

Perspectives on language education: Learning Indigenous languages and French as a second (or additional) language

National Table for French as a Second Language

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- *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm*

- *Skwxwú7mesh*

- *səlilwətaɬ*



CANADIAN
PARENTS
FOR FRENCH

OFFICIAL AND INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES EDUCATION in CANADA DISCUSSION PAPER

Introduction

This discussion paper aims to build understandings within the Canadian Parents for French (CPF) Network about Indigenous languages and official languages in Canada with a focus on associated rights, education and funding. It provides some historical perspectives as well as some orientations to languages that highlight similarities and differences between official and Indigenous languages and how different languages are valued in Canadian society. Canada is at an interesting point in relation to these languages as it has now modernized the Official Languages Act¹ and also plays an active role in the Global Task Force governing the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-32) led by UNESCO.



Bob Watts & Guy Freedman, First Peoples Group facilitators.



Reconciliation Pole (UBC) by
Haida carver & hereditary chief, James Hart



Below = before (salmon, bear & raven of Haida culture)

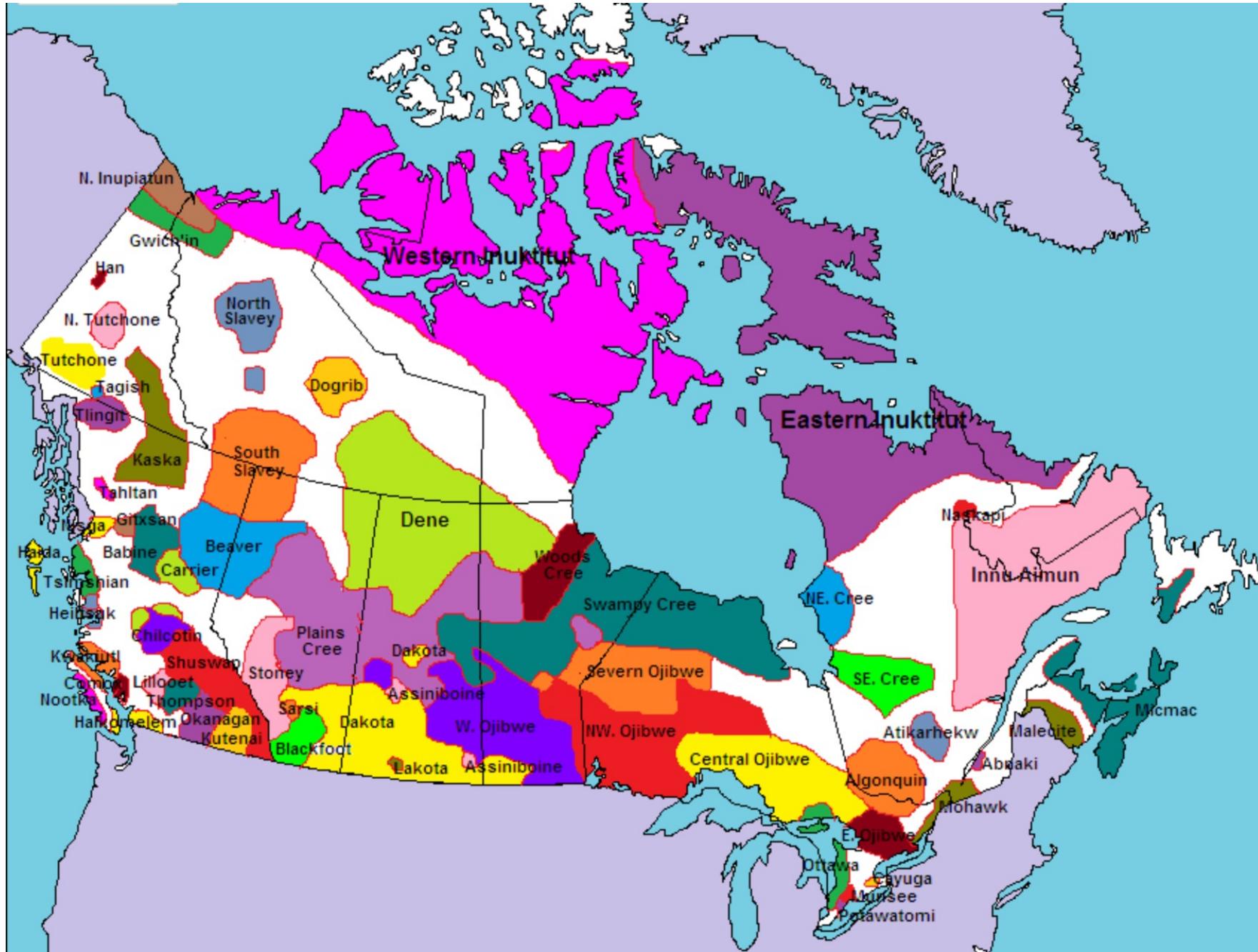
Middle = residential schools (colonization/loss of languages/cultures)



