

Tentsitewawén:nahkwe’

“We Will Pick the Words Up Again”

Assessing Kanien’kéha Vitality and Adult Immersion

Programming at Ahkwesáhsne

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my great aunt and teacher, Kanatireskénha Trudy Lauzon. Ienkatahsonterónnion' tsi nahò:ten wahskerihón:ten'. Tsi niió:re tentsikiatátken'.

Ka'nikonhratokénhston (Mind Setting)

“He (Shonkwaia'tíson) made agreements with the beings and forces that existed here before our arrival that they would help and protect us. It is our responsibility to acknowledge and give thanks to them that they are still doing their jobs as he has instructed. He gave us our language to be able to do this as a way to communicate with them. He gave us ways of speaking to them out of respect and gratitude: certain words, phrases and concepts that are unique to our language. These are what we call our original instructions, and they are what differentiate us from all others. This knowledge is expressed through and contained within our language, and the recognition and renewal of these relationships is what maintains our survival as human beings. Therefore, our language is essential to our well-being and survival.”

—Tehota'kerá:ton Jeremy Green (2020)

Abstract

Kanien'kéha [the Mohawk Language] is a foundation of *Kanien'kehá:ka* [the Mohawk people] culture and worldview. Colonial efforts to erase *Kanien'kéha* have impacted all aspects of *Kanien'kehá:ka* life. Despite this, the *Kanien'kehá:ka* have found creative and effective ways to revitalize and reclaim their language. In this thesis I will present research on an updated language vitality survey of *Kanien'kéha* at Ahkwesáhsne. I will seek to define *Kanien'kéha* vitality, and analyze vitality metrics in the context of Ahkwesáhsne *Kanien'kéha*. This research will build on previous academic work for the purpose of providing an updated base of knowledge from which *Kanien'kéha* revitalization strategies can be developed. Current *Kanien'kéha* revitalization efforts at Ahkwesáhsne will be discussed to establish the context of the language survey. This will be followed by an analysis of the impact of adult immersion programming in Ahkwesáhsne as a case study for establishing adult immersion as the most effective method of *Kanien'kéha* Revitalization. The concept of *Tentewatate'nikonhrakétsko'* [we will pick up each other's minds] will shape the historical discussion of adult immersion as a vehicle for exploring the revitalization of the *Kanien'kéha* historical narrative as a source of strength and collective empowerment of the *Kanien'kehá:ka*.

Résumé

Le Kanien'kéha [la langue mohawk] constitue un fondement de la culture et de la vision du monde des Kanien'kehá:ka [le peuple mohawk]. Les tentatives coloniales visant à effacer le Kanien'kéha ont eu des répercussions sur tous les aspects de la vie des Kanien'kehá:ka. Malgré cela, les Kanien'kehá:ka ont trouvé des moyens créatifs et efficaces de revitaliser et de se réapproprier leur langue. Dans ce mémoire, je présenterai les résultats d'une enquête actualisée sur la vitalité du Kanien'kéha à Ahkwesáhsne. Je chercherai à définir la vitalité du Kanien'kéha et à analyser les indicateurs de vitalité dans le contexte de cette langue à Ahkwesáhsne. Cette recherche s'appuiera sur des travaux universitaires antérieurs afin de fournir une base de connaissances actualisée, propice à l'élaboration de stratégies de revitalisation du kanien'kéha. Les efforts actuels de revitalisation du Kanien'kéha à Ahkwesáhsne seront abordés pour situer le contexte de l'enquête linguistique. Suivra une analyse de l'impact des programmes d'immersion pour adultes à Ahkwesáhsne, servant d'étude de cas pour démontrer que l'immersion des adultes constitue la méthode la plus efficace de revitalisation du kanien'kéha. Le concept de *Tentewatate'nikonhrakétsko'* [nous relèverons nos esprits les uns les autres] orientera l'analyse historique de l'immersion pour adultes ; celle-ci servira de vecteur pour explorer la revitalisation du récit historique Kanien'kéha en tant que source de force et d'autonomisation collective pour les Kanien'kehá:ka.

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Niá:wen Sewakwé:kon.

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Terms of Reference

Ahkwesáhsne Cultural Restoration Program (ACR): established in 2014, operated from 2014–2018 as a mentor-mentee program focused on Kanien'kéha language and culture education. The program operated under the environment division of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe.

Ahkwesahsró:non: the people of Ahkwesáhsne.

Á:se Tsitewá:ton: Let Us Become New, established in 2019, also referred to as the Kanien'kéha Language Program (KLP). A two-year Kanien'kéha adult immersion program operating under the education department of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. Formerly known as the Ahkwesáhsne Cultural Restoration Program.

L1: a first-language speaker of Kanien'kéha with significant lived experience in the Kanien'kéha language.

L2: a second language speaker of Kanien'kéha who learned in adolescence or adulthood.

Kanien'kéha: the Mohawk Language spoken at seven Mohawk communities: Ahkwesáhsne on the US-Canadian border, Kanièn:ke in New York State, Kahnawà:ke, Kanehsatà:ke in Quebec, and Ohswé:ken, Tyendinaga, and Wahta in Ontario.

Kanien'kehá:ka: People of the Flint: The Mohawk People who have occupied their homelands in present-day New York, Quebec, and Ontario since time immemorial.

Kanohweratónhtshera: Words of Thanksgiving, commonly used to refer to the Thanksgiving Address speech.

Mohawk Council of Ahkwesáhsne: Canadian Band Council overseen by an elected council with jurisdiction of the northern (Canadian-side) portion of Ahkwesáhsne.

Mohawk Territory of Ahkwesáhsne: The land currently under the jurisdiction of the U.S. federally recognized tribe, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, and the Canadian Band Council, the Mohawk Council of Ahkwesáhsne.

O'nikòn:ra: Mind or Spirit.

Ohswé:ken: Six Nations Reserve, located in the province of Ontario.

Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe: American Federally Recognized Tribe overseen by an elected council with jurisdiction of the southern (American-side) portion of Ahkwesáhsne.

Ska'nikòn:ra: One Mind, the concept representing consensus in the will of the Haudenosaunee.

Speaker: A person sufficiently proficient in Kanien'kéha to be considered conversational by an elder, and/or to be rated at least at an Advanced-Low level on the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) scale through an assessment with a modified Oral Proficiency Interview.

Root Word Method (RWM): a structural-based approach to Kanien'kéha second-language teaching and learning.

1: Introduction

Through the onset of the colonial process, the degradation and attempts to destroy Kanien'kéha have impacted the Kanien'kehá:ka's maintenance of their culture, ceremonies, histories, and worldviews. However despite these attempts, the Kanien'kehá:ka are still here, and the Kanien'kéha revitalization movement is alive and thriving in my home community of Ahkwesáhsne. This thesis will focus on the Ahkwesáhsne Territory and its use of adult immersion practices as a vehicle of Kanien'kéha revitalization and reclamation. In the following chapters, I will seek to define Kanien'kéha vitality, and analyze vitality metrics in the context of the Ahkwesáhsne dialect of Kanien'kéha. I will review the background, methodology, and findings of a Kanien'kéha vitality survey I conducted on the Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Territory. Current Kanien'kéha revitalization strategies and efforts at Ahkwesáhsne will be discussed to establish the context of the language survey. Beyond the vitality survey, I will use the concept of *Tentewatate 'nikonhrakétsko'* [we will pick up each other's minds] to shape historical discussion of adult language immersion as a vehicle for reclaiming the Kanien'kéha historical narrative as a source of collective empowerment of the Kanien'kehá:ka. This chapter will focus on researcher positionality, thesis methodology, and finally provide an overview of each of the following chapters.

1.1 Kanien'kéha Background

Kanien'kéha is spoken by the Kanien'kehá:ka at six Kanien'kehá:ka communities spread throughout Quebec, Ontario, and New York State. The Kanien'kehá:ka are members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an alliance of six sovereign Indigenous nations that occupied an

extensive area of present-day New York State, as well as portions of Pennsylvania, Quebec, and Ontario. In the pre-colonial era the Haudenosaunee Nations each had their own distinct languages, which settler-colonists attempted to erase through the colonial era.¹ According to Kanien'kehá:ka scholar Oheróskon Ryan DeCaire, as of 2023, there were approximately 562 L1 (first language) Kanien'kéha speakers and 77 L2 (second language) speakers across the Mohawk Territories of Ahkwesáhsne, Kahnawà:ke, Wáhta, Kanehsatà:ke, Tyendinaga, and Ohswé:ken. As of 2026, the Ahkwesáhsne Territory currently has the most speakers with approximately 275 L1s and 30 L2s.

1.2 Researcher Positionality/Goal of this Work

Arihwí:saks niwakhsennò:ten. Kanien'kehá:ka niwakonhontsiò:ten. Wakathahión:ni. Sharenhó:wane nakhwá:tsire. Ahkwesáhsne tkì:teron, tho tewakenakerá:ton ò:ni. Tewáhsen ià:ia'k na'tewakohseriià:kon. Ó:nen wisk niiohserá:ke shikateweiénhstha' nonkwawén:na tánon tsi niionkwarihò:ten ne káti sénha aontakié:rite' tsi ní:tsi akónhnheke' tánon takatawénrie' ieronhkwe'nà:ke ne iethi'nihsténha onhóntsia'.

My name is Arihwí:saks. My English name is Colin Benedict. I am Kanien'kehá:ka from the Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Territory. I come from the Adams and Benedict families there. I grew up in Kentsion'kowáhne, or Fort Covington, a border town to the territory. I have been studying my language, Kanien'kéha, in a full-time capacity for the past four years. I am a Kanien'kéha teacher and lifelong student. I come from two families where my grandparents were speakers, and my parents are not. Pursuing language reclamation as an adult has brought me far from home

¹ Dr. Tehota'kerá:ton Jeremy Green discusses this language shift in his 2009 thesis, describing when colonists first encountered the Kanien'kehá:ka, Kanien'kéha was the language of everyday life, trade, and politics. As colonists encroached on Kanien'kehá:ka land, language use shifted to European languages.

and back again. Speaking my language is something I had wanted for myself since I was a child. I remember my aunt taking me to *Kanonhséshne* [longhouse] for *Sha'tekohséhne* [midwinter] ceremonies and sitting there for hours, listening to the speakers on either side of the house converse in a language that I couldn't understand. As a child, I felt powerless to pursue this for myself, despite having language speakers in my family. I had little to no exposure to my language, despite growing up in and around Ahkwesáhsne surrounded by grandparents and great-uncles and aunties that spoke fluently. This held true until the first few years of my undergraduate degree, where years spent away from home at university shifted my perspective of the way I wanted to live my life and the kind of career I wanted to pursue.

My first extended language study came through ceremonial processes associated with coming-of-age fasting practices adopted by the Kanien'kehá:ka. With the help of relatives and knowledge-holders in the community who assisted me with completing this ceremony, I also began studying the *Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen* [Matters Before All Else, Thanksgiving Speech] as part of my preparation for participation. The *Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen*, also referred to as the *Kanonhweratónhsera* [Thanksgiving Speech], is the act of giving greetings, respect, and acknowledgement of relationships with all the aspects of life. It is part of our original instructions as *Ionkwanonhsión:ni* [people of the Longhouse], and continuously grounds us and reminds us of our responsibilities as human beings. This self-guided study represented the first serious language study I undertook in my youth. It allowed me to recite a short version of the *Kanonhweratónhtshera* [Thanksgiving Speech] from rote memory, not understanding what the actual language meant. Upon completion of the four-year fasting ceremony, I decided to pursue language study full-time. I studied online for a year taking virtual classes with Six Nations Polytechnic, and then enrolled in the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa two-year adult immersion

program in Six Nations. I studied there during the day, then went to university language courses in the evenings at Six Nations Polytechnic. I graduated from both programs in the spring of 2024, then moved back to Ahkwesáhsne and worked in various jobs in adult immersion settings. I worked transcribing speaker recordings, teaching at the adult introductory and immersion levels, as well as in translation, curriculum development, and resource development.

Now, the goal of my education and career is to help restore the natural intergenerational transmission of Kanien'kéha and re-establish it as the primary language of everyday use within the community. This means that children will learn their language from their parents and relatives in the home with the additional support of immersion schools. It also means that adults who want to learn the language will have access to more resources and support, and the ability to practice Kanien'kéha in a wide range of natural settings with speakers of all ages. To make this happen, Ahkwesáhsne needs to train a generation of adult second-language speakers who can raise their children in the language and simultaneously fortify a primary Kanien'kéha speaking peer group. I hope we can reach a point where Kanien'kéha becomes healthy enough to forgo the use of adult, childhood, and other programs. Kanien'kéha would be so widespread that we could return to a natural form of language transmission, where people learned from the relatives around them, not any kind of school or program. One of my friends (niá:wen Taiawentón:ti) inspired this dream, where I hope to sit on a porch with my friends and family 50 years from now and watch our grandchildren run around the yard and play, sing, dance, and speak in the language. I hope to see the Kanien'kehá:ka people pick up their language and ways again, and reform the collective strength of our nation with a return to our original government under the *Kaianere'kó:wa* [Great

Peace].² I want to read newspapers, novels, and textbooks, and see movies and plays in Kanien'kéha. This work simultaneously demands that we hope and plan for a post-colonial future, while acknowledging the realities of our current state (the Kanien'kehà:ka) as an oppressed people living under the yoke of the occupier colonial governments of the United States and Canada. Language revitalization work carries grief, trauma, despair, and hate. Acknowledging these feelings while continuing to do the work requires a sense of commitment and steadfast loyalty to land, language, community, and the Onkwehón:we people. I see these traits in my friends, family, and community who have engaged in language work, and I have tried to embody them within the scope of this thesis and beyond.

