

Irish Inuktitut teacher crossing borders with language lessons

Mick Mallon teaches Inuktitut in person in Iqaluit and over Skype to Seattle

By Angela Hill, [CBC News](#) Posted: Dec 29, 2016 11:00 AM CT Last Updated: Dec 29, 2016 11:00 AM CT

In Iqaluit, some Inuktitut language lessons are coming from an unexpected place and crossing international borders.

The teacher is 83-year-old Mick Mallon, Irish by birth, Canadian by choice. He arrived in Canada in the 1950s and has been learning, then teaching Inuktitut ever since.

"I decided to start teaching from... about six weeks after I started to learn," he said from his home office overlooking the tundra.

It's from there he teaches a class of nine students at the University of Washington in Seattle via Skype. The university has a Centre for Canadian Studies and Mallon was first recruited to teach one student as a one-off event. The class grew, and now of the nine students, seven are from Alaska.

"The class that I have there, there are some really brilliant students."

This isn't the only class he is teaching. Along with a couple of private students, Mallon teaches a course at the Arctic College in Iqaluit. The class is diverse: two people are from Nigeria, two are from the Philippines and two are from Canada.

"It's a great group, you can see, a great sense of humour, they're marvelous," Mallon said.

Amiel Hernandez is training to be a nurse in Nunavut.

"I know that, as a nurse, it will be important to know about the language while I... will help people in the community," she said.

She likes the small class size because she said it's easier to ask for help "and with Inuktitut there's a lot of things to know and memorize, so you constantly need guidance."

'It's my road show'

People have been learning from Mallon for decades, earning him recognition across the country. He was named to the Order of Canada in 2008.

Mallon, however, is modest about his success. He has a long standing joke that he's been bluffing all this time and people keep backing him up.

He said it's because, "I'm an expert in the structure of the Inuktitut language, I'm not brilliantly fluent."

While the 83-year-old could slow down to enjoy his retirement, he says he won't.

Alongside his wife, language teacher Alexina Kublu, he will continue to teach because he would be "bored stiff without it."

"What would I do, I would grow moss sitting in that chair there," he said gesturing to a big soft chair with a view overlooking Frobisher Bay.

"This is fun, I do it for free. It's my road show and the more I do it, the more I learn."

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