Top = Haida canoe & colonial-era rowboat side by side to symbolize differences but also ***travelling together***

Very top = eagle represents resilience, unity & strength of 1st nations

Thousands of copper nails to remember those who did not survive residential schools

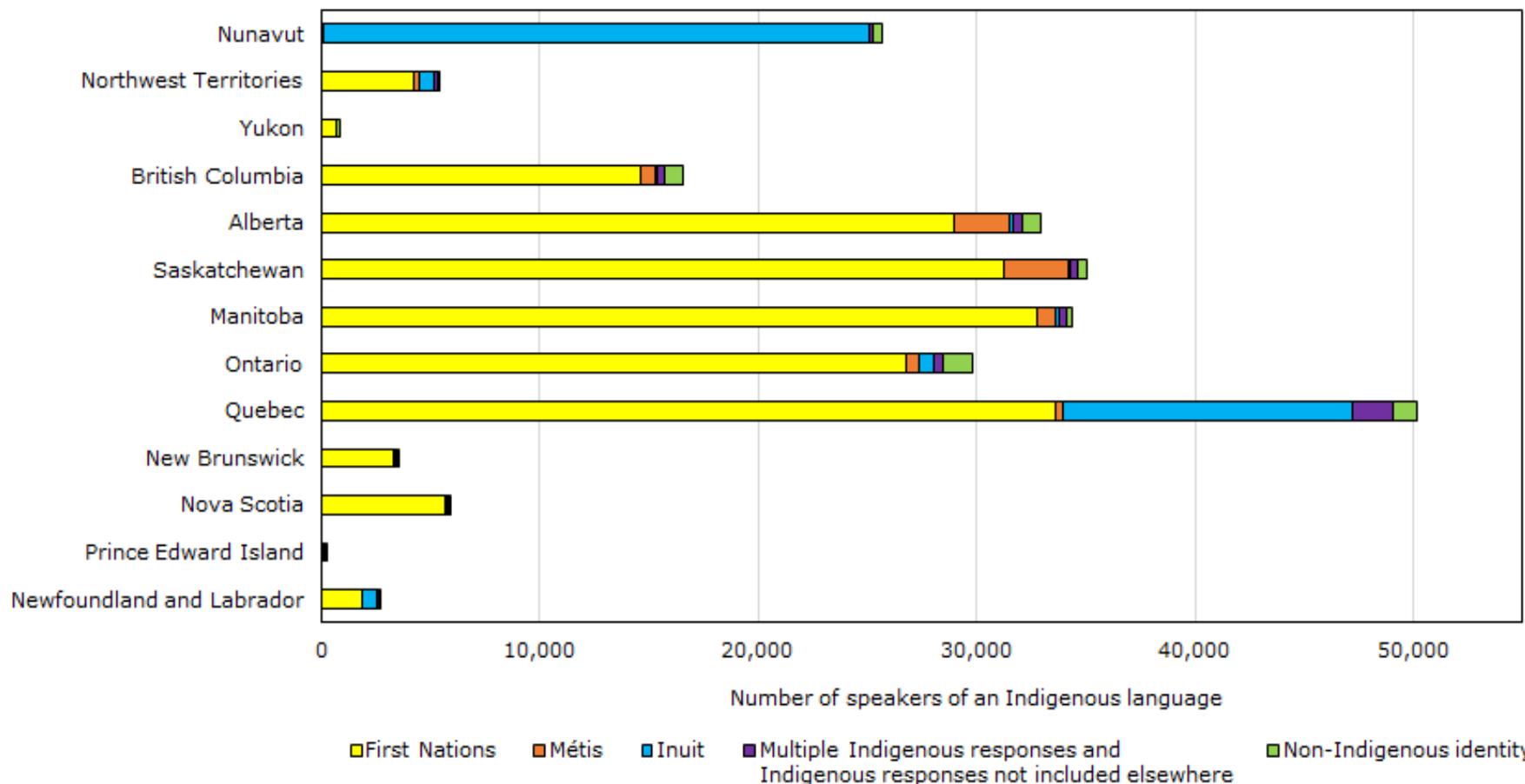


- 240,000~ people speak an Indigenous language
- 70+ Indigenous languages; 200+ dialects
- many of these languages are in decline (number of speakers reduced since 2016)
- some languages are growing, however, due to revitalization efforts:
 - several languages in BC
 - Michif in AB & SK
 - Mi'kmaq in Atlantic Cda
- most commonly spoken: Cree, Inuktitut & Ojibway

Indigenous Language Speakers / Learners in Canada

Chart 1

Quebec has the largest share of Indigenous language speakers nationally



- increase in Indigenous people learning an Indigenous lang. (1/4 of all Indigenous speakers)
- largest growth of Indigenous 2nd language acquisition in ON
- 6000~ non-Indigenous people speak an Indigenous language

Statistics Canada, 2023

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

They're not Indigenous — but they're learning Indigenous languages



Language students 'want to build connections with Indigenous people,' educator says



[Duncan McCue](#) · CBC Radio · Posted: Mar 23, 2023 1:00 AM PDT | Last Updated: May 19



Junaid Khan, left, with his Anishinaabe classmate Sarah Wood, attends an online Anishinaabemowin class offered by the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. (Duncan McCue/CBC)

L2 & L3 learners wanting to learn "an original language of the land".