1.3 Research Methodology

The premise of this thesis comes from the *Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen* [The Words Before All Else] and the responsibility that it imposes on Kanien'kehà:ka people to the *Á:se Tahatikonhsontónkie* [the faces to come; the next generations] in working to maintain and pass on *Onkwawén:na* [our language] and *Tsi Niionkwarihò:ten* [our matters, culture]. This methodology draws from work by Tahotharátye Joe Brant, who wrote “My research framework is to be known as, ‘Yonkwatehyaróntyé: A Natural Kanyen'kehà:ka Research Paradigm.’ This paradigm is rooted in the values and beliefs of the... Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen, wherein all elements of our world are revered with the Kanonhweratónhtshera: The act of giving greetings, love and respect. It is the foundation of our existence as Kanyen'kehà:ka and so, it is the foundation of this paradigm.” (Brant, 2016, p. 16). In the *Kanonhweratónhtshera*, our original

² The Great Peace refers to the traditional governance structure of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the 50 clan families represented by hereditary chiefs, guided by the principles of Skén:nen (peace), Ka'satsténhsera (power), and Ka'nikonhri:io (righteousness).

instructions and responsibilities are discussed in how we are supposed to live in harmony with the world around us. Each of the levels of creation, starting with the people, then our mother, the Earth, and then moving upwards to the sky and ending with our Creator, are mentioned. The kinship that we hold with each of those levels is embedded into the language itself.

This thesis' methodology also draws inspiration from Tehota'kerá:ton Jeremy Green's work describing the concept of *O'nikòn:ra* [Mind, Spirit] in terms of collective power. Green defines the term *Ska'nikòn:ra* [One Mind/Spirit] as "any number of people acting in concert with one another. It is from this place wherein true power is rooted. It is from here where collective action stems and grows." (Green, 2009, p. 22). *Ska'nikòn:ra* is the concept representing consensus in the will of the people, and is necessary in the Rotinonhsión:ni form of governance before any action is taken.

This thesis builds on Green's interpretation of *Ska'nikòn:ra* by positing that *Ska'nikòn:ra* can only be formed upon the foundation of language. In the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén, we say the phrase *Akwé:kon éhnska entitewahwe'nón:ni' ne onkwa'nikòn:ra* [we will gather our minds together as one], as the preface towards approaching *Ska'nikòn:ra*. It is here that our collective power as *Onkwehón:we* [original people] is rooted. Through the continued work toward reclamation of Kanien'kéha, the collective consciousness of the Kanien'kehá:ka will again be turned towards *Ska'nikòn:ra* in a reformation of this collective power. It is through the paradigm of the Kanonhweratónhsera and the responsibilities it poses to ensuring the transmission of language and knowledge to the *Á:se Tahatikonhsontónkie* [future generations] that the research of this thesis was conducted. Tsitewà:ronk tánon ska'nikòn:ra tsitewá:ton.

1.4 Chapter Outlines

The remainder of this thesis will be organized as follows:

[Chapter 2](#) will provide an overview of Indigenous language vitality, what it means, why it's important, and what the implications of those broader definitions and concepts are for the Haudenosaunee. Then the challenges in assessing Indigenous language vitality will be discussed, followed by the shared challenges in the context of Kanien'kéha. After the aforementioned concepts have been established, the chapter will finish by focusing on defining Kanien'kéha vitality, why it's important to assess Kanien'kéha vitality, and then an overview of previous work in the field, finally transitioning into [Chapter 3](#), the Ahkwesáhsne Kanien'kéha vitality survey itself.

[Chapter 3](#) is comprised of the vitality survey and its findings. It begins with a summary of the background of Kanien'kéha language displacement through the process of colonial displacement from land, then transitioning into the introduction of the Ahkwesáhsne Territory itself. Then background on major language vitality metrics and their inapplicability to Kanien'kéha is discussed, leading into a presentation of the findings from the vitality survey. After the vitality survey, the definition of Kanien'kéha speakership is analyzed with the question "What makes a speaker a speaker?" Current adult immersion Kanien'kéha fluency scales are discussed, and then the chapter ends by posing future research questions pertaining to Kanien'kéha fluency assessments.

[Chapter 4](#) shifts focus to Kanien'kéha adult immersion curriculum and programs. Specifically, the chapter defines and discusses the historical context of the Root Word Method

(RWM) and traces its early development with the establishment of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa immersion program as documented in the work by Green and Maracle (2019) and an interview with Owennatékhá Brian Maracle. The findings of the interview are discussed in the context of the early years of Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa and how the RWM changed over time. The chapter ends with a summary of the impact the RWM curriculum had on other Indigenous language immersion programs, transitioning to tracing the path of the RWM as it moved to Ahkwesáhsne in 2019.

[Chapter 5](#) focuses on the history of adult immersion in Ahkwesáhsne for the purpose of assessing the efficacy of the adult immersion programs there and the curriculum they utilize. The historical context of the Á:se Tsitewá:ton adult immersion program is discussed, from its inception, through its development, and its transition to a two-year structure. Then, the graduate demographics of the last three graduating classes of Á:se Tsitewá:ton are analyzed, and the chapter closes with strategic planning recommendations based on the demographics data.

[Chapter 6](#) is the conclusion, focusing on potential next steps for this work and where Ahkwesáhsne will hopefully go in the next few years with regards to policy changes around Kanien'kéha curriculum, programs, and fiscal resources.

2: Kanien'kéha Language Vitality Assessment

The previous chapter provided an outline of the thesis, and an overview of the research methodology used in the scope of this project. This chapter will provide an overview of Indigenous language vitality and what the implications of those broader definitions and concepts are for Kanien'kéha specifically. Major questions will include: "What does Indigenous language revitalization mean, and why is it important?", "What does Kanien'kéha vitality mean?" (§2.1), and "What are the challenges to assessing Indigenous language vitality and Kanien'kéha vitality specifically?" (§2.2). The chapter will finish by discussing challenges in assessing Kanien'kéha speakership before moving into the Ahkwesáhsne Kanien'kéha Vitality Survey in [Chapter 3](#).

2.1 Situating Kanien'kéha Vitality

In the broader context of world languages, why should anyone care about Indigenous languages specifically? Why is the protection and revitalization of Indigenous languages important? Indigenous language revitalization (ILR) is critical to resisting, overcoming, and transforming ongoing vehicles of colonialism imposed by Western society as Indigenous people seek to strengthen their communities and nations. Skutnabb-Kangas defines language revitalization as “giving new life and vigor to a language that has been decreasing in use (or has ceased to be used altogether)” (2018, p. 13). Indigenous languages maintain connections to place and natural environments through knowledge held and transmitted in ceremony and cultural practices. Without Indigenous languages, the relationships maintained by Indigenous peoples within their communities through ceremony, and by extension the relationship Indigenous communities maintain with the natural landscape, will be disrupted and result in negative

consequences on the physical and mental health of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and the natural environment. Indigenous peoples represent 5% of the world's population, but they speak two-thirds of the world's 7,000–7,500 spoken languages. Of those languages, about one-third are in some stage of language loss (Lewis and Simon, 2016), and as many as 90% are predicted to fall silent by century's end (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group, 2003). According to Nettle and Romaine (2000) The majority of endangered languages are Indigenous languages (Nettle & Romaine, 2000).

With the broader context of language revitalization defined, what does language vitality mean in the context of Kanien'kéha? As was described in the Research Methodology section (§1.3), with the continued work toward the revitalization of Kanien'kéha, the collective consciousness of the Kanien'kehá:ka will again be turned towards *Ska'nikòn:ra* [One Mind] in a reformation of our collective power. Language vitality goes beyond communication methods and mere words. In the context of Kanien'kéha, language exists as a vehicle for maintaining culture and tradition, transmitting stories, and maintaining responsibilities and relationships with the natural world around us.

In examining Kanien'kéha vitality, the health of the language is interwoven with the health of the nation, the land, and the ceremonies we use to tie it all together. This is what is meant by the term *Ska'nikòn:ra* [One Spirit/Mind]. It doesn't just apply to people; it refers to a way of being in relation with the land around us, a relation that is maintained through constant ceremony conducted in Kanien'kéha. Language loss can result in the disruption of the cycle of ceremonies and the relationship between the Kanien'kehá:ka and the natural world. Therefore, Kanien'kéha vitality is inseparable and intersectional with the mental, physical, and spiritual health of the Kanien'kehá:ka and needs to be recognized as such in language policy and

planning. Given the intersectional nature of Kanien'kéha vitality, assessment protocols must be comprehensive and include a wide range of qualitative factors specific to the context of Kanien'kehá:ka communities, to be discussed more in [Chapter 3](#).

Looking ahead, it's critical to obtain accurate data on the current state of Indigenous languages around the world so Indigenous communities might work more effectively with local, state/provincial, and federal governments to push the goals of the Indigenous language revitalization movement forward. While there are several approaches to language planning, the strategy most applicable to my home community of Ahkwesáhsne, is community-based language planning (CBLP). Lewis and Simons (2016) state: "Community-based language planning is bottom-up rather than top-down... The distinguishing quality of CBLP is the agency of local people in language-related decision making" (2016). This argument mirrors the *Ska'nikòn:ra* philosophy that any language planning and policy-making must start at the grassroots level in Ahkwesáhsne with buy-in from teachers, elders, and students of all ages.

2.2 Challenges in Assessing Kanien'kéha Vitality

In assessing Indigenous language vitality generally several issues present themselves, ranging from the availability of census information to the applicability of established proficient assessment metrics. In order to measure Indigenous language vitality, there needs to be some kind of standard for determining who is and isn't a speaker—this standard will vary based on community input and judgement. Additionally, linguist Lenore Grenoble described challenges related to Indigenous language vitality assessment as: "Population density... small communities, often very great distances from one another, and the local conditions can vary greatly... As a result, even if a language is robustly spoken in one village, it may be critically endangered in the

next. Individual proficiency in any one language often varies with domain and topic" (2018, p. 351).

The aforementioned challenges are shared in the context of assessing Kanien'kéha vitality across the Kanien'kehá:ka territories. Kanien'kéhaka scholar Oheróskon Ryan DeCaire (2023) discusses the differences in dialect between the Kanien'kehá:ka territories, the lack of census data, and the inefficacy of traditional survey or census processes when assessing Kanien'kéha vitality. DeCaire lists several factors, such as the unavailability of accurate census data at the federal level, the geopolitical histories of each of the Kanien'kehá:ka territories regarding language shift, and how most established evaluative tools for assessing language vitality don't account for the nuance of the situations of Indigenous languages. DeCaire discusses at length the inefficacy of pre-existing language vitality scales in accurately assessing Indigenous languages (p. 35, 2023). The three specific scales he mentions are the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) (Fishman, 1991), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Major Evaluative Factors of Language Vitality and Endangerment (UNESCO, 2003), and the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons, 2016).³ While he incorporates approximate vitality ratings using all three of these scales into his final vitality assessment, he also states that these scales fail to account for the nuance associated with Indigenous language vitality factors and the unique experiences of Indigenous nations. DeCaire (2023) writes:

"Even used in conjunction, the GIDS, UNESCO, and EGIDS lack accuracy namely because they were designed to measure a language's degree of endangerment, attrition, loss or disruption (from healthy to unhealthy), rather than revitalization (from unhealthy to healthy), and therefore lack an ability to measure languages in nuanced situations." (Decaire, 2023, 42)

³ See Decaire's 2023 dissertation *The Role of Adult Immersion in Kanien'kéha Revitalization* for a full introduction and critique of the GIDS, UNESCO, and EGIDS scales with regard to Indigenous Languages.

With regard to the vitality assessment in [Chapter 3](#), all three scales have been omitted due to their inapplicability to Ahkweśahsne's language vitality context. Additional challenges in Kanien'kéha vitality assessments include defining speakership itself. When assessing numbers of L1 and L2 speakers, who determines speakership and what factors do they use? The next section will discuss Kanien'kéha speakership, current fluency assessment methods used by Kanien'kehá:ka communities, and the challenges associated with those methods.

2.3 Defining Kanien'kéha Speakership

What makes a Kanien'kéha speaker? In terms of non-Indigenous languages, linguist Noam Chomsky characterizes a language speaker as having the ability to pass valid judgments on their language and identify incorrect grammatical expressions, even if they might not be able to explain why it's incorrect (Chomsky, 1965). Chomsky defines speakership of a particular language based on a high degree of innate linguistic understanding, while disregarding relationships with land, people, and culture, elements intrinsic to Indigenous languages generally.

With regards to the Kanien'kéha itself, a speaker in a cultural ceremonial domain is understood as someone with the ability to give speeches and discuss protocol and the sequence of events during longhouse ceremonies. During any longhouse ceremony, "speakers" on each side of the longhouse (divided by clan moiety) stand up and discuss the protocol for the ceremony about to happen, going back and forth from one side of the house to another until the speakers, and by extension the house, comes to one understanding of what will occur during the ceremony (they come to *Ska'nikòn:ra*, or One Mind). These speakers can discuss a wide range of topics concerning culture and ceremony with ease, including more philosophical discussions

about the meaning of aspects of our ceremonial cycle and creation story. In their responsibility as speakers for either side of the house, they represent the will and understanding of their clan families as to how the ceremony will take place and act as a voice for the entire family, passing the words and ideas the family desires across the longhouse fire to the other clan families.

This level of speakership and oration is key to upholding a functional government and cycle of ceremonies for the Kanien'kehá:ka. In operating at this level of fluency, second-language speakers need to have complete mastery over the Kanien'kéha verb morphology and structure and need to be able to seamlessly integrate new and unfamiliar vocabulary in conversational time. In planning for language revitalization, is this the level of speakership we should be pushing students to achieve? Or is this just one aspect and domain of fluency that exists as part of a larger structure we haven't created yet? This decision isn't mine to make alone, but my hope is for a continued collaborative conversation on this topic between adult immersion instructors, elders, and language revitalization practitioners until we reach some level of *Ska'nikòn:ra* for what is realistically attainable within the second-language speaker community and the support students need to get there.

