Kettle and Stony Point First Nation: A Narrative of Indigenous Language Revitalization and Digital Indian Day School Histories

Jordan George, Kettle and Stony Point First Nation
jordan.george@kettlepoint.org

Jackson Pind, Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies, Trent University
jacksonpind@trentu.ca

Benjamin Farmer Lacombe, Independent Scholar
benjamin.fl@bell.net

Abstract

This article explores the intersection of Indigenous language revitalization and digital archival resources, in the context of ongoing efforts to preserve and share the histories of Indian Day Schools in Canada. The Indian Day School system is a lesser known but significant part of the country's colonial history, which subjected Indigenous children to cultural assimilation and abuse. This research highlights the importance of integrating Indigenous languages into digital storytelling as a means of reclaiming cultural heritage and fostering intergenerational healing. We emphasize the need for collaborative efforts among Indigenous communities, scholars, educators, and technology experts to build ethically responsible and culturally sensitive digital resources that celebrate Indigenous languages and honour the resilience of Indian Day School survivors. Ultimately, this article calls for greater recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems and the integration of technology as a catalyst for Indigenous language preservation and cultural resurgence.

Keywords: Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, Language revitalization, Indigenous History, Indian Day Schools, Digital Archives

Introduction

In recent years, the crossroad of Indigenous language revitalization and digital technology has become a focal point for preserving and sharing endangered languages (Galla, 2016; Koole & Lewis, 2018). This article delves into recent efforts to rejuvenate Indigenous languages, namely through the utilization of digital media, to engage with the painful legacies of Indian Day Schools. Often overshadowed in discussions of Canada's colonial past and its residential schools, Indigenous children in Indian Day Schools were subjected to violent cultural assimilation through numerous forms of abuse. This article underscores the pressing need for collaborative endeavors among Indigenous communities, scholars, educators, and technology experts to create learning resources that not only reckon with our colonial past, but which do so by meaningfully and substantially supporting the revitalization of Indigenous languages.

In 2022, with the support of the Small Research Grants Fund of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR), Jackson and Benjamin began the process of translating the

Indian Day School digital map platform: www.indiandayschools.org. A recently published research note offers more details about the nature of this new platform, as well as the driving forces behind its creation (Farmer Lacombe & Pind, 2023).[1] We were fortunate to be able to hire Jordan George, who was a Bachelor of Education student at Queen's University at the time. Jordan is from Kettle and Stony Point First Nation and currently works in the community as a communications specialist. This collaboration allowed us to explore how we could support language revitalization organically by sharing his family history with Indian Day Schools. We believed translating our map into Anishinaabemowin would help language revitalization efforts in Ontario, and would specifically advance Jordan's ongoing work to create language resources which confront the impact of Indian Day Schools in his community. This article explores our process for translating our digital platform into Anishinaabemowin with the help of a community member who was personally impacted by these schools due to generations of forced attendance in their community, and lays out considerations for future digital language revitalization efforts.

Author Positionalities

Aanii kina wiiyaa, Mkademigizii-Zhaadan Manidokaa nidizhnikaaz, *Wiiwkwedong-Kikonong miinawaa Aazhoodenaang* (Kettle & Stony Point First Nation) Nishnaabe kiing nidoonjibaa. Giigohn-Mishiikenh-Nahmahbin nidodemyaan. Ninoos zhinkaazod Shkaamigizii. Shakamigizii ogwisan Daawshbidoongiizhigbaa. Daashbidoongiizhigbaa ogwisan Robert Georgebaa Sr., miinawaa Albert Georgebaa (Cumaani-Bidaawnakwot) gye Manidookaabaa, Mayangiikebaa, Tobinabeebaa, miinawaa Anaquibabaa.

Greetings everyone, my name is Jordan George, and I am from Kettle (Kikonong) & Stony (Aazhoodenaang) Point First Nation. Both Kettle & Stony Point are one First Nation and are located within the Wiiwkedong Nishnaabe kiing/land. My clan is the Fish Clan, specifically the Turtle and Sucker fish clans which I inherited through my father's father and mother, my paternal grandparents. My father's name is Ronald C. George, Shkaamigizii (Strong Eagle). He is the son of Daawshbidoongiizhigibaa (the late Robert George Jr. whose name means "Splitting the Sky"), who was a son of Robert George Sr., and a grandson of Albert George, and a great-grandson of Macatoshu Manidookaa, himself the son of Mayangiike, who is the son Tobinabee, a great-grandson of Anaquiba. Tobinabee represented the Potawatomi Anishinabeg in treaty negotiations with the United States.