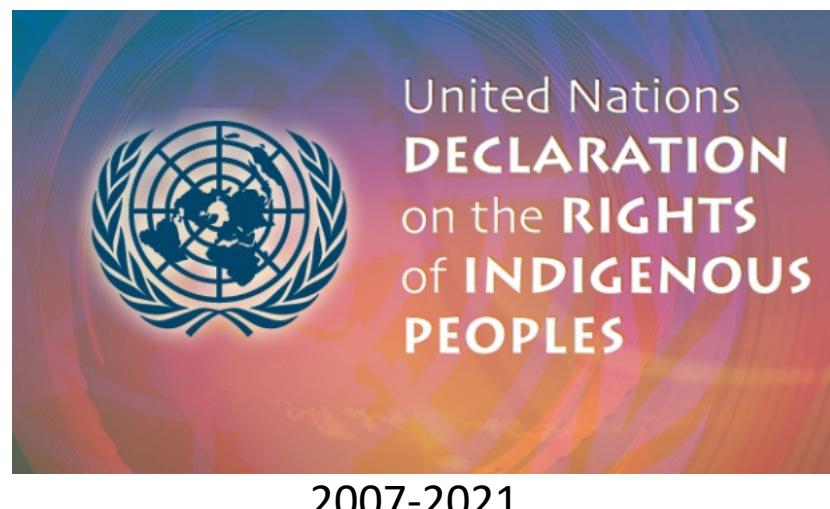
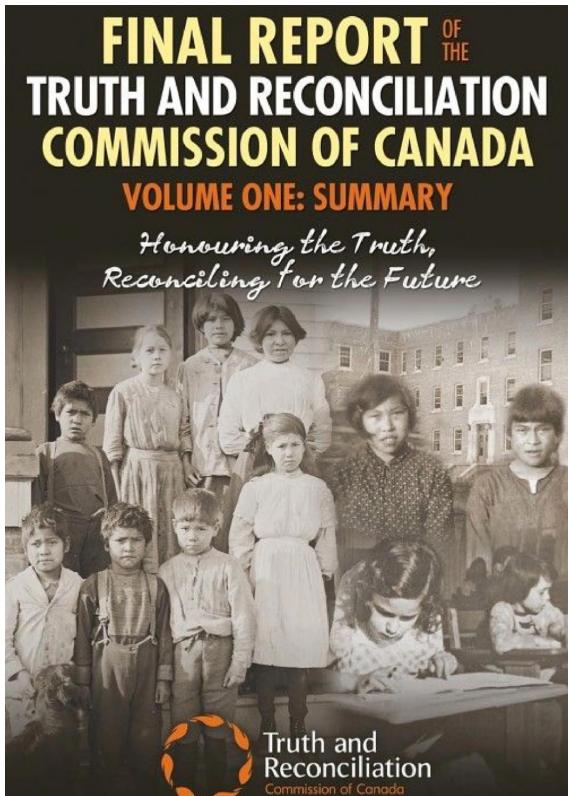
“If it were possible to gather in all the Indian children and retain them for a certain period, there would be produced a generation of “English-speaking Indians.”

(Dept of Indian Affairs, 1895)

“Many among the rising generation do not even know their own language. This great change has been wrought through the Squamish Indian School. All honour and praise to its able and devoted teachers.”

(Principal, Squamish Mission School, 1937)

2008-
2015



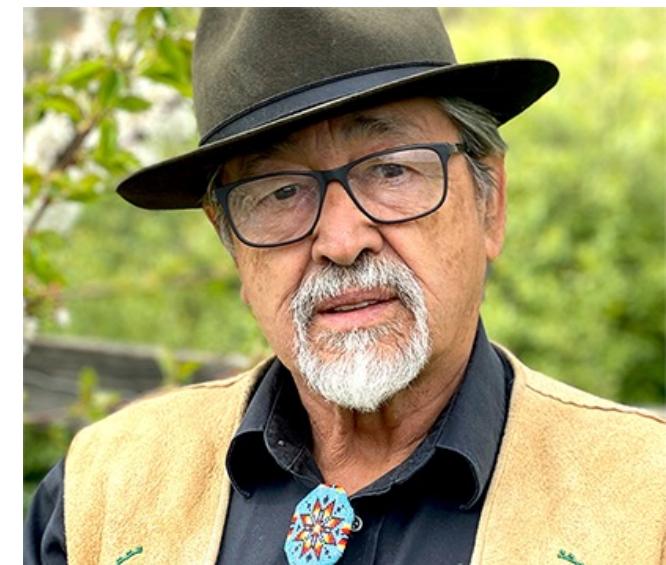
Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