With that said, I believe the aforementioned level of language fluency needed to be a "speaker" in a cultural sense can be used to provide a foundational benchmark (among other factors) for speakership by specifically focusing on the language itself (not incorporating the level of cultural fluency needed to operate in that specific ceremonial space). The fluency needed to fully understand the speakers on the opposing side of the house, discuss that information with your clan, and then respond in kind requires a high amount of technical and grammatical skill in the language, including the ability to speak about abstract theoretical issues with regard to cultural history, and technical language with regard to informing the people present specifically

what they'll be doing that day (in the context of longhouse ceremonies, what kind of song will be sung, who will be singing, who will lead the dance, the protocol involved in both, and when it's proper for everyone to join in). That technical ability to simultaneously navigate abstract concepts and deliver a high degree of presentational skill is a benchmark the L2 community can work towards and attain, either in the context of longhouse ceremony or other aspects of life. With that goal in mind, creating culturally relevant fluency assessment guidelines is critical.

2.4 Challenges in Assessing Kanien'kéha Speakership

Immersion Programs across the Kanien'kehá:ka territories utilize standards from the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages Scale (ACTFL) via a Modified Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) to assess Kanien'kéha fluency in adult learners (Decaire, 2023). The ACTFL oral proficiency scale is a foreign (non-English) language fluency assessment scale that has been adapted to test speaking proficiency among Kanien'kéha second-language learners. It is a multi-tier scale made up of five main tiers. They are (from lowest to highest fluency) Novice (Low, Mid, High), Intermediate (Low, Mid, High), Advanced (Low, Mid, High), Superior, and Distinguished.⁴ The commonly-held goal among second-language learners of Kanien'kéha is to reach the Superior level, which is the level of fluency that first-language Kanien'kéha speakers are commonly recognized as. With regard to the two-year adult immersion programs, students normally come in at an unrateable level (under Novice-Low) and after Year 1, they graduate at an Intermediate-Low level of fluency. At Intermediate-Low, students can:

"handle successfully a limited number of uncomplicated communication tasks by using the language creatively in straightforward social situations. Their conversation is restricted to concrete exchanges and predictable topics necessary for survival. Topics relate to basic personal information such as self and family,

⁴ See the [ACTFL Fluency Guidelines](#) for a full breakdown of speaker proficiency at each level.

some daily activities and personal preferences, and some immediate needs, such as ordering food and making simple purchases." (ACTFL, 2024, 17)

During the OPI assessment, students will be interviewed for approximately 20–30 minutes and asked a variety of questions starting with "Who are you?" increasing in complexity as the conversation continues until prompts testing the student's ability to use descriptive language in discussing personal preferences and everyday life are reached. At the end of the second-year of study, students are expected to reach an Advanced-Low level of fluency or higher on the ACTFL scale. At this level, students can:

"engage fully in everyday conversations and routine work-related interactions and communicate on topics of community, national, or international interest. Individuals at this level can typically report facts, make simple recommendations, and provide straightforward descriptions, directions, instructions, and narrations, and they can express points of view in discussion and deal with unpredictable social situations." (ACTFL, 2024, 20)

Interviews at the end of the second-year are 45–60 minutes long and start immediately with more advanced conversational prompts where the assessor will bring the student from the base of their fluency to higher levels until their ceiling is established. At the Advanced-Low level, students will be expected to handle conflict and defend their viewpoints on specific topics.

In considering the context of ACTFL usage in Kanien'kéha L2 spaces, one must examine how ACTFL came to be used at the adult immersion programs across the Mohawk territories. In an interview conducted in the fall of 2024 with Owennatékhwa Brian Maracle, founder and long-time instructor at the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa immersion program in Six Nations, Owennatékhwa described that in his early years of teaching, he pondered what "fluency" meant in terms of Kanien'kéha proficiency. He was asked to measure and relate student progress and success to the Band Office and other funders. For a few years, he had difficulties assessing students and providing concrete goals for them to attain at the end of the program until he found

the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). He adapted this assessment to the Kanien'kéha context and used it to measure proficiency and progress in students.⁵ He also set concrete goals for students to achieve by the end of the program. After he incorporated ACTFL OPIs, the length of the program was expanded from one year to two years of full-time study. He stated the importance of ACTFL as critical to Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa's curriculum delivery and assessment (Benedict & Maracle, 2024).

Owennatékhá noted that the main factors behind the selection and implementation of the ACTFL OPI were due to time constraints, the necessity to test fluency assessment via a recognized standard, and the perceived applicability of ACTFL to Kanien'kéha at the time. There were no pre-existing standards for measuring Kanien'kéha speakership, so Owennatékhá went with the sensible and available option. Since the use of the ACTFL OPI began, graduates of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa immersion school have founded two other adult immersion programs at Tyendinaga in 2022 and Ahkwesáhsne in 2019 (J. Thompson, Personal Communication, May 17 2026). Both of these programs also adopted the same ACTFL Modified OPI system of Kanien'kéha fluency assessment used by Owennatékhá. Currently, the ACTFL Modified OPI is used by all five adult immersion programs in operation across the Kanien'kehá:ka territories.

The ACTFL oral proficiency scale has provided us with a baseline assessment to determine fluency in the second-language learner community. However, I believe that these standards are applied uncritically to Kanien'kéha, and there are methodological and epistemological differences that cannot be reconciled.⁶ It then becomes necessary for the

⁵ According to Language Testing International, Language Proficiency is defined as "the ability to communicate accurately" while Language Fluency is "The smoothness of one's speech". (Jaros-White, 2023)

⁶ See Stacey (2016) and Decaire (2023) for further discussion on the background of ACTFL usage in Kanien'kéha fluency assessment.

immersion programs in operation across the Kanien'kehá:ka territories to devise their own standardized methods of language fluency assessment for not only adult-immersion students, but all ages. Looking forward, I hope that the adult-immersion programs can come together with Kanien'kehá:ka academics, teachers, language learners of all ages, and elders, to formulate a Kanien'kéha fluency assessment scale written entirely in Kanien'kéha.

3: Tsi Niiota'karí:te ne Ahkwesáhsnéha: Ahkwesáhsne Language Vitality Survey

The previous chapter established the broader context of Indigenous language vitality and its importance and then closed by focusing on issues in assessing Kanien'kéha vitality. This chapter will feature the Ahkwesáhsne Language Vitality Survey I conducted as part of this project and its implications for the Ahkwesáhsne community. This chapter begins with a summary of the background of the Ahkwesáhsne Territory (§[3.1](#)) and then introduces the Kanien'kéha revitalization movement happening there (§[3.2](#)) before transitioning into the survey and its findings (§[3.3](#)).

3.1 Kanien'kéha and Ahkwesáhsne Background

The long history between Euro-American settlers and Kanien'kehá:ka people is well documented, as over the course of four centuries power shifted from Indigenous peoples to settlers across the continent. By the time residential schools in Canada and boarding schools in the United States began, language shift was already well underway. In the present day, given the current state of Kanien'kéha vitality with less than 300 speakers at the Ahkwesáhsne Territory, immediate and radical change is needed in government and education policy to reverse language shift (Fishman, 1991). By extension, accurate Kanien'kéha vitality metrics are needed to inform those policy decisions.

In the fall of 2025, I conducted a survey of Kanien'kéha vitality at my home community of Ahkwesáhsne to inform language policy change and advocate for increased support of organizations conducting language preservation work there. Ahkwesáhsne is located on the

American-Canadian border, split by the state of New York and the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. The 33 square miles of Ahkwesáhsne Kanien'kehá:ka territory is a hub of Kanien'kehá:ka culture, language, and traditions. The Ahkwesáhsne Kanien'kehá:ka territory sits on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, 90 minutes outside of Montreal. While Mohawk people had lived in the area for hundreds of years, the permanent settlement of Ahkwesáhsne started with the establishment of the St. Regis Mission by the Tarbell brothers in 1760 (Bonaparte, 1993). Before the settlement of Ahkwesáhsne there were Seneca, Oneida, and Mohawk people who had been living at the Kahnawà:ke Territory outside of Montreal. Due to a lack of land in Kahnawà:ke, approximately 30 families moved 20 leagues upriver to the St. Regis Mission. Records indicate that the St. Regis Mission had been established in 1755 and was occupied by French Jesuit missionaries. The families were led by John and Zacariah Tarbell, two brothers and condoled chiefs of the confederacy who had been raised by Jesuit missionaries. The Tarbell brothers were born into an English settler family and had been captured by Mohawks in 1707 and taken to Kahnawà:ke. They were raised as Mohawks, condoled as chiefs, and led the settlement of Ahkwesáhsne (Bonaparte, 1993). Today, the Tarbells remain one of the largest and most prominent families in Ahkwesáhsne.

Today, Ahkwesáhsne is inhabited by approximately 13,000 people and is largely comprised of members of the Kanien'kehá:ka (Dcaire, 2023). On the southern portion of Ahkwesáhsne (the United States side) there is a US-federally recognized governance structure in place that oversees community programs and fund distribution. This governance structure is called the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe (SRMT). The SRMT is a sovereign domestic nation, as defined by its nation-to-nation treaty relationship with the United States. It has the power to carry out its own independent business, and many of the community support programs are funded by

the United States through treaty agreements. On the northern portion of Ahkwesáhsne (the Canadian side), there is a Canadian-recognized government known as the Mohawk Council of Ahkwesáhsne (MCA). Similar to the SRMT, the MCA oversees the distribution of Canadian federal funds, infrastructure planning, and the implementation of social programs to benefit the Canadian-side of the community. The third governance structure in place is the traditional condoloed council of chiefs, known as the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs (MNCC). The condoloed chiefs are part of the broader governance structure that spreads across the entire Haudenosaunee confederacy, which has been in place for thousands of years. The condoloed chiefs operate out of at least two longhouses and uphold the traditional teachings and ceremonial cycles of the Kanien'kehá:ka at Ahkwesáhsne. All three councils have worked together to push Kanien'kéha revitalization efforts forward in the community. The Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Territory has been recognized as a leader in Indigenous language immersion education since the founding of the Ahkwesáhsne Freedom School in 1979. Since then, immersion programs have grown and developed in childhood and adult education across the community.

3.2 Current Language Immersion Efforts in Ahkwesáhsne

The previous section focused on the historical background of Ahkwesáhsne and its current government structures. This section will summarize the major sites of Kanien'kéha immersion currently in operation at Ahkwesáhsne for the purpose of establishing an understanding of the structure of the major programs and schools pushing Kanien'kéha revitalization forward at all levels of education. The following table summarizes all major sites of Kanien'kéha immersion education currently in operation in 2026.

Table 1*Notable Immersion Programs in the Ahkwesáhsne Territory*

Program Name	Year Established	Type	Description
Ahkwesáhsne Freedom School	1979	N-6 Childhood Immersion	A culture-based elementary immersion program starting from newborn to grade 6.
Kaná:takon School	2010	K-6 Childhood Immersion	Public elementary school offering immersion from pre-kindergarten to Grade 5. The school focuses on language learning and comprehension through a culture-based program, while incorporating Ontario Ministry of Education outcomes.
Tsiakwawennatónhe'ts	2022	N-6 Childhood Immersion	A culture-based elementary immersion program starting from newborn to Grade 6.
Á:se Tsiwéwá:ton	2019	Adult Immersion	A two-year adult immersion program operating under the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, on the American side of the reserve, targeted at bringing adult learners from little to no fluency to an advanced-level with over 2000 hours of immersion instruction. Students are compensated for their classroom time.
Ionkwahronkha'ónhákie	2019	Adult Immersion	A grassroots, non-profit organization operating on the Canadian side of the reserve, targeted at increasing proficiency in advanced-level adult speakers through immersion events and programming.
AEDA Advanced Mohawk Course	2026	Adult Immersion	A year-long course run by the Ahkwesáhsne Economic Development Agency on the Canadian side of the reserve. Taught by a L1 speaker, this course is designed to help intermediate-advanced adult students reach higher levels of fluency. Students are compensated for their classroom time.

Two major programs that have led Kanien'kéha immersion work are the Ahkwesáhsne Freedom School and the Á:se Tsitewá:ton Adult Language Program. The Á:se Tsitewá:ton program is a new (established in 2019) adult immersion program. It has been continuously producing advanced-level Kanien'kéha speakers since the fall of 2019. It is a two-year program with a structure and curriculum based on the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa program in Six Nations (known as the Root Word Method, to be discussed further in [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#)). Á:se Tsitewá:ton is funded through the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe on the American side of the reserve. It accepts a cohort-style class of about 10 students, with applications opening up to the Ahkwesáhsne community every two years. The program employs two language teachers who oversee day-to-day lessons. Additional staff includes a program director and an administrative assistant. Similar to other language immersion programs across Kanien'kehá:ka territories, the program struggles with securing funds on a year-to-year basis to continue operations.

The Ahkwesáhsne Freedom School is the oldest Mohawk language immersion secondary school currently in Ahkwesáhsne. Founded in 1979, the Freedom School has been educating the youth of Ahkwesáhsne for over 40 years. Currently, the school supports grades Pre-K through 8, operating on the American side of the reserve. The school runs independently of any of the tribal government structures and operates based on funds acquired from the community. It receives continuous funding from the St.Regis Mohawk Tribe and the Mohawk Council of Ahkwesáhsne, with donations from various other individuals and programs in the community. The Freedom School also offers a language nest to the community for toddlers and infants. Due to funding constraints, class sizes for the language nest and each grade level are limited to preserve the efficacy of the immersion environment and the quality of education.

As is displayed in the table above, several of the immersion programs listed are new, starting in 2019 or later. With Á:se Tsitewá:ton established as the first two-year adult immersion school in Ahkwesáhsne, two other programs have developed as support structures for graduates of Á:se Tsitewá:ton and other two-year adult immersion programs. The Ionkwahronkha'onhákíe program is a grassroots collective of second-language speakers looking to further increase their fluency levels by interacting with first-language speakers in natural learning environments. Founded in 2019 by a small, educated group of second-language speakers, they create spaces in the community for first- and second-language speakers to socialize and converse in more informal learning environments outside of the classroom. They go about this work by hosting events and workshops centered around cultural activities, including medicine walks, basket-making, gardening, and cooking classes.

