̱nuł language. In an attempt to revitalize the language, the Ucluelet First Nations have created a Language Program “to contribute to restoring the mental, spiritual, physical and emotional wholeness of the community” (Ucluelet First Nations, 2013). The goals for the program as outlined on their website are as follows:

- 1) To increase literacy in the Ucluelet First Nation language.
- 2) To restore and revitalize the use of the Ucluelet First Nation language among the generation/s who still have the ability to speak the language.
- 3) To preserve the language still spoken by elderly fluent speakers today, by recording and archiving vocabulary, grammar, oral histories, stories, songs, speeches, and other means of expression in the language.

- 4) A long-term goal is to eventually produce a large array of written and aural sources in the language for schooling and entertainment (including books, magazines, videos, TV and radio programming).
- 5) The long-term goal is to produce a younger generation of Ucluelet First Nation speakers.

The Elders of the Ucluelet First Nation feel younger generations should have more exposure to the traditional language, especially the immersion of oral language skills. Thus, they have implemented exposure to traditional language into certain schools in the area and will begin to handout rewards for the degree to which immersion students bring back the use of the language into the community (2013). Although it is a tedious process, it is critical for the Ucluelet First Nation to develop curriculum with a variety of written resources for teachers. Secondly, for the proficient speakers of the language, training in classroom management and language teaching strategies is paramount. This will establish a seamless connection between schools and Elders in the community, and will ultimately expedite the process of increasing proficiency among youth and spreading the importance of the traditional Nuučaanuł language in the Ucluelet community. For adults, there is a newly created Parallel Adult Language Program; in order for parents to be able to keep up with their children in learning the language, a program like this is abundantly necessary (2013). To support the matter of language, the Ucluelet First Nation has established an extensive Resource Library for anybody to access at anytime, an invaluable resource for the Ucluelet community.

Traditional Way of Life

The Ucluelet First Nation people adopt many of the same practices and beliefs as the Nuuchaltn First Nation as a whole. In Ucluelet, the belief systems “evolved within the natural limits of nature and has four principal spirit chiefs: on the land spirit chief; in the sky spirit chief; in the water spirit chief; and beyond and below the horizon spirit chief” (Happynook, 2005). These forms are found in everything that surrounds us, and thus, respect is given to all natural resources; the Ucluelet people always think of themselves in relation to nature, not the other way around. In today’s society, this historical relationship with the environment is now under attack and “urban separatism” is being forced upon many aboriginal cultures (2005).

Spirituality plays a critical role in the Ucluelet First Nation; people pray before they do anything. For example, Hudson Webster, a Nuuchaltn aboriginal, explains that if you are unable to provide for yourself, the Creator will look after you, but “one must pray and believe and good things will happen for you” (Webster, 2013). Of the utmost importance for the Ucluelet people (and most aboriginal people in Canada) is the connection you have with where you come from (i.e., your ancestry, your birthplace/home, kinship, etc.). Sacred marriage ceremonies are extremely important in Nuuchaltn culture, but grandparents are very strict about them since cultural teachings are passed down from generation to generation, through marriage and birth. Ultimately, everything the Ucluelet people did involved a connection to the Creator including one’s own identity.

Educational Institutions

The Ucluelet area public schools belong to School District 70 (Alberni) of the BC Ministry of Education. There are two public schools in the town: Ucluelet Elementary (Grades K to 7) and Ucluelet Senior Secondary (Grades 8 to 12) (Yuukwifath, 2011). Both schools are quite small, and have a mixed-demographic of aboriginal and non-aboriginal students. The high population of aboriginal students in these schools is undoubtedly associated with the nonexistence of a tribal or independent traditional school in the region. Thus, it is fundamentally important for teachers in Ucluelet to have a strong understanding of Aboriginal history and culture. The Ucluelet First Nation supports the public school system in many ways, and some of their recommendations will be discussed in the section below. Although there are no independent schools, for students who have not completed the necessary requirements to acquire a Dogwood degree, on reserve educational classes are offered through the Ittatsoo Learning Centre in Ucluelet.

Teaching in the Ucluelet Community

Teachers in the Ucluelet community are very fortunate to have the support of local First Nation groups. This connection between the education system and the community is pivotal in the integration of aboriginal concepts into the classroom. However, as a teacher, it is critical to understand the region that I am teaching in. For example, if I was teacher in the Ucluelet public schools, the information above directly impacts and guides how I would teach within the community.

Firstly, if I were a teacher in Ucluelet, I would take advantage of our environmental surroundings and the diverse geography that the west coast of

Vancouver Island provides. That is, I would take my students into the outdoors for experiential learning. Putting learning into this context is an extremely successful teaching technique, one that is essential at making subject matter meaningful for students. The Ucluelet geography provides ample opportunity to explore the environment. For example, I could take students surfing for PE class, exploring traditional plants to the region in Biology class, or study landforms from an Aboriginal perspective in Geography class; the possibilities are endless.