Jordan works for the Chippewas of Kettle & Stony Point First Nation (CKSPFN) as a Communications Specialist for the community administration. Working closely with Chief and Council, various committees, corporate divisions and staff across program areas, his work focuses on ensuring the Crown and proponents honour sound and transparent Duty-to-Consult processes in Consultation & Accommodation projects. His work history spans across the fields Crisis Response, Education, and Governance.

Jackson Pind is an Assistant Professor of Indigenous methodologies at the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies, Trent University. As a mixed Settler-Anishinaabe historian, his research has focused on the history of Indigenous education in Ontario, especially the Indian Day Schools in the 20th century. He has worked closely with Elder and Dr. Raymond Mason from

[1] The authors express their gratitude to Dr. Theodore Christou for his role in supervising the creation of this project.

Peguis First Nation and the community of Curve Lake First Nation in creating community-based histories of the Indian Day School System. Jackson's collaboration with Dr. Mason led to the publication of *Spirit of the Grassroots People: Seeking Justice for Indigenous Survivors of Canada's Colonial Education System* and the digital mapping platform described in this article.

Benjamin Farmer Lacombe is a settler Franco-Ontarian educator, who has conducted research at the crossroads of digital history, inquiry-based learning, and user experience design. He is the lead designer and co-creator of the digital history platform described in this article. He is an Ontario Certified Teacher and has taught Canadian history at the high school level. He is currently teaching at the Benjamin Franklin International School in Barcelona.

These three positionalities mirror some of the original interactions in Ontario between European and Indigenous peoples. Jordan is a member of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, who was raised within the community. Jackson has settler ancestry from Ireland, Finland, and Denmark and Anishinaabe ancestry from Alderville First Nation. Benjamin has twelve generations of French-Canadian heritage. Combined, these scholars are exploring education, history, language, and digital learning through the topic of the Indian Day School system. As Dwayne Donald (2012) writes:

> I am convinced that the task of decolonizing in the Canadian context can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across historic divides, deconstruct their shared pasts, and engage critically with the realization that their presents and futures are similarity tied together. (p. 534)

We believe that both Indigenous people and settlers must work together in building tools which support critical engagement with the understudied history of Indian Day Schools, and which do so in multiple languages—not only in Canada's colonial languages.

Language Revitalization Context in Canada

Over 150,000 Indian Day School survivors have submitted claims to the 2019 Indian Day School Class Action Settlement (Deer, 2022). Over 85% of those survivors received the lowest level of payment of just $10,000 for experiencing a system of education that attempted to remove their Indigenous language and traditions. Another $200 million has been earmarked for language revitalization, healing, and initiatives organized by the Garry McLean Settlement corporation. This is equivalent to an additional amount of only $1,333.33 per claimant. Tallied this way, most Indian Day School survivors in Canada have been compensated just over $10,000 to heal their trauma and to relearn their languages, all while living with intergenerational impacts.

We are currently in the UNESCO Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032), and the government of Canada has committed to further protection through language initiatives. However, the long-term effects of colonial schooling continue to negatively impact the number of Indigenous language speakers across the country. In Ontario, the last decade saw a 9.4% drop in the number of Indigenous people who could speak an Indigenous language in the province, down to a total of 26,750 (Statistics Canada, 2023). Within the Ontario education system, there have been some positive but slow trends towards incorporating Indigenous languages into public schools. According to a report from People for Education published in 2023, "between 2012 and 2022, the proportion of schools offering Indigenous language programs has increased from 4% to

13% for elementary schools, and from 11% to 20% for secondary schools" (p. 2). The report also noted that a survey conducted with school principals expressed the need to support Indigenous language courses but that there was a lack of funding and personnel to offer these programs. While there is an increasing desire from the provincial education system to increase Indigenous language offerings, it has not been fully realized due to these funding and staffing constraints. We believe our platform helps alleviate this problem, if only modestly, by providing a free, modern, and easily accessible Anishinaabemowin digital learning resource on the history of Indian Day Schools. Since launching in 2023, we have had over 20,000 visitors to the website, including students from elementary through post-secondary who have used the map and its features to explore the history of Indian Day Schools close to them. The next section of this article outlines one such history, and illustrates the vast potential for digital resources to support intergenerational healing.