Another program targeted at two-year adult immersion graduates is the AEDA Advanced Mohawk Course. This course is taught by a first-language speaker who provides a structured curriculum analyzing different grammatical features of Kanien'kéha to deepen students' understanding of the mechanics of the language. Both the AEDA course and Ionkwahronkha'onhákíe provide invaluable support to two-year adult immersion graduates. The common understanding among the adult immersion programs is that post-graduation student fluency levels tend to regress due to the reintegration into a non-Kanien'kéha speaking world. Programs like AEDA and Ionkwahronkha'onhákíe provide a structured support network of L1 speakers and language immersion events to help the graduates of adult immersion maintain and increase Kanien'kéha fluency.

Looking forward, there's a critical need for immediate expansion of all the aforementioned immersion programs, as well as several major gaps that exist in the immersion

opportunities available in terms of the ages they serve. All of the childhood immersion programs feature elementary immersion into middle school, with no high school opportunities available anywhere on the reserve. Additionally, the common understanding in the community is that each of the immersion programs is consistently in high demand, with large applicant pools for childhood and adult course offerings. It is critical to establish updated vitality numbers for Ahkwesáhsne Kanien'kéha to provide a case for the increase in funds and support for the immersion programs.

3.3 Survey Background

DeCaire's 2023 dissertation is the first major academic project to establish a framework for Kanien'kéha vitality surveys. The framework he established is used in this chapter, but I apply a different methodology with regard to the information collection process. I focus only on Ahkwesáhsne (as opposed to all the Kanien'kehá:ka territories) and as a result provide further context with regard to the qualitative factors in his framework. Additionally, in my research methodology I utilized the collective knowledge of L1 elders combined with previous language census data to assess the number of L1 and L2 populations in Ahkwesáhsne. In producing numbers of L1 and L2 speakers, DeCaire relied on estimates provided by language experts at each of the Mohawk territories. DeCaire estimated there were approximately 10 L2 (second-language) and 350 L1 (first-language) Kanien'kéha speakers residing at Ahkwesáhsne (DeCaire, 2023, p. 35). These numbers require reexamination due to the aging population of L1 speakers at Ahkwesáhsne and the increasing L2 speaker population. Most of the L1 speakers of Kanien'kéha at the Ahkwesáhsne Territory are over the age of 60, with most L2 speakers under the age of 35 (see [Table 3](#) below). To continue to form effective language revitalization strategies

and policies, an updated, comprehensive vitality assessment of Kanien'kéha at Ahkwesáhsne is needed. Through collaboration with L1 speakers we were able to expand on DeCaire's framework and add demographic information on gender, age, area of residency on the Ahkwesáhsne Territory, and intergenerational language transmission data (if the speakers listed have children, and if their children speak).

3.4 Survey Timeline and Data Collection

The original motivation for this project came out of conversations that occurred at an advanced Kanien'kéha course I attended in the spring of 2025. At that time, a small group of Kanien'kéha L2s were meeting with a contingent of elder L1 speakers for an advanced Kanien'kéha course held at the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. During that course, the elders would tell stories and the L2s would listen and ask questions about vocabulary the elders utilized. Through that process, they would talk about friends or relatives who had recently passed away and tell stories about their lived experiences and memories with those people. They began to comment on the large number of L1 speakers passing away in Ahkwesáhsne and asked me if I knew anything about how many there were in the community. I cited DeCaire's research and told them those numbers were from 2023 (Decaire, 2024). They said an update was needed, and so this work began.

The project itself started with a consultation with the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe's language program, Á:se Tsitewá:ton in September of 2025. I requested the use of the previous survey the tribe had conducted in 2023.⁷ Upon initial review, the survey itself was a list of names, with no

⁷ I met with the program manager of Á:se Tsitewá:ton, Eric Thompson, in September 2025 and discussed the parameters and goals of the vitality survey. After listening to the proposed project, Eric agreed on the condition that the information from the updated survey be housed at the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program.

other information included. In order to build on and update the 2021 survey by Thompson and the 2023 survey by DeCaire, I invited three elder speakers and knowledge holders to participate in updating the survey by pooling their collective knowledge and personal networks within the L1 community of Ahkwesáhsne to provide judgements about speakership and provide notice if anyone on the list had passed away since 2023. Sensitive demographic data including individual names and ages, were omitted from this thesis. Additionally, the Vitality Survey and all accompanying findings will be turned back over to the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program at the end of the project.

I reached out to three speakers I had already worked with extensively and had formed relationships with long before this project. One of them is in her 60s and is a lifelong resident of Ahkwesáhsne. She currently teaches multiple adult courses and previously taught at the Freedom School and Kaná:takon School. The second is also in his 60s and worked as an ironworker for years before retiring and serving on the Mohawk Council of Ahkwesáhsne as an elected chief. He has remained a stalwart advocate for language learning throughout his life. He currently teaches adults at the advanced level through night classes. The third is in his 80s, another lifelong ironworker and language advocate. These elders were all invited to participate in the census update to utilize their knowledge of the L1 community at Ahkwesáhsne to provide context and judgements about speaker fluency and provide notice of anyone on the list who had passed away. These specific elders were invited due to their community-recognized language and community knowledge and their previous experience in Kanien'kéha teaching and revitalization efforts. They collectively agreed to assist with the project, and we met for one two-hour session to review the list provided by the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe.

The session took place on October 20th, 2025, at the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe's administration building in one of the community classrooms. Before our review session, there were 355 speakers listed, slightly higher than Decaire's estimate in 2023. Since 2023, approximately 58 people have passed away. Out of the remaining names, 20 were determined to not be Kanien'kéha speakers, and two other people were identified as L2 speakers based on the collective knowledge of the elders group. This totaled 80 names removed from the updated L1 speaker list, reducing the 2023 estimate of 350 to the most recent estimate of 275.

In terms of the structure of the conversation during data collection, I presented the list to them on a smartboard, and we collectively went through each name. They would discuss the person and tell me immediately if the person had passed away. If the person was still with us, they would enter into discussion to determine the person's level of fluency based on their knowledge of the person and their family. When approaching the conversation of who was and wasn't considered a "speaker" of Kanien'kéha, the elders used metrics of advanced conversationality, asking and answering two main questions: "Can the person speak comfortably on a wide variety of topics?" and "Are they able to converse comfortably and without major errors with another speaker?" I also collected demographic information on where the person lived (district of the reserve), gender, and their approximate age, with all the data to be housed at the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program, with future access dictated by the program staff.

Going into the meeting, I planned to collect additional information on each individual's area of residence, whether they had children, and if their children spoke Kanien'kéha. However, due to the speed with which the elders reviewed and discussed each name, there were cases where they forgot to mention the region of residence (of Ahkwesáhsne) or information about the children of individuals on the census. The findings of our work are summarized below.

Table 2*Ahkwesáhsne Language Vitality Evaluative Factors*

			2023	2026
Speakers on Territory	L1 Speakers (Advanced Proficiency or Higher)		350	275
	L2 Speakers (Advanced Proficiency or Higher)		10	30
Proportion of Speakers	On-Territory		12,896 (2.8%)	12,896 (2.2%)
	All Membership		18,725 (1.9%)	18,725 (1.5%)
Intergenerational Transmission	L1 Speaking Families		9	9
	L1 Children of L2 Parents		5	10
Domain Usage and Functions	Identity Function Beyond Emblematic and Symbolic Function		Yes	Yes
	Community Function Beyond Emblematic and Symbolic Function		Limited	Limited
	Used to Transmit Essential Bodies of Knowledge		Yes	Yes
Government Attitude and Policy	Federal	Protection By Law	No	No
		Committed Long-Term Funding	No	No
	Band/Tribe	Committed Long-Term Funding	No	No
		Language Law/Policy	No	No
		Official Band/Tribal Council Resolution to Support Language Revitalization Efforts	Yes	Yes
Community Attitudes	Most Support Language Maintenance		Yes	Yes
	Most Actively Promote Language Use		Yes	Yes
	Most Actively Oppose Use of Dominant Language (English and/or French)		No	No
Literacy and Education Materials	Established Orthography		Yes	Yes
	Orthographic Standardization		Yes	Yes
	Written Form Supported by Community		Yes	Yes
	Modernization (Literature, Materials, Lexicon Development)		Limited	Limited

	Adequate Dictionaries, Lexicons, and Learning Grammars	Limited	Limited
	Adequate Documentation	Limited	Limited
	Adequate Body of Literature	Limited	Limited
	Available Media (Videos, Recordings, etc.)	Limited	Limited
Maintenance and Revitalization Infrastructure	Established Language Revitalization Body	No	No
	Ongoing Revitalization Planning Process in Place	Yes	Yes
	Immersion Program for Toddlers and/or Children	Yes (N-6)	Yes (N-6)
	Immersion Program for Adults	Yes	Yes
	Non-Immersion Classes for Children	Yes	Yes
	Non-Immersion Classes for Adults	Yes	Yes
	Program Support for Families	Limited	Yes
	Adequate Visibility and Community Mobilization Efforts	Fair	Fair

Additional factors that were assessed in the 2026 census survey, but not in 2023, are listed in [Table 3](#). The inclusion of the factors in [Table 3](#) is due to the specificity of this survey with its focus on the Ahkwesáhsne Territory only, as opposed to the 2023 survey which encompassed all six of the Kanien'kehá:ka territories. With this focus on Ahkwesáhsne and the access to the previous census data housed at the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe, the data collection process with the elders provided avenues for expansion of the demographics collected to include gender and age categories as well.

Through this process of tracking language vitality from 2023 to 2026 the two factors that have changed the most over this time period are the number of L1 and L2 speakers at Ahkwesáhsne. Importantly, while the number of L1 speakers has inevitably decreased, the number of L2 speakers has risen. The population of L1 speakers has decreased from approximately 350 in 2023 to 275 in 2026. With regards to the L2 speaker population, we see an

increase from 10 in 2023 to 30 in 2026. The shift in L1 speaker populations from 2023 to 2026 is indicative of a rapidly aging demographic. However, the increase in L2 adult speakers highlights the efficacy of the adult immersion programs operating in Ahkwesáhsne and across the Mohawk territories, producing advanced-level speakers over two years of intensive immersion training. In my estimation, the most critical number in the vitality survey is the increase of L1 children of L2 parents. The underlying goal of the adult immersion programs is to restore Kanien'kéha language transmission to its natural state, in the home, where all generations, from grandparents to parents to children, are conversing in Kanien'kéha. With this goal in mind, the immersion programs normally tend to favor younger adults of child-bearing age (to be discussed more in [Chapter 5](#)) in the hope that these students will become speakers, meet another young speaker, and raise a Kanien'kéha speaking family. While L2 populations are increasing, Ahkwesáhsne is still losing L1 speakers more quickly than we can train new L2 speakers. Hopefully, with increased funding for immersion programs at all age levels, which can support strategic planning, lead to meaningful policy change, and positive language legislation at the federal and band council levels, more support structures can be created to bolster the effective programs already in operation.

Table 3

Gender and Age Demographics of Ahkwesáhsne Speakers

Speakers on-Territory	L1 Speakers (Advanced Proficiency or Higher)		275
	L2 Speakers (Advanced Proficiency or Higher)		30
Median Age	L1 Speakers		68
	L2 Speakers		28
Gender	L1 Speakers	Male	48.40%
		Female	51.60%
	L2 Speakers	Male	46.70%
		Female	53.30%

3.5 Kanien'kéha Fluency Assessment Factors

The following subsections will provide further context for the findings of each of the factors listed in [Table 2](#). Each of the terms used will be defined and discussed, as well as any major changes from 2023 to 2026. Additional qualitative information will be included, providing further understanding of the state of Kanien'kéha vitality in Ahkwesáhsne.

3.5.1 Ahkwesahsnéha Domain Use and Functions

A language domain refers to the environment in which a particular variety of language is used, such as in the home, in the workplace, or in religious settings. Sociolinguist Joshua Fishman defines a domain as a “cluster of social situations typically constrained by a common set of behavioral rules” (1972, 452). The preservation of the diversity of Kanien'kéha language domains is critical for revitalization purposes, especially with regard to cultural domains and practices. For example, there exists an entire domain of language dealing with basket making,

from terms used to describe the process of weaving, to packing down splints, to making handles. If we don't make baskets, we won't use those words, and that could lead to us losing that kind of vocabulary. The opposite is true as well: if we don't know the Kanien'kéha words to talk about basket making, the craft itself becomes more endangered. Kanien'kehá:ka language and cultural practices are woven together in that way.

With regard to broader domain preservation as an aspect of language vitality, DeCaire considers three main points in Kanien'kéha domain use: 1) identity function beyond emblematic and symbolic function, 2) community function beyond emblematic and symbolic function, and 3) used to transmit essential bodies of knowledge (DeCaire, 2023). Identity function is the domain where usage identifies the speaker with a particular social group. Symbolic and Emblematic function refers to language use to identify with a particular social group, but not to meaningfully communicate or transmit knowledge. Community function refers to collective usage of language with regard to communication and knowledge transmission in public spaces and events. These factors have remained unchanged from 2023 to 2026, as displayed in [Table 2](#). Identity function in everyday language refers to Kanien'kéha use in introductions at meetings, greetings, or in other spaces where language use is specifically for claiming belonging to a social group. With regard to Ahkwesáhsne's context, the language use and knowledge of most community members is relegated to familiarity with a few nouns, such as days of the week, colors, animals, and how to introduce oneself in social situation (how to say one's name, age, what clan they're from, and where they live). This kind of symbolic usage without actual speech production at a conversational level can lead to misconceptions surrounding Kanien'kéha fluency and vitality levels in Ahkwesáhsne.

