

Indigenous Languages, Bilingualism and Early Childhood

RCAAQ-2020

WHAT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT BILINGUALISM AND INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Indigenous peoples in Quebec are struggling to preserve their languages, which are at the heart of their culture and identity (Taylor et al., 2008). In urban areas, the preservation and transmission of Indigenous languages is a particularly great challenge and a concern for many parents. Accurate information is key to children's parents and entourage optimally supporting their children's development. Scientific knowledge can thus guide parents and educators in making informed decisions while also considering each family's context and needs

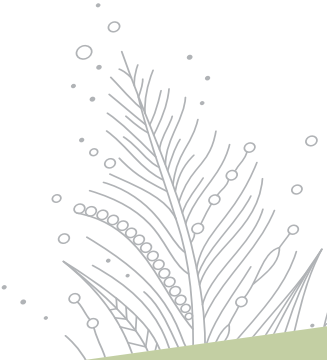
It is normal that children who are learning a second language:

- » Mix their first and second languages in the same sentence (Daviault, 2011)
- » Have fewer vocabulary words in one of the languages (when both languages are considered, bilingual children will have as much vocabulary as a unilingual child of the same age (Tupula Kabola, 2016)
- » Don't know how to express a person, object or concept in one language, but are able to do so in the other language (it depends on the contexts in which they are exposed to each language)

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BILINGUALISM:

- » Bilingualism does not cause language or learning problems or difficulties.
- » Bilingualism will not worsen a language disorder.
- » Knowledge and mastery of the parents' first language is an asset for children' optimal development and overall well-being.

None of these observations should ever trigger a shift in the home from the mother tongue to a second language. It should always be the parents who choose which language is spoken at home.



"Home is practically the only place where we can speak our language."

—Parent and Native Friendship Centre member



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DATA ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN QUEBEC

In general, the data from the Statistics Canada 2016 Census show that several Indigenous languages are still very much alive and in use. Approximately 70 Indigenous languages are still spoken and used in Canada.

In Quebec, over 40,000 people have an Indigenous mother tongue. The following table presents a comparison of the Indigenous languages in Quebec with the largest numbers of speakers.

LANGUAGE	APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	% OF THE POPULATION WHO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE IN THE NATION
Cree	15 000	81%
Inuktitut	12 000	98%
Innu aimun	8 700	45%
Atikamekw	6 150	81%
Algonquin	1 185	11%
Naskapi	590	45%
Mi'kmaq	485	8%
Mohawk	365	2%

In some nations, more than 80% of members speak and use their Indigenous language. This illustrates exceptional vitality in the Canadian context.



"I'm so proud to speak my language [...] My identity is my language."

–Native Friendship Centre member

"It's important to keep our culture going and it's important to try to keep our language going. It's who we are."

– Native Friendship Centre staff member

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“To speak the language is to teach it, to make it come alive...”

—Elder and Native Friendship Centre member

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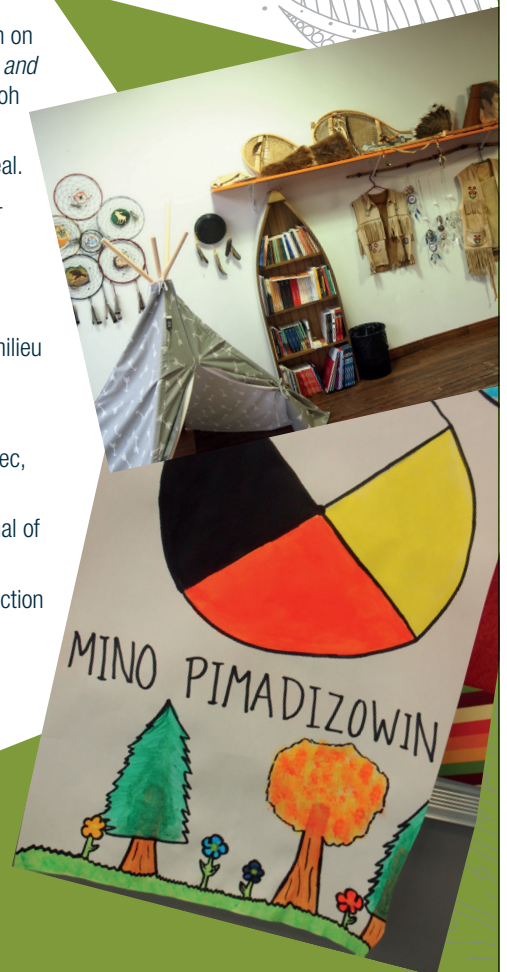
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