Overview of Kettle and Stony Point Indian Day Schools

As part of this research project, Jordan and Jackson worked collaboratively to explore the archival files related to the Kettle and Stony Point Indian Day Schools that were held at Library and Archives Canada, within the RG10 files series. This brief account of the Indian Day School that members of Jordan's family experienced is primarily based on this data. These files, along with 700,000 additional ones about other schools, are available within our online digital learning platform. Jordan could easily consult relevant historical information which provides evidence of the experience of attending an Indian Day School in his community. Jordan was able to recognize family and community members in many of these files, including uncles, aunts, and grandparents.

The Indian Day School situated at Kettle Point was under the administration of the Anglican Church from 1870 to 1990. The official registry includes two schools, reflecting a significant change brought about by events in their home community during World War II. In 1942, under the War Measures Act, the federal government requisitioned land to establish a military base named Camp Ipperwash. Consequently, the Indigenous residents were displaced from their land, leading to the closure of the "Stony Point" school operated by the Methodist Missionary Society (1880-1942).

Figure 1
Kettle Point Indian Day School circa December 1942, around the time Stony Point Day school amalgamated with Kettle Points
(Courtesy of Jordan George)

Students were subsequently relocated to the Anglican "Kettle Point" Day School. The historical records of both schools reveal similar instances of mistreatment and health issues. The Kettle Point School encountered failures in government policy common in day schools, with challenges in securing adequate teachers, maintaining regular attendance, and preventing rapid spread of illnesses within the reserve (Carleton, 2022; Raptis, 2016). Located at the southern end of Lake Huron, the schools were relatively isolated, with the nearest railway over 10 miles away in Forest, Ontario. As a result, recruiting teachers willing to leave their own communities to teach on the First Nation proved difficult. The Department of Indian Affairs in January 1942 conceded, "in discussing conditions and the problems of the Teachers one is led to believe that the teaching of Indian children is reserved for martyrs of the profession (p. 121)." Issues with teacher quality were apparent from the outset. Complaints emerged at the turn of the century from community members and students, alleging instances of teacher misconduct. One community member, Thomas George, reported in March 1897 that the "teacher had used the school children's water pail for washing personal undergarments during school hours (p. 29)." Although the teacher was investigated and eventually dismissed, the lack of concern for the students was evident. The Chief and Council acted against teachers, causing problems in the community. Multiple petitions were launched to remove teachers who were neglecting their duties or causing disturbances on the reserve. Community members also participated in protests by refusing to send their children to the Indian Day School. Persistent outbreaks of diseases like

measles, smallpox, and whooping cough further exacerbated attendance challenges, prompting the government to make efforts to increase student enrollment. In a 1916 report, J. D. McLean, the Assistant Deputy Secretary, noted that "despite an enrollment of 43, average attendance had been only 12 since the previous January (p. 84)." McLean reminded the Indian Agent that attendance would be enforced if children were not sent to school upon its reopening in the fall. In all these regards, the experience of being an Indian Day School student in Ontario mirrored that of other schools and was heavily contingent on available teachers.

Even when Kettle and Stony Point First Nation were able to secure some of the highest qualified teachers in the province, they failed to live up to expectations. A clipping of *The Sarnia Observer* was sent to the Department and reported a story on "Drinking in Indian School House," where a thanksgiving party was held within the school and led to an assault charge. The RCMP were called to investigate the party under both the Indian Act and Liquor Control Act of Ontario, which banned alcohol on reserves. It was revealed that the teacher, George Dill, was the President of the Teachers' Association of Ontario Indian Schools and had invited a number of cottagers from Ipperwash Beach to celebrate the end of the summer season. An Indigenous community member confronted Mr. Dill, which led to a fight breaking out and the RCMP being called to lay charges. This matter was reported alongside several newspaper articles critical of the Department of Indian Affairs. The acting Indian Agent, J. C. Trenouth, wrote to the Department in October 1937:

> As you will see, this matter has been given a lot of adverse publicity, not only for Mr. Dill, but for the Kettle and Stony Point School and Reserve as well. Mr. Dill is an exceptional teacher and has given fine service at this school. (p. 44)