For the purpose of this thesis in attempting to quantify speakers and speakership in Ahkweśáhsne's dialect of Kanien'kéha, what is relevant to being a speaker is whether or not someone can pass the language down to the next generation as a primary language so they might use it within and between peer groups. This is something that L1 speakers can do because of the innate knowledge they acquired as young children; something that L2 speakers can do with effort and practice because they've achieved a certain level of proficiency. It's not something within the language fluency of someone who is only able to use words relegated to the aforementioned topics (nouns, days of the week, introductory language). This doesn't mean that it isn't of some value to be able to introduce yourself, or to know how to have basic exchanges. However, for what is relevant and critical for the purposes of this project — tracking the numbers of speakers with the long-term goal of reestablishing intergenerational transmission and primary peer group usage — language knowledge limited in domain usage to introductory language and a few nouns falls outside the notion of speakership. Since the onset of adult immersion programming utilizing a structural based approach to language learning and teaching (to be discussed further in Chapters [4](#) and [5](#)) the number of L2 speakers in Ahkweśáhsne has increased as language policy and revitalization goals turn from symbolic usage, back to the re-establishment of intergenerational transmission.

The growing number of L2 speakers at Ahkweśáhsne are contributing to impactful community-based and led research projects on a wide variety of language domains. For example, Ionkwahronkha'onhákíe (the grassroots organization for L2 adult speakers looking to increase their fluency through immersion settings mentioned in [Chapter 2](#)) has been planning and executing language immersion events centered on domain-specific language use and documentation. In the spring of 2024, Ionkwahronkha'onhákíe held a basket-making workshop

bringing together L1 and L2 speakers from Ahkwésáhsne and surrounding communities, with L1 language experts providing domain-specific language and basket-makers providing knowledge of the cultural practice. Events like this have increased in frequency and attendance over the past five years. Given the increasing numbers of L2 speakers and the shifting attitudes surrounding language domain use, there's been a resurgence of language used not only as a source of knowledge but as a vehicle of cultural knowledge transmission, marking a critical step towards increasing domain use within Ahkwesáhsne.

3.5.2 Government Attitude and Policy

While collaboration increases between L1 and L2 speakers to create immersion spaces of varied Kanien'kéha domain usage and re-establish language as a source of knowledge transmission, fiscal and governmental structures restrict natural growth of immersion programs and access to long-term funding sources.

Between 2023 and 2026, no major changes occurred in Ahkwesáhsne with regard to government attitude and policy toward Kanien'kéha at the local, provincial, or national level. At the local level, there has been an increase in short-term fiscal support from the Mohawk Council of Ahkwesáhsne and the St Regis Mohawk Tribe for language-based initiatives. For example, the St Regis Mohawk Tribe has taken on more of the operating costs of the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program that operates under their education department—covering the fiscal expenses for student stipends to attend the program. While this is an improvement, there is still no dedicated long-term funding for language initiatives in the Ahkwesáhsne area. Consequently, staff and instructor positions remain grant-funded, placing the program's future in a constant state of

uncertainty and making hiring and long-term planning difficult (E. Thompson, Personal Communication, May 17 2026).

Additionally, there is not yet a codified language law in Ahkwesáhsne explicitly stating that Kanien'kéha is the primary language of everyday life. Resolutions by the MCA and SRMT have been ratified, expressing support for Kanien'kéha, but a language law has yet to be approved. Other Mohawk territories have begun discussing and ratifying community-wide language laws. In Kahnawà:ke, the Kahnawà:ke Language Law was passed in 1999, explicitly stating the purpose of the law was "to revive and restore the Kanien'kéha language as the primary language of communication, education, ceremony, government, and business" (Kahnawà:ke, 1999). The Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte (Tyendinaga) passed a resolution through their band council in 2021 "affirming Kanyen'kéha (Mohawk) as the official language of the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and the original Mohawk Tract as a whole" (*TMC Statement Regarding Kanyen'kéha Affirmation and Commitments*, 2021).

While Ahkwesáhsne has fallen behind its sister communities in terms of development and implementation of a language law and policy on both the American and Canadian sides of the border, the SRMT developed an Ahkwesáhsne Language Plan in January 2024 with feedback and input from major community stakeholders, ranging from childhood and adult immersion programs to longhouse governance. This plan laid out a series of short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals for the Ahkwesáhsne community with regard to the development of its language infrastructure and programming at all levels. Items 2 and 3 listed on the mid-term future goals (2–4 years out from the adoption of the plan) were "2 – create language policies that support everyone's participation in Kanien'kéha initiatives in Akwesasne, and 3 – develop consensus on the design of an independent community-based language entity responsible for continuously

improving the effectiveness of our collective language initiatives" (SRMT, 2024). A variety of other goals were stated, ranging from the increase in funds for pre-existing language programs to increasing the capacity of said programs to intake students at all age levels. However, since the final draft of the Language Plan was shared with the SRMT in 2024, there hasn't been additional action towards achieving any of the stated goals aside from the SRMT accepting responsibility for the costs of student stipends at the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program. Despite the lack of major changes, the L1 and L2 communities at Ahkwesáhsne continue to advocate and organize at the community level for increased resources for all levels of Kanien'kéha language education and for official recognition of Kanien'kéha as the language of Ahkwesáhsne.

3.5.3 Community Attitudes

As discussed previously, the general sentiment towards language within Ahkwesáhsne is favorable; however, most of the community of non-speakers don't actively pursue language studies or oppose the use of English as the dominant language. Out of the population of Ahkwesáhsne (approximately 12,896 on-territory members) current language infrastructure is only able to educate approximately 160 adults at any point in time. Even if the entire adult population of Ahkwesáhsne decided to pursue language studies simultaneously, the course offerings at Ahkwesáhsne are limited in their capacity to intake students, as summarized in the [Table 4](#) below. It's critical that Kanien'kéha programs procure secure long-term funding to expand course offerings at all age levels for all instruction types from introductory courses to immersion.

Table 4*Adult Kanien'kéha Classes in Ahkwesáhsne in 2026*

Class Name	Class Duration	Year Established	Class Frequency	Class Capacity	Instruction Medium	Instructor	Type	Description
AEDA Introductory Kanien'kéha Course	1 year	2026	5 hours weekly	15	In-Person	Wentanó:ron Jocco	Introductory	Run by the Ahkwesáhsne Economic Development Agency on the Canadian side of the reserve and taught by a L2 speaker, this course introduces students to the grammar and fundamentals of Kanien'keha. Students are compensated for their classroom time.
AEDA Introductory Kanien'kéha Course	1 year	2020	5 hours weekly	40	Hybrid	Otsi:tsia Sunday	Introductory	Run by the Ahkwesáhsne Economic Development Agency on the Canadian side of the reserve and taught by a L2 speaker, this course introduces students to the grammar and fundamentals of Kanien'keha. Students are compensated for their classroom time.
SRMT Introductory Kanien'kéha Course	20 weeks	2023	6 hours weekly	10	In-Person	Kaniehtáhare	Introductory	Operating under the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe on the American side of the reserve and taught by a L2 speaker, this course introduces students to the grammar and fundamentals of Kanien'kéha.
AMBE Introductory Kanien'kéha Course	Ongoing	2025	2 hours weekly	5	In-Person	Tekaronhiákwas McDonald and Tyler Laffin	Introductory	Operating under the Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education on the Canadian side of the reserve, this course is reserved for teachers and staff at the AMS elementary school. Taught

								by L2 speakers, this course introduces students to the grammar and fundamentals of Kanien'kéha.
AMBE Advanced Kanien'kéha Course	Ongoing	2025	2 hours weekly	5	In-Person	Tekaronhiákwes McDonald and Tyler Laffin	Advanced	Run by the Ahkwesáhsne Mohawk Board of Education on the Canadian side of the reserve. This course is reserved for teachers and staff at the Kaná:takon elementary school. Taught by L2 speakers, this course introduces fluent students to the morphological framework of Kanien'kéha through a focus on verb stem conjugation.
Iohahí:io Introductory Kanien'kéha Course	15 weeks	2025	3 hours weekly	30	In-Person	Arihwisaks Benedict	Introductory	Run by Iohahí:io, the local post-secondary institute on the Canadian side of the reserve and taught by a L2 speaker, this course prepares students to apply to adult-immersion programs.
Haudenosaunee Universe Kanien'kéha Course	14 weeks	2024	2 hours weekly	15	In-Person	Kawennenhá:wi Nelson	Introductory	Run by Haudenosaunee University on the American side of the reserve and taught by a L1 speaker, this course focuses on thematic noun lists in instruction.
HEAL Lodge	Ongoing	2024	1 hour weekly	15	In-Person	Mitchell Brant and Martha Lickers	Introductory	Run by the HEAL lodge on the Canadian side of the reserve, this course focuses on language surrounding Longhouse teachings at an introductory level.

Á:se Tsitéwá:ton	2 years	2019	30 hours weekly	15	In-Person	Kaien'kwinéhtha Ransom and Kaniehtáhare	Immersion	A 2-year adult-immersion program operating under the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe on the American side of the reserve, targeted at bringing adult learners from little to no fluency to an advanced level with over 2000 hours of immersion instruction. Students are compensated for their classroom time.
AEDA Advanced Mohawk Course	1 year	2025	4 hours weekly	20	In-Person	Mary McDonald	Immersion	A year-long course run by the Ahkwesáhsne Economic Development Agency on the Canadian side of the reserve. Taught by a L1 speaker, this course is designed to help intermediate adult students reach higher levels of fluency. Students are compensated for their classroom time.
AEDA Advanced Mohawk Course	1 year	2026	2 hours weekly	10	In-Person	Otsì:tsia Sunday	Immersion	A year-long course run by the Ahkwesáhsne Economic Development Agency on the Canadian side of the reserve. Taught by a L2 speaker, this course is focused on story-telling and advancing fluency among intermediate-to-advanced level speakers.
Total				160				

3.5.4 Literacy and Educational Materials

With the founding of the Á:se Tsitewá:ton immersion program in 2019, the use of the Root Word Method, and the subsequent increasing numbers of L2 speakers in Ahkwesáhsne, community attitudes towards the written form of Kanien'kéha are evolving. For context, the modern Kanien'kéha orthography (standardized spelling system) was developed in 1993 by a coalition of Kanien'kehá:ka language teachers, speakers, linguists, and elders, including Karihwenhawe'kénha Dorothy Lazore from Ahkwesáhsne (Lazore, 1993). In August of 1993, the Mohawk Language Standardization Conference met at the Kenhtè:ke Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory for the purpose of finalizing a standardized spelling system that would be used across the Mohawk territories. That orthography is still in use today in Ahkwesáhsne.

This orthography is generally accepted and standardized across Ahkwesáhsne, with some minor variations in writing based on region and family dialect variation as well as L1 speaker preference. This orthography is supported by the community, but the Kanien'kéha literacy levels are very low, with the majority of L1 speakers not using the written language at all, and the broader community having little to no knowledge of the spoken or written language. Also, the use of accurate diacritics (crucial for correct pronunciation of the written language by learners) in public signage and language occurring in the physical landscape around the community is rare. The lack of understanding and adequate usage of the Kanien'kéha writing system has created friction between the L1 and L2 communities with regard to resource and curriculum development. L1 speakers who teach at any level often lack the professional training to write consistently in Kanien'kéha using the modern orthography, having learned the oral language in a natural home environment that predates the onset of the written language. Kanien'kéha was

traditionally an oral language; since it was transmitted in the home, and not in schools, many L1 speakers were never taught to read and write it. This led to the rise in popularity of spelling Kanien'kéha words following English orthography among L1 speakers and L2 learners who struggle to understand the writing system. This practice leads to errors and inaccuracies in the spelling of everyday words, which makes it harder for learners, at all levels, to study. However, L2 learners are now graduating from adult immersion programs with an adequate degree of knowledge in Kanien'kéha grammar, morphology, and writing systems. These graduates are now employed as teachers and curriculum and resource developers in the community and are producing written work that accurately uses the modern orthography.

In interactions between the L1 and L2 adult communities, the L1 speakers have recognized the expertise L2 speakers hold with regard to the written language and the grammar of Kanien'kéha generally. This has led to increased collaboration between L1 instructors and L2 speakers. For example, concerning adult introductory courses in Ahkwesáhsne from the 1970s through 2024, there was a greater emphasis placed on memorizing thematic lists of words than on understanding grammar and writing systems. More recently, however, introductory courses have begun to focus more on understanding grammar and writing systems and providing learners with a foundational understanding of Kanien'kéha morphology.

This shift took place in part through increased collaboration between L1 and L2 instructors, with the introductory courses offered at the St Regis Mohawk Tribe in the fall of 2024 and spring of 2025 moving from L1 instruction focused on thematic noun lists to co-instruction between L1 and L2 instructors focusing on grammar to L2 instructors taking charge of the delivery of the courses by the summer of 2025. Also, L2 instructors were hired to

provide other introductory language courses at various other language education sites around Ahkwesáhsne, as displayed in [Table 4](#).

3.5.5 Maintenance and Revitalization Infrastructure

There is still no centralized Kanien'kéha revitalization organization in Ahkwesáhsne, which provides a structural barrier to increasing language vitality in the community. This is due to a number of factors, first and foremost, the border splitting the community. Due to the different jurisdictions and government entities laying claim to different parts of the territory, formulating any kind of cross-community organization or infrastructure has proven challenging for organizations, such as Ionkwahronkha'onhátie and Á:se Tsitewá:ton, as Kanien'kéha is one language split by two settler nations.

Due to the challenging governance and finance structure, funds are earmarked for language initiatives based on where they are situated on reserve. While communication and collaboration has naturally increased between language programs on different sides of the reserve in recent years due to the increased numbers of L2 speakers entering the workforce in language related fields (See [§5.6](#)), most community language organizations are unable to pool funds and resources in order to support collaborative projects and engagement.

Despite the adversity Ahkwesáhsne faces due to its location, people and organizations on both sides of the border continue to work collaboratively wherever possible to push the Kanien'kéha revitalization movement forward. Through sharing research, resources, programming, and events, language practitioners and teachers continue to find unique and creative ways to navigate the colonial borders imposed on the community, consistently reiterating that we are one community and one nation. The Kanien'kehá:ka have lived here since

time immemorial, and we will continue to be here long after the United States and Canada are gone. As long as the land remains, we will remain. The fact that we are still able to speak Kanien'kéha today is testament to our collective strength and resilience.