Secondly, if I were a teacher in the community of Ucluelet, I would have to be aware of efforts in the First Nations community to revitalize the traditional language of Nuučaanuḷ. In the classroom, I would help foster the development and the teachings of traditional language to the best of my ability by taking advantage of resources created by the Ucluelet First Nations Language Program. Since I am not an 'expert' at traditional languages, I will try my best at bringing in Elders or knowledgeable people to teach this component of a child's schooling; it would be inappropriate for me to "fake" my knowledge. To further increase the study of traditional language, I would facilitate open discussion with parents. If I can create an environment where parents feel comfortable approaching me about certain subjects, then the students will have a beneficial learning experience not only at school, but also at home.

Thirdly, having the knowledge of Ucluelet First Nation peoples' traditional and spiritual ways of life is of the utmost importance for me to be able to respect their beliefs in the classroom. A naïve teacher could result in students feeling isolated, alone, or hurt -- feelings that should never belong in the classroom. How can we foster learning if we are not respectful of each child's beliefs and way of life?

Finally, as a teacher in the Ucluelet community, I would need to balance aboriginal components with the required curriculum as set out by the BC Provincial Government. To foster a careful balance in the classroom, I would be sure to look over the School District 70 (Alberni) Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (BC Provincial Government, 2004). This document provides useful objectives and guidelines to enhance educational performance among Aboriginal populations specific to the Alberni School District 70. One of the primary goals that I would help support would be “to increase the number of Aboriginal students completing grade 12 with a Dogwood Certificate that will enable them to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and assets needed to contribute to a healthy society and sustainable economy” (2004).

Ultimately, I need to enhance Aboriginal students’ personal belief that they can be successful in BC in a public education system that is safe, caring, supportive and respectful. To do this, I need to be empathetic of cultures and help facilitate academic growth combined with a strong sense of understanding and appreciation of the local First Nations tribes and culture of all Aboriginal groups. If I can incorporate these concepts into my teachings in the Ucluelet community, then I would feel as though I was successfully doing my job and giving students of all race, ethnicity, creed and religion an equal opportunity of becoming the best person they can be.

Appendix

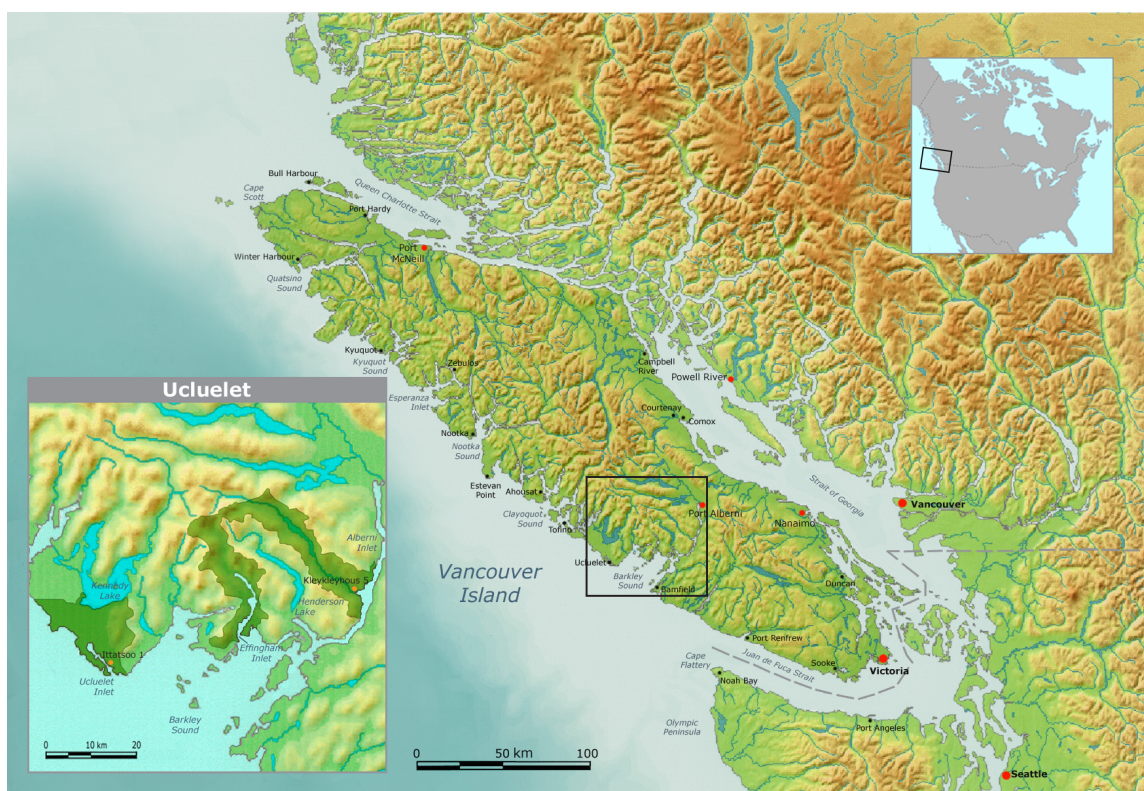


Figure 1. Map of Ucluelet First Nation Traditional Territory (Ucluelet First Nations, 2013)

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