After a month-long trial, the Director McGill of Indian Affairs on November 13th, 1937, noted in a memorandum that Dill had been convicted of "processing intoxicants on an Indian reserve, under Section 130 of the Indian Act (p. 86)." A few days later, the Member of Parliament for Lambton-Kent, Hugh A. Mackenzie, asked the department to not force Mr. Dill to resign as teacher, writing in November 1937:

> Mr. Dill left himself open to just criticism and I am not going to condone his actions in that regard. The Department at Ottawa is well aware of his work among the Indians and if he could be permitted to finish his school year before resigning, it would be much appreciated by him. (p. 94)

Despite these pleas, Mr. Dill resigned by the end of November and left the school without a teacher for December. Thus, the Kettle and Stony Point school experienced numerous problems that impacted education, even when it had some of the most recognized and respected teachers.

There are some parts of our history that are buried, and we dig for them by facing their impact after many years, if we are lucky. While we are coming to terms with the depth of the effect of residential schools and, slowly, of day schools as well, we are only beginning to formulate a plan for how to deal with it. I (Jordan) remember sitting in my grandmother (Nkoomis) Sylvia's room when Stephen Harper apologized for the federal government's role in residential schools. I remember the dignity she showed us as she faced this reality almost a half century after she attended Mt. Elgin Residential School in Munsee/Chippewas of the Thames. I'm not sure if she ever confided in anyone about what she experienced there. The process of searching the grounds

around the site is not yet complete. Even though these things are happening, and in part because of these things, some of us are trying to create a vision of what it means to revive the most precious of all which was lost, save those children who never came home themselves. I am speaking of the language they spoke going into these institutions. Coming away from the residential schools and day schools they had learned that our language was not useful, that it could get them hurt, and that the value of Anishinaabemowin was so much smaller than what it really was and is.

My grandfather and grandmother never believed that our language was not meaningful. My grandfather died driving to Walpole Island (Bkejwanong) to speak Anishinaabemowin with his friends. He never attended residential schools. Perhaps, part of this is due to the fact that his father (Robert George Sr.) was an Indian police constable, and that his family wasn't targeted in the way my grandmother's was. None of his siblings attended residential school as far as I know, but they all attended the Stony Point Day School, and after 1942 the Kettle Point Day school. My father attended the Stony Point Day School and was not taught about the language or culture growing up. Not until he was in his 30s and had children of his own did he begin teaching us the language. I remember my Dad called our cat "Gizag" for a few months before Grandpa corrected his pronunciation as "Gaazhig" instead. My great-aunt, Annie Bunce, who I never had the chance to meet, passed away at the young age of seven in 1927. Her resting place is on the grounds of the former Kettle and Stony Point Day School. This is the starting place for our language revitalization journey and has led to my ongoing work in this area for my community.

Figure 2
Current Site of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation Indian Day School
(Photo by Jordan George, 2023)

