

Indigenous Linguistic Standards

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Initial Research Question

- What 'standards' for Indigenous languages exist in Ontario and elsewhere?
- Secondary questions included: What kinds of legislative/policy changes would need to take place in order to effectively implement Indigenous linguistic standards in Ontario and what kinds of barriers exist to implementing linguistic standards?

Why is this Important?

This information is important to:

- 1) Helping support collective advocacy efforts recognizing the rights of First Nations; and 2) informing policy and program development with the goal of building strong relationships.

Research Strategy

Research Approach: To address this present information gap, an environmental scan was conducted through secondary research. Secondary research was the most appropriate approach as it can be completed within a quick timeframe, it is low cost, and it most effective in guiding/aligning larger future research goals and subsequent policy (in this case, those related to Indigenous language education in Ontario).

Secondary Research

- Less Expensive
- Relatively Quick
- Broad Understanding
- Obtained from Public Document
- Preparation for Primary Research

Data Review and Collection: For this project, the researcher carried out secondary research through a review of current literature relevant

to the identified aforementioned research problem. This process involved three steps: 1) Identification of the subject domain, key research questions, and data collection procedures; 2) Comparative analysis and synthesis of data; and 3) Recommendations Resulting from the Research.

Reframing Question

Underlying the initial question is an assumption that 'language standardization' is indeed an Indigenous concept and desire. However, an initial scan of relevant literature, found several sources that highlighted the ways in which the movement towards "standardization" has had a reverse negative affect on the health of Indigenous languages. The data revealed that a key question for consideration in this research is:

What impacts have "standards" had on Indigenous language revitalization/learning? Moreover, what do we actually mean, and imply by, "standardization"?

Methods

- A comprehensive search/review of 3 categories of literature; 1) peer-reviewed books/articles; 2) News media; and, 3) publicly accessible government and First Nation reports/documents.
- Informal interviews with education experts in the area of Indigenous language revitalization in order to better contextualize and situate the research.

Research Findings

Specific program goals/objectives, curricula, and administrative and legislative challenges were discussed.

Key points:

- Most initiatives focus on early childhood education initiatives in the form of immersion programming.
- Schools adhere to Ontario Provincial curriculum while "indigenizing" the curriculum for inclusion of local language and culture.



- The higher the grade level, the less emphasis on Indigenous language (reason: resources, rigid provincial standards, etc.)

- First Nation communities in Ontario have demonstrated ingenuity and resourcefulness in establishing their own Indigenous language preservation projects, which provide them with the resources and curriculum essential to language success.

Key Challenges:

- Pressures of adhering to colonial education standards may work directly against the main goal of revitalizing Indigenous languages and ensuring First Nation students are receiving culturally-safe and culturally-competent education.

"In some ways, standardization is a goal that is in direct opposition to the goal of developing diverse schools based on indigenous cultures and languages." -Riley, Abu-Saad & Hermes, 2005)

- There is no legal obligation for local school boards to enter into Reverse Tuition Agreements.
- Provincial teacher certification standards (requirement of funding arrangements) often prevent First Nations from accessing and utilizing their own linguistic capital (e.g. language experts)
- Research shows that language policy and standardization rooted in non-Indigenous worldview and systems, often forces students to lose their Indigenous epistemology, and cultural identity key to sustainable and healthy living.

Legislative Changes

Relevant legislation examples (existing, in-progress, dated, or future options) that could be implemented or learned from in order to improve Indigenous language education:

- **Bill 214, Education Amendment Act (Regional Aboriginal School Boards)**
- **Inuit Language Protection Act**
- **Sub-section 188(1) of the Education Act**
- **Native American Languages Act and Bill S-212 (An Act for the advancement of the aboriginal languages of Canada and to recognize and respect aboriginal language rights)**

Key Recommendations

- Indigenous language education development must involve Indigenous youth as youth are critical in interpreting and transforming language policy. There is a lack of research in this area and future inquiry should explore, for example, youth perspectives on the learning environment, methods of instruction and evaluation, and overall language outcomes.
- Future legislation and policy must enable First Nations to build and develop necessary infrastructure to create, circulate, and archive Indigenous language tools and resources based on local customs and dialects, and that respect local epistemologies.
- Future research needs to explore the significance of local Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies and how these can better serve as a foundation for Indigenous language curriculum and knowledge standards.
- Future policy and research must attend to the ways in which "standardization" may potentially contradict the goals of community-based and community-driven education.
- Large-scale research project that provides a comparative analysis of existing programs (internationally) for the purpose of sharing best practices and resources and to determine how these programs are designed to strengthen local Indigenous culture, worldview, and spirituality.