On June 21, 2019, the *Indigenous Languages Act* (the Act) received Royal Assent, with the overall purpose of supporting the efforts of Indigenous Peoples to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen Indigenous languages.



Dr. Raymond Théberge
Commissioner of Official Languages
Role has existed since 1970



Dr. Ronald Ignace
Commissioner of Indigenous Languages
Role has existed since 2021

Proposed changes to language law will create
'barriers' for Indigenous people: AFN



GG Mary Simon: My bilingualism
is Inuktitut & English



Montreal
Indigenous leader calls mandatory French
courses in English CEGEPs 'cultural genocide'

Ottawa should offer Indigenous-language
training, exemptions to public servants:
memo

Senior civil servants explored offering Indigenous-language training to federal employees and possible exemptions to those who already speak one from requiring fluency in both English and French.

More Students and Families Choosing French Immersion Programming Than Ever Before

'An impossible choice': Parents plead with TDSB to save French immersion classes at their school



Open houses planned to promote French Immersion in Olds, AB

Benefits of French immersion touted by Sooke parents' group

Joly: Canada's bilingualism is under pressure, and reform can't wait

Too often, parents who want to enrol their kids in French immersion can only do so through a wait list or lottery system,

Legislation Enshrines Mi'kmaq as Nova Scotia's First Language

"I am very excited about this legislation and am eagerly looking forward to working with our elders, knowledge keepers, **language warriors** and the Province in the joint implementation of this legislation. It is my hope that the model we create can be used nationally."

Chief Leroy Denny, Eskasoni First Nation
Chair, *Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey*



Front: NS Lt Gov Arthur LeBlanc, Kji-Keptin Antle Denny, Mi'kmaw Grand Council
Back: NS Premier Tim Houston, Minister of L'nu Affairs Karla MacFarlane &
Mi'kmaw Grand Chief Norman Sylliboy

"Without our language, we cannot pass along what our Elders are really teaching us."

Elder Albert Marshall,
Eskasoni First Nation

British Columbia

B.C.'s French immersion struggles have Vernon parents camping out and a Vancouver program overcapacity



Minster says more immersion teachers being recruited, trained

[Liam Britten](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jan 22, 2019 2:49 PM PST | Last Updated: January 22, 2019



B.C. Education Minister Rob Fleming says more needs to be done to address shortfalls in French immersion in the province. (Shutterstock)

British Columbia

New report reveals Indigenous language learning is on the rise



About 17,000 people are learning their First Nations language in B.C.: First Peoples' Cultural Council



[Janella Hamilton](#) · CBC News · Posted: Feb 21, 2023 9:45 PM PST | Last Updated: February 22



Roxanne Dool (left), Brody Bear (centre), Cody Dool (right) and family have been learning their ancestral language of Halq'eméylem. (Submitted by: Roxanne Dool)

Innu Nation celebrates record number of Grade 12 graduates



**Mushuau Innu Natuashish School
Graduating Class of 2023**

Anishinaabe language strategy in Ontario teaching language to everyone

By [Darrell Stranger](#)

May 02, 2021



National News

Federal committees looking at graduation rates of Indigenous students

By [Annette Francis](#)

Mar 28, 2023



Indigenous Languages and Official Languages Education

How does CPF fit into landscapes where there are (or potentially will be) 3 official languages?

- What are some ideas or ways of thinking that need to change?
- What are new ideas to embrace?

Thinking Differently about Language Learning (Wernicke & Daniels)

Language as problem (emphasis on majority language mastery)

Language as right (official status: whose language counts?)

Language as resource (learners' multilingual literacies)

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Language as *relational* to encourage healthy and balanced Indigenous-Canadian relations (Donald, 2022)

to unlearn colonial ways of understanding language and language learning and learn other ways, incl Indigenous ways

Questions to Consider (Wernicke & Daniels)

What place do local First Nation, Métis or Inuit language and literacy practices have in the FSL classroom?

Who has the right to learn and the authority to teach an Indigenous language?

What precautions can prevent settler colonial educational practices from perpetuating further harm to Indigenous people and languages?

How do students who speak Indigenous languages incorporate French into their linguistic repertoires?



cpf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/CPFNat_DiscussionPaper_June2023_EN_v6_DIGITAL.pdf

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