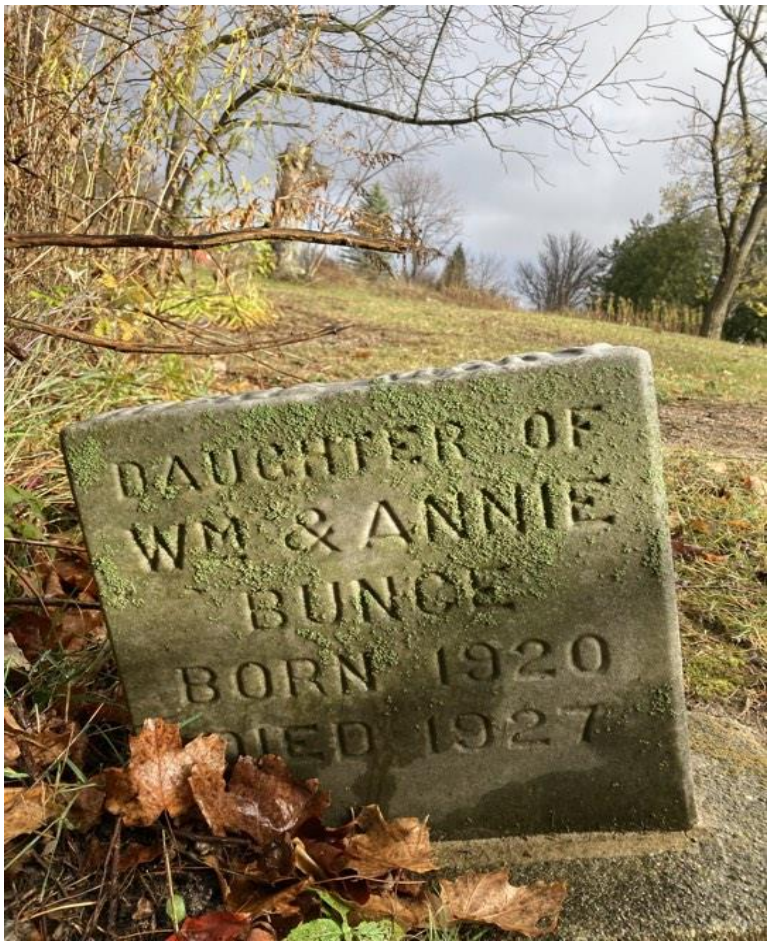

Figure 3

Current Site of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation Indian Day School showing the gravesite of Jordan's Great-Aunt, Annie Bunce, on the same property

(Photo by Jordan George, 2023)

Language Revitalization and the Translation of our Digital Platform

In translating the www.indiandayschools.org platform,[2] I felt I was contributing to Naaknigewin (the law, the plan) and Mino Bimaadziwin (good life, good journey). I felt content knowing that, while not perfect, I was contributing to the reality of "Shkii Nishnaabemowin" (New Ojibwe language), which in a matter of generations will be more perfect than anything that I or even my grandfather could have imagined. I spent many hours translating, reviewing the meanings, and crafting translated sentences for this project. I used the Rhodes Odawa-Eastern Ojibwe Dictionary, the online Ojibwe People's Dictionary, and several other databases online to confirm, even when I knew the translations. I feel grateful that these resources exist for students like me to use.

[2] See Farmer Lacombe & Pind (2023) for a full description of the project and its creation. This article focuses on Jordan's translation journey and its implication for Indigenous language revitalization.

Having a fully functional multilingual user interface was an early and fundamental goal in the development of the Indian Day Schools digital map. In May 2022, the project was publicly launched in two languages: English and French. In April 2023, we uploaded Jordan's Anishinaabemowin interface as a third option, although this remains a work in progress and a forerunning effort that will facilitate further translation efforts into other languages.

To start the translation process, Benjamin and Jackson created a list of 141 English terms that had to be translated for the Indian Day School digital platform to be functional in Anishinaabemowin (or any other Indigenous language). These terms were sections of text that were grouped together such as "Federal Indian Day Schools," "province or territory," "religious affiliation," and "map settings." Jordan took on the time-consuming and challenging process of translating the phrases into Anishinaabemowin on a spreadsheet, which could then be eventually uploaded on the website. Not all words were translated; for example, the names of certain places and people were left in their English form. Some parts of the database were already available in Anishinaabemowin as a result of the class action, which is a foundational source of information for this project. Specifically, the document "Schedule K – List of Federal Indian Day Schools" was important in approximating the locations of schools on the map, and is available in English, French, Dene, Inuktitut, Mi'kmaq, Ojibway, and Plains Cree. However, the interface of the website was entirely translated by Jordan, who used 1397 Anishinaabemowin "words" to convey the meaning of only 743 English words. As a result of his efforts, all the functions of the map can now be used in Anishinaabemowin, which represents the first of several Indigenous languages we hope to convert.