4: Raoká:ra: An Oral History of the Root Word Method (RWM)

In examining the vitality of Kanien'kéha at Ahkweśáhsne, the story of the inception of the Root Word Method adult immersion curriculum and its development and shift from Six Nations to Ahkweśáhsne, requires deeper examination and analysis. This is necessary so we might gain further clarity as to the struggles of previous language practitioners in providing the groundwork for the programs and curriculum we have today. Through this clarity, a deeper sense of purpose and motivation might be conveyed to learners, so that we might continue to build an informed, holistic movement of language revitalization in the face of ongoing linguistic colonialism. This chapter will discuss major findings of an oral interview conducted entirely in Kanien'kéha with Owennatékhá Brian Maracle, the founder of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa Kanien'kéha adult immersion program in Ohswé:ken, for the purpose of documenting his story and experience for the education of future generations of Kanien'kehá:ka. Additionally, this interview will be used to establish the background of the Root Word Method in tracing how the curriculum came to be used in Ahkweśáhsne. The concept of *Tentewatate'nikonhrakétsko'* [we will pick up each other's minds] was applied to the interview as a vehicle for exploring the reclamation of historical narratives as a source of strength and collective empowerment of the Kanien'kehá:ka. Major findings and key points within the interview will be highlighted, and an analysis will be conducted on the impact of Owennatékhá's work and its implications for the Kanien'kéha revitalization movement with regard to adult-immersion programming, tracing the movement of the RWM from Ohswé:ken to Ahkweśáhsne.

4.1 Tentewatate'nikonhrakétsko' : Reclamation of Historical Narratives Within

Kanien'kéha Revitalization

Expanding beyond the foundations of Ahkwesahsnéha vitality, the underlying goal of the language revitalization movement in Kanien'kehà:ka communities is not simply to revitalize our language, but our way of life; our ceremonies, cultural practices, worldviews and stories. Through this work, we maintain our connections with land and each other so the *Á:se Tahatikonhsontónkie* [the faces to come] will prosper. Through this language reclamation work, we are healing ourselves and becoming whole Onkwehón:we people again, while simultaneously processing the trauma inflicted on past generations through the colonial process of land theft and attempted genocide. To continue to heal we must approach language revitalization through a historical lense providing direction, understanding, and clarity to learners. This arises out of a need to acknowledge the struggles and hardships with relearning Kanien'kéha given the history of language dispossession, and a need to provide a more holistic, wellness based approach in the classroom that centers student well-being and *Ka'nikonhrí:io* [the good mind].

The first step in this approach is recognizing the importance of language to reclaiming Kanien'kehà:ka lifeways through story and the continuation of our oral tradition so that we might fully comprehend the complete history of our people and the struggles and triumphs of generations past. This chapter posits the concept of *Tentewatate'nikonhrakétsko'* [we will pick up each other's minds] as redefining the application of the historical narratives of the Kanien'kehà:ka, not as reminders of past trauma, but as sources of collective strength and instruction, for the purpose of the reclamation of *Ska'nikòn:ra* for the Kanien'kehà:ka.

Tentewatate'nikonhrakétsko' is a term derived from the verb *Shakoti'nikonhrakétskwá* [they lift up their minds]. When a community member is grieving or depressed (referred to as

Roti'nikonhrèn:ton [their minds are hanging], there are specific protocols and ceremonies used by the Kanien'kehá:ka to bring the community member in question out of that mental state, with the general process referred to as *Ensehshakoti'nikonhrakétsko'* [they will lift their minds back up again], back to a healthy place centered in *Ka'nikonhrí:io*.

Drawing from the concept of *Tentewatate'nikonhrakétsko'* and posing the history of Kanien'kéha revitalization as a source of continued strength, this approach will help inform the understanding of the revitalization movement of Kanien'kéha learners, teachers, and speakers. This will lay the groundwork for informed decision-making and strategic planning by language practitioners and band councils in the years to come. In the context of the Kanien'kéha revitalization movement, adult immersion programs have proven to be one of the most effective methods of revitalization. Examining the history of the Root Word Method through *Tentewatate'nikonhrakétsko'* will help reclaim our own narratives in history, focusing on intergenerational collaboration to restore strength, resilience, and knowledge transmission through language. Hale describes the role language plays in knowledge production in that it "embodies the intellectual wealth of the people who use it. A language and the intellectual productions of its speakers are often inseparable" (1992, p. 37). As the Kanien'kehá:ka look forward toward multi-faceted goals of language and cultural revitalization, the re-establishment of widespread oral traditions of knowledge transmission and the creation of new traditions of written Kanien'kéha historical narrative will be critical to the ongoing health of the language.

4.2 Kanien'kéha Adult Immersion Background

This section will discuss the general structure of the adult immersion programs in operation across the Kanien'kehá:ka territories for the purpose of contextualizing the curriculum

and history behind the immersion program in Ahkweśáhsne. There are currently five full-time Kanien'kéha adult immersion programs across all communities, and one in Ahkwesáhsne. All of the immersion programs are Á:se Tsitewá:ton (Ahkwesáhsne), Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa (Ohswé:ken), Ratihwennahí:rats (Kahnawà:ke), Shatiwennakará:tats (Tyendinaga), and Ratiwennenhá:wi (Kanehsatà:ke). These immersion programs are delivered over two-three school years with 10-20 students per cohort. The goal of these adult immersion programs is to bring adult students from little to no Kanien'kéha fluency to an Advanced-Low level of fluency on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Scale. Major assessments of student progress for the Ohswé:ken and Ahkwesáhsne programs utilize the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) that was mentioned in [Chapter 2](#), a one-on-one interview that assesses student language proficiency according to the ACTFL Oral Proficiency guidelines (ACTFL, 2012). A range of recent work by Haudenosaunee scholars has affirmed the value of adult immersion programs and their role and impact in Kanien'kéha revitalization. Professor Tehota'kerá:ton Jeremy Green stated “the goal of Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa was not to simply offer an alternative to state imposed French language courses, or to offer an alternative to legally mandated compulsory state education. The goal was to create speakers” (2020, p. 24). Dr. Ryan DeCaire expanded on Jeremy Green's work and researched the efficacy of adult immersion programs. In his 2023 dissertation, DeCaire stated “true immersion programs have significantly more quality and quantity of language input compared to other methods” (2023, p. 79). The pedagogy utilized by the programs at Ahkwesáhsne, Tyendinaga, and Ohswé:ken is based on the Root Word Method (RWM), formulated by Kanahtawakhon'kénha David Maracle and Owennatékhha Brian Maracle in the 1990s providing a systematic breakdown of Kanien'kéha (Green and Maracle, 2019). After the formulation of the RWM, Owennatékhha went on to design a curriculum around it and founded

the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa immersion program in 1999. Today, Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa has over 160 graduates.

4.3 Root Word Method Background

This section will provide an overview and define the Root Word Method in the context of its establishment as the most effective framework and curriculum for Kanien'kéha revitalization. Green and Maracle (2019) describe the Root Word Method (RWM) as "(1) a method of organizing the documentation, classification, and categorization of the lexicon, syntax, and morphology of a polysynthetic language; and (2) the teaching and learning of polysynthetic languages wherein learners acquire the morphology and syntax of the target language in a predictable order" (Green & Maracle, 2018). The RWM was developed by Kanien'kehá:ka linguist Kanatawakhon'kénha David Maracle in the 1990s during his time as a linguistics professor at Western University. The stated goal of the RWM was "to grammaticize a polysynthetic Indigenous language to reduce it to a simplified form in order to more efficiently teach it to willing learners" (Green and Maracle, 2019, p. 147). With this goal, Kanatawakhon'kénha utilized decades of linguistic research performed on Kanien'kéha by linguists to develop and create a curriculum that worked for Kanien'kehá:ka adult students. Utilizing a simple-to-complex system of teaching starting with pronominal prefix manipulation, then scaffolding morpheme features in Kanien'kéha to build out a student's corpus of words, Kanatawakhon'kénha provided the foundation for the RWM as it exists today. Currently, through the structure of the adult immersion programs that use the RWM, upon graduation students "will have been taught approximately 800 verb roots, 200 noun roots, 72 pronominal prefixes, 16 aspectual prefix and suffix combinations, a plethora of adjectival, locative, purposive,

benefactive, reflexive, and reversive prefixes and suffixes, and the rules for how all of these morphemes fit together to create a multiplicity of words." (Green and Maracle, 2019, p. 150).

While it is important to acknowledge the efforts of non-Kanien'kehá:ka linguists in providing the foundation of linguistic research and academic work that was used in the creation of the RWM, it is also critical to acknowledge the history itself. It took a Kanien'kehá:ka scholar working for the betterment of Kanien'kéha and the Kanien'kehá:ka first and foremost to develop a curriculum that worked for adult students. More specifically, the evolution of this curriculum displays the Kanien'kehá:ka have continued contributing to our own knowledge with respect to language. Through Kanien'kéha revitalization work, we are actively placing ourselves back into relation with our ancestors by upholding our responsibilities as understood through our original instructions in the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwén. Looking forward, it would be beneficial to co-create spaces in which Kanien'kehá:ka and non-Kanien'kehá:ka scholars can work and conduct research in tandem and come to *Ska'nikòn:ra* [consensus] with regard to the desired outcomes of such academic collaboration.

As the RWM has gained popularity and notoriety through the years, it has provided an efficient and straightforward path to attaining fluency for adult learners of Kanien'kéha. However, for Kanien'kehá:ka communities who haven't used the RWM in the past, it is critical to examine why the implementation of the RWM matters so much in the context of Kanien'kéha revitalization. Today, there are currently two other Kanien'kéha immersion programs in operation besides Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa that have adapted and utilized the Root Word Method curriculum as developed by Owennatékhwa Brian Maracle. These programs are Á:se Tsitewá:ton in Ahkwesáhsne (St Regis Mohawk Tribe, 2022) and Shatiwennakará:tats in Tyendinaga (Foley, 2023). Additionally, there are two other Indigenous language adult

immersion programs that have translated the Root Word Method curriculum into their subsequent languages for its use and implementation. These are the Tuscarora Language Immersion Program (TLIP) at the Tuscarora Territory (Nęękwawęta?0kwáhshek, 2021), and the Mi'gmaq Adult Immersion Program in Listuguj, Quebec (Jacques, 2024).

Focusing on Ahkwesáhsne, prior to the usage of the RWM curriculum, Kanien'kéha classes at the adult level tended to focus on thematic noun lists, such as numbers, colors, and days of the week, with little focus on morphology or grammar structure. Courses at Ahkwesáhsne were taught in this way until the adoption of the RWM at the Á:se Tsitewá:ton Kanien'kéha immersion program in 2019 and the introductory level classes in 2025 at the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. Now, there are approximately five adult introductory courses and the Á:se Tsitewá:ton immersion program in operation utilizing the RWM at Ahkwesáhsne. In tracing the evolution of the RWM from Kanatawakhon'kénha's work to its usage in Ahkwesáhsne in the present day, it's critical to discuss the early history of the development of the RWM at Ohswé:ken and the subsequent establishment of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa adult immersion program. In the following sections, the findings of an interview with the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa founder and long-time director, Dr. Owennatékhá Brian Maracle, will be discussed in order to further examine the development of the RWM in its early years.

4.4 The Impact of the Root Word Method and Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa

In tracing the evolution of the RWM from Kanatawakhon'kénha's work to its usage in Ahkwesáhsne in the present day, it's critical to discuss the early history of the development of the RWM at Ohswé:ken and the subsequent establishment of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa adult immersion program. In the following sections, the findings of an interview with the

Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa founder and long-time director, Dr. Owennatékha Brian Maracle, will be discussed in order to further examine the development of the RWM in its early years.

4.4.1 Interview: Owennatékha Brian Maracle Introduction

This section will introduce the background of an oral interview in Kanien'kéha that was conducted with Owennatékha Brian Maracle at his residence in Ohswé:ken on November 18th, 2024. This interview focused on his experience establishing the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa program and his development of the RWM through adult immersion teaching. A prepared list of questions was sent to him in advance. The interview was conducted in Kanien'kéha, and I transcribed the interview in its entirety. These questions (found in [Appendix C](#)) focused on a chronological telling of his upbringing, then transitioning into his work as an adult, and his Kanien'kéha reclamation journey. Questions focused on his lived experience entering into language revitalization work, working with Kanatakwáhkōn David Maracle to formulate the Root Word Method, and developing the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa curriculum. After that, questions focused on drawing out his experience in founding Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa and what it was like for him to teach there over the years. The interview lasted approximately seventy-five minutes. After the interview concluded, I transcribed and translated the audio file utilizing ELAN software.

4.4.2 Interview: Language Journey and The Root Word Method

Owennatékha Brian Maracle was born in 1947 in Ohswé:ken, Ontario, and was raised in Ohswé:ken and New York. In the interview, he described his childhood and early education. He graduated high school in Rochester, and earned a BA in Fine Arts from Dartmouth College in

1969. After discussing his experience moving back to Ohswé:ken as a young man, Owennatékha talked about how a few first-language speakers and linguists had tried, unsuccessfully, to teach him Kanien'kéha. He described how he learned a lot of words, but he was unable to hold a conversation or make sentences.

Í:kehre ne áhsen ok nikawén:nake ì: 'i kewennaienté:ri, ne ó:nen sha'té:kon iawén:re na'tewakohseria'kòn:ne. Kewennaienté:ri ne shé:kon, iah shé:kon, shekórie. Iah tekewennaienterihne shé:kon. Shekórie. Táhnnon wa'kkwé:ni' akì:ron' tho nìiowihstá:'e. Iah te, iah tekewennaienté:ri ne "shé:kon, henh, iah, éhnska tékeni áhsen," othén:nen ó:ia.

[I think that I only knew three words when I was eighteen years old. I knew "Hello," not hello, "Hello (in Oneida)," I didn't know the word "Hello." "Hello (in Oneida)" and I could say "What time is it?" I didn't know "Hello, yes, no, one, two, three," anything else.]

