

## Deregulate and Empower Language Teachers



Killulark Arngna'naaq interviewed by Hayden King

*The Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship is a policy and leadership development program recognizing leadership potential among young northern Canadians eager to address policy challenges facing the North. This interview is part of a series Yellowhead is publishing, featuring discussions with 2018-2019 Fellows on their fellowship policy papers.*

*Here, Hayden King, Executive Director of Yellowhead Institute, speaks to 2018-2019 Glassco Fellow Killulark Arngna'naaq on her paper, [Deregulate and Empower Language Teachers](#), which examines policy options for supporting Indigenous language revitalization in the North, and addresses issues teachers and learners are facing.*

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**HAYDEN:** I know that you're pretty passionate about language revitalization. How is your language revitalization work going personally?

**KILLULARK:** Very slow. I have a really hard time reading off of a piece of paper. Then retaining language — connecting things from a piece of paper to an actual object, or sentence, or way of thinking. I personally encountered a lot of barriers trying to learn Inuktitut outside of Inuit Nunangat, with no one to practice with, no context of actually being on the 'Nuna or living a traditional lifestyle. I have a new member of my family, a small one, and I've been trying to just speak Inuktitut to him so he's familiar with at least hearing it. I have picked up a couple more words and started practicing a couple more things just [by] spending time with him, but [it's] not very great.

**HAYDEN:** What was it that led you to want to write your paper on language revitalization?

**KILLULARK:** It's a topic that I have always tried to pursue in my personal life. I felt focusing on language revitalization in terms of "policy" might help motivate me. Starting with language revitalization research and contextualization across all of the North sent me down a little bit of a rabbit hole. It very much changed what I had initially pictured. I had big plans to come up with a network for language learners outside of Nunangat across Canada. I was like, "It's going to happen, we're going to learn together," and then as I expanded my research and scope, it was very Nunavut language-focused: I realized that there are so many cool things already happening. The connection that would develop from that could develop with people running parallel efforts across the North, even across Canada. [That] would make a huge difference, because learning from each other — what works, and what people are already doing — knowledge, experience sharing, makes a huge difference.

**HAYDEN:** For your paper, you had to learn what exists in the federal landscape for language revitalization. Then looking at ITK's [Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami] policy recommendations you, almost immediately, make it clear that the Federal approach is inadequate. Maybe you could tell me what's wrong here?

**KILLULARK:** I don't think our society should devalue the work of language teachers and learners. It's hard work to teach, it's hard work to learn.

**If we're serious about bringing back languages or strengthening them, we need to value the people that are doing that work so they can dedicate time and energy to language teaching and learning.**

How [is that] feasible? To my mind, it inherently falls within education. Our current [education] structure is funded by the government. We can look at federal funding for language revitalization — it is not a lot when you think about how many languages there are within Canada. Even just within the North, even within the Northwest Territories.

So, first, limited resources from the feds. Second, they [the federal government] make zero effort to try to make that money accessible for people that are experts in the language they're trying to teach. The application forms are incredibly inaccessible just by nature of the fact that it's only available in English and French. The terminology is so bureaucratic, legal, and technical. Then, just writing about what project you envision, and [filling out] the budget portion is impossible. Those are the failings I think of [when it comes to] federal support of language revitalization.

**HAYDEN:** What about philanthropic or charitable support?

**KILLULARK:** My main proposal actually came up from frustrations in my day job. I work for a charity and part of my responsibilities is finding grant partners. We developed a fund, now called the **Indigenous Culture and Language Resurgence Fund**, for different language and culture efforts happening across the North.

I'm frustrated with the charitable regulations within Canada. If we found a grant partner that was making a huge difference in their community just teaching people a language, we would not be able to support them because charitable regulation limits how charity or charitable sector dollars can be given to people.

**If it was just a granny sitting in her kitchen and teaching a bunch of kids Inuktitut while she was sitting there, we would not be able to support her with our charitable dollars because she wouldn't qualify within the set funding parameters because of current legislation.**

**HAYDEN:** What is it about the legislation that prevents that? Is it around taxes?

**KILLULARK:** I quote the section in my **paper**. It restricts how charities can spend dollars. It's basically to avoid a charitable operation receiving money from donations from the public or other foundations and just spending it on whatever they want.

**HAYDEN:** Are you hopeful that things are moving towards recognizing what Indigenous people are saying in regards to making the granting process less onerous, or do you think there is still a paternalistic attitude — an unwillingness to support Indigenous grassroots efforts around language revitalization or resurgence in general?

**KILLULARK:** Both. Our team really tries to meet people where they are and not have that paternalistic relationship with them. But in the charitable sector, things are still paternalistic.

I feel philanthropic support has a degree of ego involved when it comes to grants, and those receiving grants have to showcase that they're being supported by a charity.

**HAYDEN:** You advocate for changing laws so that charities can be more flexible with who they donate to for language revitalization to happen. That's something that the federal government can listen to and can change. If the charitable sector was pushing for this change themselves, is there an opportunity for them to push this agenda forward, or do they want to preserve the existing rules when it comes to donations?

**KILLULARK:** What my proposal does is shift the burden of due diligence to the entity giving out the grant. Right now, I think it's standard for charitable organizations to have a big proposal for potential recipients, which requires a lot of detail about the project: who's involved, who the money is going to, and how it's going to be spent.

**What we do is talk to people to find out what they're doing, what their programming is. We actually have partnerships with them instead of a piece of paper that we send back and forth. We take on the burden of accountability and due diligence.**

I could see resistance with this approach in the charitable sector because there is a lot of work involved in developing meaningful partnerships.

**HAYDEN:** Do you think there's an opportunity for the charitable sector to pick up some of the slack here?

**KILLULARK:** Yes. Really, it's the philanthropic sector, not the charitable sector. I've worked at charities: everyone works 20 hours a day. The philanthropic sector has huge financial resources available to them, so capacity shouldn't be an issue; they can afford to hire more people and do more.

**HAYDEN:** Hayden: Your paper adds a unique element to the language revitalization conversation. I don't know if you plan to do more work in this area, but it would be helpful if you did.

**KILLULARK:** I do have a dream of dealing with the frustrations of terrible restrictions, of developing a quick start guide for people doing charitable things. I picture a community member saying, "I want to start a charity that does language teaching." When you think about starting that, it sounds like a nightmare: trying to register with the CRA, what is a business license, what's GST? It's been a pipe dream of mine to develop a quick reference plain language guide to "How to start a charity."

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