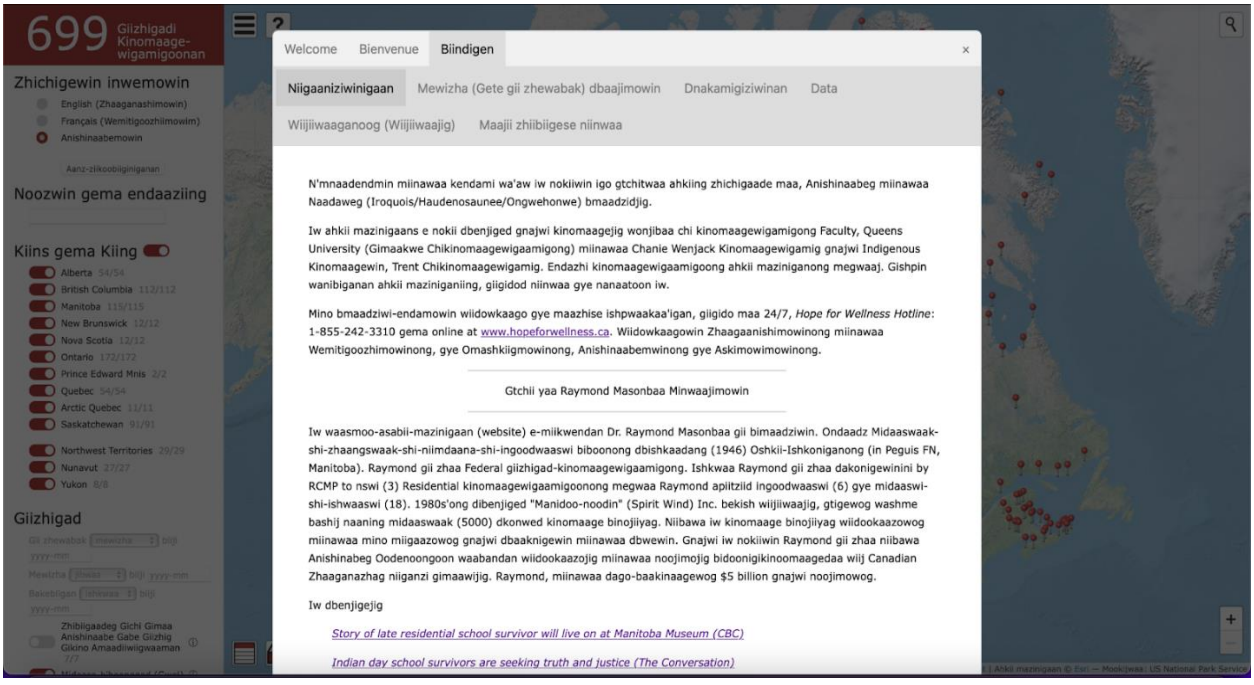

Figure 4

The ongoing implementation of an Anishinaabemowin interface for the digital map of Federal Indian Day Schools

(Courtesy of Jordan George, Jackson Pind, and Benjamin Farmer Lacombe)

Figure 5

Comparison of the Anishinaabemowin translation and English on the Kettle and Stony Point School
(Courtesy of Jordan George, Jackson Pind, and Benjamin Farmer Lacombe)

Through this process, we have found that decisions regarding languages for digital history projects which support reconciliation can be uniquely challenging. In 2021, Statistics Canada reported that 237,420 Indigenous people (13% of the population) could speak an Indigenous language well enough to hold a conversation. At the top of that list were the Cree languages and Inuktitut, with 86,475 and 40,320 speakers respectively. At the other end, 29 languages are listed as having fewer than 1,000 speakers. The conventional wisdom in web development and digital design would be to reach the widest audiences first, by prioritizing the most spoken languages. However, languages with fewer speakers or with greater rates of decline could be said to be in more urgent need of resources which support language revitalization. Yet, other factors can weigh on the decision-making, namely the availability of translators.

As mentioned earlier, crucial data on the day schools was released from the class action in five Indigenous languages, alongside English and French: Dene, Inuktitut, Mi'kmaq, Ojibway, and Plains Cree. According to the same Statistics Canada (2021) Census, this represents about 70% of speakers of Indigenous languages. As such, these five languages were chosen as developmental goals for our digital platform, since the pre-existence of the data in these languages greatly reduces the work and costs needed, as it only leaves the web interface to be translated. Our next steps of perfecting the Anishinaabemowin interface and of reaching out to more community translators are being pursued alongside changes and improvements to the functional elements of the project.

Technical Biases and Considerations

Currently, the Indian Day Schools website can be said to comprise two halves: the first being the interactive map, which offers context and insights into the operation of the day school system—which can now be used in Anishinaabemowin—and the second being the vast collection of RG10 archival documents linked for ease of viewing and researching. While offering the first-half in multiple Indigenous languages is relatively straightforward, the same cannot be said of the digital archive, which is entirely in English. This reflects the historical context in which these documents were produced, and the assimilationist government which produced them. This circumstance disrupts the stated goal of the website to offer an equivalent experience in multiple languages, since reading and understanding English is effectively a requirement to explore the archival documents. The sheer size of the fonds precludes manual translations without a monumental investment—currently there are over 700,000 pages, with millions more on the horizon (Forester, 2023).