Táhnnon, táhnnon, í:kehre tsi tióhton iawén:re tewenniá:we tióhton niwáhsen ià:iak takatáhsawen' tsi kateweienhstha ne Kanien'kéha Ohwé:ken nón:we. Táhnnon tóhkara nihá:ti wahonte'nién:ten' aionkerihónnien' ne Kanien'kéha. Ne ronhronkha'tsherí:io. Táhnnon é:so nikawén:nake wa'keweientéhta'ne' nek tsi iah tewakkénion takewennasonterónnion'. Táhnnon Kanatawakhonkénha ne shaià:tat né:ne wahate'nién:ten ahakerihónnien'.

[And, and, I think 1996 I started to study Kanien'kéha in Ohswé:ken. And a few first language-speakers tried to teach me Kanien'kéha. And I learned a lot of words, but I couldn't make sentences. And Kanatawákhon (David Maracle, deceased) was one man who tried to teach me.]

It was during this period that he met David Kanatawákhon Maracle, a Mohawk linguist and professor at Western University. Kanatawákhon tried to teach him unsuccessfully. During this period he also met the woman he would later marry, Ohnekiióhstha. Ohnekiióhstha and Owennatékha had similar goals with regards to becoming speakers of Kanien'kéha, so they moved north to Wáhta Kanien'kehá:ka Territory to isolate themselves and focus on their language studies, but they were still unable to teach themselves even with such extreme measures. They came back to Six Nations and reported back to the Grand River Employment

And Training (GREAT) center, who had hired the both of them to learn Kanien'kéha.

Owennatékha told his funders at GREAT he was unable to learn Kanien'kéha, when asked why, he stated that Kanien'kéha and English were very different, and there was something happening in the language of Kanien'kéha that wasn't clear to learners. He described it as:

Táhnnon wahonni:ron' "Oh nontié:ren?" Well, tsi ní:ioht tsi nì:'i onke'nikonhraién:ta'ne', tsi ní:ioht tsi nì:'i wake'nikonhraién:ta's ne Kanien'kéha, ok nahò:ten niiawen'on'hátie ne kawennakónhson. Ohstónha ì:'i kahrónkhahkwe. Táhnnon kwah kí' tekiattíhen. Ne skawén:nat ne Kanien'kéha, é:so niiohri:wake ne kawén:nakon. Ne tekonttihanion. Táhnnon teiotohontsióhon í:se aesa'nikonhraién:ta'ne' oh nikaiérha ne owenna'shòn:'a. Oh ní:ioht tahsewennákha'.

[And they said "Why?" Well, how I understood it, how I understand Kanien'kéha, whatever is happening in the language. I used to speak a little bit. And it was very different. One word in Kanien'kéha has many matters (grammatical features) in the word. That's very different. And it's important that you understand what the words are doing. How you might take words apart.]

So GREAT hired Owennatékha and Ohnekiiohstha to make a learning plan/curriculum examining the structure of Kanien'kéha. After that point, they visited Kanatawákhon David Maracle to get his help with deciphering the linguistic aspects of the language into something usable to them. Owennatékha then describes entering Kanatawákhon's office and seeing many small papers covering his desk. On the papers, the roots of Kanien'kéha words were written. Kanatawákhon showed him how to manipulate different morphemes (parts of words) in Kanien'kéha through different combinations of the papers on the desk. Kanatawákhon put together three pieces of paper, where the morphemes "ro," "nonhs," and "iyo" were written, respectively, and then showed Owennatékha that these morphemes, put together, "rononhsí:yo," meant "he has a nice house." Kanatawákhon then changed two of the morphemes to "iako" and "nakt," making the word "iakonaktí:yo," or "she has a nice room." Owennatékha then realized

that if he could learn what the different morphemes of Kanien'kéha do, and how to manipulate them, he could become a speaker. He described it as:

*Wahèn:ron' oh nahò:ten kén:ton, táhnon wa'thaté:ni' "ro" tsi niió:re "iako",
wa'thaté:ni' ne "-nonhs-" tsi niió:re "-nakt-" táhnon onktó:kenhse' eh shikahá:wí,
tóka' í: 'i aonke'nikonhraién:ta'ne' akwé:kon ne niiorihwá:sas, ne nikawenná:ass,
ne otskwa'shòn:'a, ní:'i onktó:kenhse' tsi akkwé:ni' akahrónkha'ne' ne
Kanien'kéha.*

[He said what it meant, and then he changed "ro" to "iako," he changed "-nonhs-" to "-nakt-," and at that time I realized, if I could understand all these small matters, small words, all the roots, I realized I could become a speaker of Kanien'kéha.]

4.4.3 Interview: Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa Founding and Early Years

After their meeting at Western, Owennatékha began studying the roots of Kanien'kéha words using a dictionary Kanatawákhon had written. Owennatékha brought this idea for a new method of learning to GREAT, and the decision was made to use the curriculum for the teaching of a course. GREAT then hired Owennatékha and Ohnekiióhstha to start a language group. Owennatékha was very clear at several points during the interview, he had never wanted to become a teacher of Kanien'kéha, he only ever wanted to learn how to speak it. Despite his lack of desire to teach, Owennatékha hired Kanatawákhon to help them make a language class. They found a space, decided to have the class during the day at the same time children were at school, and they realized it was necessary for them to study all day, everyday during the week to become proficient and to stay one step ahead of the students. So Kanatawákhon taught the course in the mornings, and Owennatékha taught after lunch, reviewing what Kanatawákhon had covered that morning. There were eleven students that year.

After the first year, Owennatékha said he could speak at an Intermediate-Low, Novice-High level on the ACTFL scale and that he was happy with that, knowing he had a good

foundation to continue his language studies for life. However, other people in Ohswé:ken heard about the program and came up to him asking about studying there the following year. At that time, there wasn't a plan for the program to continue, as it had only been for the year. But there was enough interest expressed that Owennatékhá decided to go forward with another cohort of students, and he would be the lone teacher. They started again in the fall of 1999. For that second year and then more than five years after, it was just Owennatékhá teaching what he and Kanatawákhon had covered that first year, using no other source but the dictionary that Kanatawákhon wrote. Owennatékhá then started to write additional materials to help the students. He stated that was how Onkwawén:na Kentóyhkwa started.

4.4.4 Interview: Teaching Kanien'kéha, Hardship and Change

Owennatékhá stated about ten years passed after the first class in 1999 before he started teaching in a similar fashion to the modern curriculum, where he used the system of forty Kanien'kéha prefixes to introduce students to the Root Word Method. He stated:

Í:kehre tsi tá'non', thóha oié:ri niiohserá:ke ontóhetste' ká:ron tsi niio:re takatáhsawen' tsi kherihonnién:nis sha'téioht niiakwatiérha ón:wa. Sha'téioht tsi nihontiérha ón:wa. Tsi nón:we ne káti teiotohontsióhon, wa'kherihón:ten' ótia'ke né:ne wahón:nehre' ahontéweienhste' onkwawén:na nonká:ti, teiotohontsióhon ahatiweientéhta'ne' kaié:ri niwáhsen nikawén:nake né:ne wátstha ne otskwa'shòn:'a ne "nòn:we's." Táhnnon kaié:ri niwáhsen ní:kon prefixes.

[I think maybe, almost ten years passed before I started to teach the same way we do now. The same they do now. Where it is important, I gave a few people responsibilities that wanted to study our language. It is necessary for them to learn forty words (prefixes) that use the root "nòn:we's." And forty prefixes.]

He also talked about difficulties during that time: shortages of funding, varying levels of interest and enrollment from year-to-year, and having to create all of the curriculum and materials himself in the evenings after class for the next day. The labor primarily fell to him

because there was no funding to hire anyone to assist him. His wife, Ohnekiióhstha, worked at Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa during that time; however, she was in charge of the administrative tasks of payroll, communications, and other things. It was a long time before he was able to hire someone to help him in the classroom. He described this as:

*Táhnnon ì: 'i kherihonnién: nis akonhá: 'ok. Né: 'e tsi iah é:so
teionkwahwistaién: tahkwe. Ohnekiióhstha né: ne tionnónhtons ne
kahiatonhsera 'shòn: 'a ne Onkwawén:na. Teiotohontsióhon aierihwaserón: ni'
né: ne kanáktakon ne ohwísta aorihwà: ke, ne kahiatonhsera 'shòn: 'a aorihwà: ke,
ne teietharáhkwa aorihwà: ke, táhnnon ì: 'i wa 'kherihónnien' enhniserakwé: kon.
Táhnnon ne kén: ton ne tká: konte ne akwé: kon akón: ni' ne okarahsnéha né: ne
én: katste' ne ó: nen enióhrhen 'ne.*

[And I taught by myself. Because we didn't have a lot of money. Ohnekiióhstha was in charge of the books of Onkwawén:na. It was necessary for her to plan the room and money issues, the book issues, the phone issues, and I taught them all day. And that meant often I would made everything in the evening, that what I would use the next day.]

During this time, he pondered what “fluency” meant in terms of Kanien’kéha proficiency. It was necessary for him to communicate student progress and success to the Band Office and other funders. For a few years, he had difficulties assessing students and providing concrete goals for them to attain at the end of the program. Until one day, he found the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview Assessment (OPI). As was mentioned in [Chapter 2](#), Owennatékhá adapted this assessment to the Kanien’kéha context and used it to measure fluency and progress in students. He also set concrete goals for students to achieve by the end of the program. After he incorporated ACTFL, the length of the program was expanded from one year to two years of full-time study. He stated the importance of the Root Word Method and ACTFL as critical to Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa’s curriculum delivery and assessment.

When questioned about additional challenges in his early teaching career, he cited a lack of time. There was never enough time in a day to do what he needed to do, and there was never enough money to hire additional support and get the materials they needed to run the program.

He stated:

*Tsi nahò:ten né:ne... wakerì:waïen né: 'e tsi tewáhsen ók kaié:ri
nikahwista 'etsherá:ke tsi niwenhníseres. Iah nonwén:ton tethiiékaié:ri
tewakenaktó:tehkwe. Ne káti akón:ni' akwé:kon naho 'énhshon ne
wa'tionkwatonwén:tsionhse'.*

[That what... I have an issue because there's only twenty-four hours during the day. I never had enough time. So that I could make all what we needed.]

One barrier was a lack of first-language speakers who were willing to help teach and speak with students. He described how at that time, all of the remaining first-language speakers of Kanien'kéha at Ohswé:ken were elders, and they either couldn't work full-time, or if they could, there was better pay elsewhere. Another difficulty was that the elders were unfamiliar with the Root Word Method, the reading and writing system of Kanien'kéha, and they also couldn't explain the grammar of the language. Speakers were raised to participate in society and community, not to bring the language back to those who could not speak.

4.4.5 Interview: Looking Forward

Owennatékha stated he worked at Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa full-time for twenty-five years, and in that time, over two-hundred students graduated from the program. However, he highlighted that the speaking levels of the graduates varied, and some people didn't graduate as the curriculum evolved and the length of the program increased from one year to two. He also discussed language loss after graduation, saying that some graduates couldn't retain the language after leaving the immersion environment. In other cases, some graduates went on to raise

first-language speakers in their own children. When questioned about how graduates might improve their own language retention, he discussed the mindset of successful students. The students who speak a lot, who enjoy speaking will generally be more successful. He also talked about initiative after graduation and how people need to continuously push themselves to become better speakers. He mentioned the use of social media and other modern tools to increase speaking time with other students and emphasized the importance of forming relationships with people who are focused on maintaining Kanien'kéha immersion as well. He described:

So tioianà: 'a oh nihoti'nikonhrò:tens ne ronteweiénhstha. Enwá:ton' ahonhkwihseron' ahonte'nién:ton' sénha enkarihwé:sake ahontá:ti', ne kén:ton tká:konte aiakoió'ten' ne thí'. Tká:konte ahatiientéhrha'ne' ne kentióhkwa né:ne ronteweiénhstha né:ne rontá:tis ne Kanien'kéha. Tká:konte á:iontste' "Social Media Apps" né:ne tsi nón:we ónhka'k ióntstha ne Kanien'kéha, "Facebook raoititióhkwa," iah ì:'i tekienté:ri ka'niká:ien ná:'a. Wakaterièn:tare tókat á:ienhre tóhsa aiako'nikórhen' ne owenna'shòn:'a, sénha eniontewenní:iohste', tká:konte ahsakwihseron' tsi sátstha. Táhnnon ne kén:ton tká:konte ok nahò:ten náhsiehre' né:ne iah tesatiérhahkwe ká:ron tsi niió:re tasatáhsawen' tsi sateweiénhstha. Tká:konte ne ónhka'k ó:ia aesewatén:ro'ne'.

[So it depends what kind of mindset the students have. It will be possible for them to try hard to talk about more issues, that means one must work at that. They must meet a group of students that speak Kanien'kéha. One must use "Social Media Apps" where someone uses Kanien'kéha, "Facebook group," I don't know which one that is. I know if one might want to not forget all the words, to become more fluent, you must try hard to use it. And that means you must do something you've never done before you started to study. You all must make friends.]

When he was asked, "What would you like to see happen in regards to Kanien'kéha thirty years from now?" he talked about concerns with the changing climate, the introduction of A.I., and his surprise that Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa is still in operation today. He said he didn't think it would last for three years, much less thirty. He also talked about issues with the standard orthography of Kanien'kéha, how different territories and dialects still write words differently, making it more difficult for learners and curriculum designers. He then discussed the importance

of more Kanien'kéha written materials. The example he gave was that you can learn French in immersion and then access all kinds of books written entirely in French. That is not the case for Kanien'kéha. He urged students to write more and to make movies too. The last question I asked was "If you could tell something to the people who will study our language in the years to come, what would you tell them?". Owennatékhá replied:

Táhnnon tká:konte áhsatste'. Tká:konte áhsatá:ti' enhniserakwé:kon. Tókat iah ónhka'k í:se, tókat iah thaesonkwe'taién:take, taesenithá:ren', tká:konte taesenithá:ren' ne sentshè:na érhá. Né:ne kahwistá:'eks iohrén:ton áhsonhtà:ke, né:ne tahsatahtherá:ni tsi atátken. Thó'k ní:kon. Táhnnon tká:konte áhsia'tá:ra'ne' ne kentióhkwa. Tká:konte áhsheia'ta'tshén:ri' ónhka'k né:ne ronhrónkha, ne ronteweiénhstha, táhnnon ísatst ne owén:na skáthne ronónnha, né:ne ronhrónkha nok ronteweiénhstha, tho'k ní:kon.

