

A Study of Preferences, Attitudes and Access among Youth-Aged Mi'kmaw Language Learners in Ktaqmkuk

N. Draco Dunphy – Memorial University of Newfoundland – nddunphy@mun.ca

There have been a number of calls for change, action and justice regarding Indigenous language revitalization at all levels of society, but language revitalization has seen to be deprioritized, even amongst Indigenous community governments (McIvor et al. 2020). One of the larger issues in the space of reconciliation and Mi'kmaw language revitalization in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has been the lack of data pertaining to Indigenous demographics overall, as well as data pertaining to youth desires, attitudes and access to Indigenous language learning.

In conversations with Indigenous leadership in the province, there has been an idea expressed that youth do not wish to learn the Mi'kmaw language in the province as evidenced by low attendance in online language classes. This idea runs in direct contradiction to both my own experience and the experience of my peers who have a strong desire to learn the language but face access barriers to learning.

With carefully selected questions incorporating ideas from utopia as a method approach, I will conduct interviews with youth-aged Mi'kmaw Language Learners in Ktaqmkuk (the Island of Newfoundland) to more accurately determine their thoughts surrounding Indigenous language use in an ideal world, how they would want to engage with their language and language learning, and what barriers to access prevent them from engaging with language in this ideal way presently.

I hypothesize that youth would like to learn the language to a higher degree of fluency, but they face challenges such as a lack of accessible learning mediums, the funds to travel to access programs, or that the opportunity cost of learning the language is too high at the present. Many Indigenous youth are at a vulnerable stage in their lives, and the need to provide for their families and secure their economic position comes into conflict with the desire to learn their language, perceiving the time cost of learning to be too high.

I hope that my findings will illuminate gaps in the literature on the perceived opportunity cost of Indigenous language learning and the desire for accessible Indigenous language programming for youth in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, opening up avenues for further research. These findings will also provide valuable evidence of the need to redesign Indigenous language policy, programs and a shift towards adequate funding for successful and accessible Indigenous language revitalization activities.