There are also technical barriers which prevent usage of these files in languages other than English. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) was used on our platform to try to recreate machine-readable text from the photographs of the original documents, but the results varied in success. While the accessibility and searchability of the documents were meaningfully improved, the results were not consistent enough to allow for automated translation or text-to-speech functionalities. The OCR process was moderately successful in reconstructing words from the hundreds of thousands of pages, but it fared expectedly worse when encountering handwriting (Farmer Lacombe & Pind, 2023). This makes handwritten documents practically invisible to search engines or even local searches in a PDF reader. Also unsurprising is the fact that some types of documents are more likely to have been typewritten than others. A common occurrence is for letters from community members to be recorded by hand, while governmental replies are typed out. We were surprised to find that some handwritten words were correctly picked up by the OCR software, but this was only true for certain calligraphies. This creates unevenness in the types of documents and authors which are digitally visible in this archive. Of note, this is not only a digitization problem, as outmoded cursive handwriting can also be difficult for readers to decipher. Regardless of intention, the reality is that specific types of documents are less accessible and less visible than others. The overarching lesson here is that digital archives can have technical biases, in unexpected ways, and are never perfect replicas of their source—which themselves may contain their own biases. Stakeholders who come together to create projects like our own should be mindful of this, in order to identify, label, and ideally rectify such biases.

Conclusion

The intersection of Indigenous language revitalization and the documentation of Indian Day School histories holds immense promise for education, healing, cultural revival, and narrative empowerment. A vivid example of this perspective is found in the personal journey of Jordan from Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. Jordan's pivotal role in the Anishinaabemowin translation project, showcased on our educational platform, www.indiandayschools.org, serves as a striking example of the powerful merger of language revival and historical preservation. We believe translating our website into Indigenous languages signifies an essential reclamation of identity and narratives. As of now, anyone who searches for Indian Day Schools and opens our website will prominently see the three languages available to them, namely Anishinaabemowin

alongside French and English. We hope to add more Indigenous languages to the platform moving forward.

This endeavor, while challenging, is crucial for the revitalization of Indigenous languages, which have been systematically suppressed through colonial education systems, including the Indian Day Schools. By having the website available in Indigenous languages, the project not only aids in preserving these languages but could also help ensure that the narratives of the past are more accessible and meaningful to Indigenous communities. This aligns with the broader goal of acknowledging and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems and narratives into our understanding of Canadian history. Moreover, this translation effort enriches educational materials available for language learning, providing real-world contexts to language instruction and thus deepening the educational experience. It allows for a more holistic approach to learning, where language and history are interwoven, enhancing the relevance and impact of both to students' lives.

Collectively, this project spotlights Indigenous resilience and cultural resurgence, underlining that true reconciliation involves working collaboratively to help restore cultural heritage, linguistically and historically. Currently, Library and Archives of Canada is digitizing six million additional documents related to the history of Indian Day Schools in Canada (Forester, 2023). Librarian and Archivist of Canada Leslie Weir has indicated that the number of documents would fill multiple tractor trailers worth of material, and that "day schools were an integral part of the plan to try to take away the culture, community connection, and the language (Forester, 2023)." LAC intends to transfer the files to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation for safekeeping, but there are no confirmed further plans on educational resources as of the writing of this article in December 2023. Ongoing work will need to be completed to make sure that this newly digitized material is accessible to students, educators, and researchers into the future. We believe our project provides an example of what can be done when working collaboratively to research, learn, and teach about this history.

Through translating narratives into Indigenous languages, Indigenous communities challenge historical erasure and provide a path forward for other communities facing the same realities. Amidst the legacy of systemic suppression, this alignment of language revitalization and Indian Day School history empowers Indigenous communities to reshape narratives, through the creation of valuable educational resources. Moreover, there is room for a variety of people to bring their own pieces and expertise to the table, which can be essential to reconstructing this history together. Jordan contributed his unique perspective shaped by his personal experiences within the community and his proficiency in Anishinaabemowin. Jackson brought his expertise in archival research related to Indian Day Schools, and Benjamin offered his digital creativity with web-based platforms. Together, our diverse expertise and collaborative efforts made us a stronger team, enabling us to accomplish a broader range of tasks and research objectives collectively. This journey fosters a future illuminated by revitalized Indigenous languages, strengthening heritage, and promising a new legacy for educational exploration in digital spaces. We hope other communities will follow this path, and we are happy to support their efforts in making history education grounded in Indigenous languages.

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