

In July [Gaelic Narrative Project — How We Thrive](#) invited Dr. Micheal Newton to lead conversations on stories and comments participants have heard as they work to reclaim Gaelic language, culture, identity, and heritage. We explored dominant narratives that uphold negative comments and attitudes about Gaelic, and counter-narratives that offer perspectives with greater nuance, and depth, which can possibly point to a way forward for Gaelic Nova Scotia. Here are the flip chart notes from both sessions.

Mabou Session

12 people | July 2, 2022

1. What we have heard about Gaelic/Gaels

- It's a dead language
- You can't eat Gaelic
- Nothing but gibberish
- Just broken English
- What are you doing to do with it
- Why bring it back
- You can't speak it fluently as a learner
- It's a hard language
- It doesn't look like it sounds
- It's backward, primitive, lazy
- No social benefit
- It doesn't relate to the modern world
- How do you sell it to tourists?
- It can't pay for itself
- We can appropriate symbols and leave language behind
- It is not a racial issue, lower priority
- It is the language of white people
- It is not truly native to Nova Scotia
- It has not been here very long
- Gaels have benefited from being in a power hierarchy

- Gaelic takes attention away from more marginalized groups
- Gaels should just get over it.
- You are being exclusive by just focusing on Gaelic

2. Dominant Narratives

- Anglophones get to (has the power) to define modernity and what its norms are
- Materialism and Capitalism are the highest goals and measure of success/failure
- Other alternative languages/identities/cultures can't co-exist
- Gaelic is to be equated with whiteness (essentialism)
- Either a victim or oppressor (essentialism)
- Culture, language, identity don't have value or impact by themselves
- Focus should be on impact on most marginalized folks/communities rather than underlying structures/ideologies

3. Counter Narratives

- Gaelic is a language/culture that is not about race, it is about community
- Gaelic has a strong anti-materialist value system
- Gaelic values community, spiritual and cultural in intangible goals
- In order to embrace the diversity of our wider community and to become effective allies for the marginalized, we can leverage understanding of Gaelic experience
- Relationship to self is primary and informs perception and relations with others
- Gaels came to Nova Scotia as Gaels, not as 'white' British
- No language/culture is inherently inferior/obsolete. It is unfair to treat Gaels that way.
- Language loss creates cultural traumas that need to be addressed.

Halifax

16 people | July 10, 2022

1. What we have heard about Gaelic/Gaels

- No material value, only emotional, familial sentiment.
- Exclusive, not inclusive.
- Racialized identity, proxy for whiteness
- Rural, backwards, primitive, associated with poverty
- It's a dead language, stuck in the past.
- No intrinsic value
- No inherent place in modern, educational institutions.
- Not a real language, too limited in capacity
- English will be ruined if it co-exists with Gaelic – English needs a monopoly
- Gaelic has no future. It needs to be abandoned.
- Not a real language, people, culture, community
- Needs improvement, civilization, development

- Difference becomes an awkward joke
- Doesn't deserve same degree of respect.
- Gaelic didn't value it. They chose to let it die.
- Gaelic is a low priority for social justice.
- (Gaels) Scots are equated with the power elite.

(It should be noted that two participants at the meeting did not feel negatively impacted by any comments on Gaelic language and culture.)

2. Dominant Narratives

- Materialism is highest priority/good. Spiritual, cultural, linguistic issues are not a tangible essential need.
- Only one way to determine well-being
- English equated with material wealth, progress, civilization, success, modernity
- Monopoly of ethnolinguistic superiority/dominance
- Can only master/foster 1 language
- Racial categories hide ethnolinguistic issues
- Gaelic community is racially defined
- Gaels have benefited from whiteness
- Ethnic tokens (i.e. tartanism) is sufficient
- Civilization is measured by tangible artifacts, material culture
- There's a competition for resources, Darwinism view, limited good
- Culture and language are optional, ornamental.
- Gaelic is a fake fabrication for tourism
- Anglo-modernity (market) defines the terms under which we live.

3. Counter-Narratives

- Well-being not just defined in material terms, but also cultural, linguistic, and social.
- All communities have the right to articulate self-representation and needs
- Reclaiming enhances a sense of connection, self-worth, and purpose.
- Gaelic culture is about community building and connection – passing on and reinforcing shared values and tradition. Includes all people who participate in language and culture. Not genetic.
- Strong, adaptive communities offer resilience and meaning and outlets for members well being.
- Confidence and self-worth are vital for good relations with others and the road to ally-ship and decolonization
- Gaelic community is intrinsically diverse.
- Unique forms of artistic/cultural expression
- There are many ways to engage, empower and revitalize tradition and community. It is never too late.
- There are personal rewards for engaging with community.
- Supporting Gaelic community, not at cost of other communities. We can collaborate, not compete. We have shared structural challenges that we can resolve together.
- Gaelic aids in deconstructing whiteness.