[And you must use it. You must speak all day. If you don't have anyone to talk to, you must talk to your dog. The bell on the wall, talk to yourself in the mirror. That's all. And you must join a group. You must find someone who speaks, students, and use the language with them, the ones that speak and study. That's all.]

In closing, he mentioned domain expansion and how it's necessary for us to tell stories about things we've never talked about before to make ourselves better speakers. He told us to push ourselves to become better, and to focus on written language as a method of study. The interview closed after that point.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

As the number of Mohawk immersion programs has increased, and they build out their capacity for student intake, the number of graduates will increase over the next few years. However, we (the Kanien'kehá:ka) find ourselves in a race against time, as the first-language speaker population continues to drop every year. As the Kanien'kéha revitalization movement grows, it is critical to integrate the domains of language use and knowledge of elder L1 speakers

into our long-term revitalization goals as we continue to focus on developing the RWM style of immersion instruction. Regardless of what the future holds, the Kanien'kehá:ka people remain steadfast in their commitment to maintain their language and culture. Towards the end of his interview, Owennatékhá stated:

*Wa'khehró:ri' iah teionkwáhson, iah tesewáhson. Tká:konte ahsataterihónnien'.
Í:'i wa'akwate'nién:ton' akwarihónnien' ne thí. Í:se nón:wa é'tho
nisaio'tenhserò:ten."*

[I told them we're not done. You all aren't done. You must teach yourself. We tried to teach you. Now it's your job.]

5: Tsi Ní:ioht tsi Sahòn:ronke' ne Ronatehià:ron: The Impact of Adult Language Revitalization at Ahkwesáhsne

This chapter will explore the history behind how the Root Word Method came to Ahkwesáhsne, and the impact the curriculum has had since the inception of its usage in 2019. Additionally, I will discuss the previous history of adult language immersion in Ahkwesáhsne in the 2010s until the inception of the Root Word Method usage. As community stakeholders consider which revitalization programs to invest in, it's critical that the long-term goals of any language work seek to re-establish intergenerational language transmission and speakership. This chapter will analyze the efficacy of the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program through its graduate demographic data to build a case for adult immersion as the most impactful method of Kanien'kéha revitalization at Ahkwesáhsne.

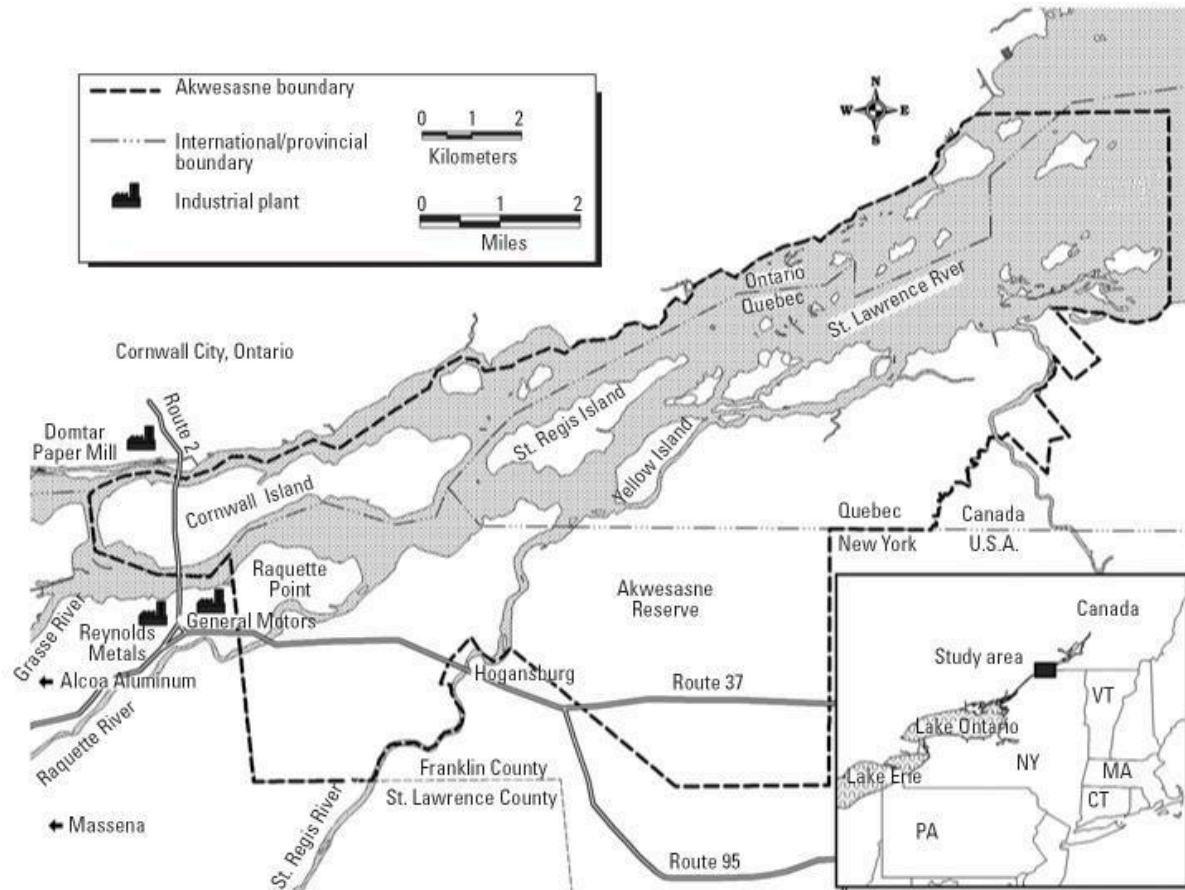
5.1 Adult Immersion in Ahkwesáhsne

In the previous sections, I discussed the development, impact, and implementation of the Root Word Method in Ohswé:ken in its early years. Now, by tracing the spread of the Root Word Method from Ohswé:ken to other Kanien'kehá:ka territories, the efficacy of the curriculum itself can be analyzed in order to establish its impact on Kanien'kéha revitalization at Ahkwesáhsne. Prior to the creation of the Á:se Tsitewá:ton adult immersion program, the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe established the Ahkwesáhsne Cultural Restoration Program in 2014. This program was created because the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, the Mohawk Council of Ahkwesáhsne, and the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs (these three governing entities as a unit are referred to as “the Tri-Council”) had reached a settlement agreement with Alcoa Aluminum and General Motors,

two corporations who had operated on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River through the 1900s into the 2000s. The Natural Resource Damage Settlement arose out of injuries committed by both corporations to the natural environment of Ahkwesáhsne, recreational fishing, and the Kanien'kehá:ka culture that resulted in a 20.3 million dollar payout to the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe (St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, 2013). Since the 1950s, both corporations had been dumping hazardous waste into the Grasse River which sits just to the west of Ahkwesáhsne. This hazardous waste contained polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), aluminum, fluoride, and cyanide. A map of the Alcoa and General Motors plants is on the following page.

Figure 1: Map of the Ahkwasáhsne Mohawk Territory and Local Industrial Plants

(Fitzgerald et. al., 2005)



A cultural impact study was conducted by Taiaia:ke Alfred in 2006 on the impact the corporation sites had on the community of Ahkwasáhsne. Alfred stated that prior to the start of the dumping of contaminants into the local waterways of Ahkwasáhsne, families on the territory were almost completely reliant on traditional hunting, fishing, and farming practices for sustenance. This study concluded:

"The release of contaminants into the natural environment has forced Akwesasro:nnon to drastically reduce traditional resource harvesting activities. As a result, they have, on the whole as a community, been denied the ability to provide their families with healthy foods; denied the ability to fulfill their traditional obligations toward the land, waters, plants and animals; and, denied the

ability to pass on practical, theoretical, philosophical and linguistic knowledge of what it means to be Akwesasro:non" (Alfred, 2006).

Due to this interruption in traditional obligations, there was an increased disruption in knowledge transmission between generations of not only cultural-related knowledge, but language knowledge as well. For example, the domain-specific words to use when fishing, planting, or hunting are important not only for the health of the language, but to ensure that the cultural practices themselves can continue, given that there are embedded knowledge systems in the language itself. As a result, in the settlement between the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and General Motors there were 8.4 million dollars in funds set aside specifically for language and culture revitalization. These funds were used to create the Ahkwesáhsne Cultural Restoration Program (ACR) in 2014.

This program was designed to be a mentor-mentee style cultural program, pairing motivated young-adult learners in the community with knowledge holders in cultural activities and practices, including basketmaking, trapping, medicine collection and preparation, hunting, and more. In addition to the cultural teachings each mentee received, there was a language component as well. This was a full-time, four-year program that operated from 2014 to 2018 and was originally intended to be a one-time occurrence, as the settlement funds were a non-renewable funding source. However, there was increased interest from the broader Ahkwesáhsne community in adult language learning programming, which led to the ACR staff applying for additional grant funding to provide an intensive, two-year program similar to the adult immersion programs in other communities. The ACR applied for another grant to run a language-focused program and hired a language instructor and TA to teach the first two-year

cohort which began in the fall of 2019. This became the first and only adult immersion program in the community of Ahkwesáhsne to utilize the RWM style of instruction.

5.2 The Root Word Method and Ahkwesáhsne Adult Kanien'kéha Revitalization

As the Root Word Method curriculum grew and developed, thanks to the efforts of Owennatékha and the other instructors in Six Nations, Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa gained notoriety as one of the premier schools of adult Kanien'kéha education. This led to a number of Ahkwesáhsró:non (people of Ahkwesáhsne) leaving their home community and going to study out in Six Nations (approximately a 6-hour drive from Ahkwesáhsne), since prior to 2019, there was no total adult immersion programming offered in Ahkwesáhsne (the ACR program wasn't an immersion environment). This led to a number of young learners from Ahkwesáhsne studying in Ohswé:ken, working as teachers or TAs in various immersion settings in Six Nations, and then moving back to Ahkwesáhsne with the intent of establishing long-term adult immersion programming in their home community. This influx of trained, motivated adult immersion instructors, combined with the increasing interest of adult learners in Ahkwesáhsne in immersion opportunities, led to the renaming of the ACR program in 2019 as the Á:se Tsitewá:ton adult immersion program, which utilized the Root Word Method curriculum translated into the Ahkwesáhsne dialect. The first two language instructors of Á:se Tsitewá:ton were both alumni of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa program and were familiar with the Root Word Method curriculum. The Á:se Tsitewá:ton program reached out to Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa and purchased the curriculum in 2019, and the instructors worked in the years following to translate and adapt it to suit Ahkwesáhsne's dialect and community needs (J. Thompson, Personal Communication, May 19 2026).

This program operates on a nearly-identical structure to Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa in Ohswé:ken and Shatiwennakará:tats in Tyendinaga. Students receive 1000 hours of compensated immersion instruction time per year, for a total of 2000 hours upon graduation. Class size is about the same, with approximately 12–16 students per cohort, and the curriculum is similar, with Á:se Tsitewá:ton making adjustments to the order of certain units and concepts to accommodate for the community of L1 speakers at Ahkwesáhsne who had expectations of the students to be able to introduce themselves after a few months (J. Thompson, Personal Communication, May 19 2026). This resulted in concepts such as place names and vocabulary pertaining to age, clan, and nationality being shifted to earlier in the curriculum, in Ahkwesáhsne's case (Á:se Tsitewá:ton, 2023).

Since its inception in 2019, the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program has graduated three cohorts of students. In collaboration with the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program, I was granted access to the graduate demographics of all three cohorts by the program director with the understanding that I would conduct an analysis focused on the implications of age, gender, and fluency outcomes on a cohort-by-cohort basis, with the findings to be shared with the program upon completion. Individual student names and other sensitive information will be omitted from this project for privacy purposes. As a former teacher's assistant for Á:se Tsitewá:ton, I had already worked closely with the office staff and language instructors and first worked with the graduate data in the summer of 2025, when I was tasked with creating a presentation on behalf of the program to be shared at a gathering of the Kanien'kéha adult immersion programs that took place at Blue Mountain, Ontario in July of 2025. At that time, all of the programs across the Kanien'kehá:ka Territories gathered to share knowledge of their various approaches to adult immersion and their

challenges and successes. Those demographics have been updated as of May, 2026 and are summarized in the table below.

Table 5

Á:se Tsitewá:ton Graduate Demographics 2019-2025

Graduate Class Size	Class of 2021		11
	Class of 2023		7
	Class of 2025		14
	Average		11
Retention Rate	Total Number of Students		39
	Did Not Graduate (DNG)		7
	Percentage DNG		17.9%
Age (Approximate at Time of Graduation)	Class of 2021		30–39
	Class of 2023		18–29
	Class of 2025		18–29
	Average		18–29
Gender	Class of 2021	Male	45.45%
		Female	54.55%
	Class of 2023	Male	42.86%
		Female	57.14%
	Class of 2025	Male	54.55%
		Female	45.45%
	Average	Male	47.62%
		Female	52.38%
Initial Fluency Level	Class of 2021		Novice-Low
	Class of 2023		Novice-Mid
	Class of 2025		Novice-Low
Graduation Fluency Level	Class of 2021		Intermediate-High
	Class of 2023		Advanced-Low

	Class of 2025	Advanced Low
Field of Work Post-Graduation (All Classes)	Kanien'kéha Teacher	25.6%
	Kanien'kéha-Related Field	30.8%
	Non-Kanien'kéha Related Field	25.6%
	Unknown	17.9%

The initial data set included names, graduating class, and fluency levels before starting the program and upon graduation. The categories of Gender, Age, and Field of Work Post-Graduation were added with help and input from the former students themselves, staff at the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program, and elders in the community. Data concerning age was approximated by myself and the staff at Á:se Tsitewá:ton based on our personal knowledge of the graduates, and sorted into the closest 10-year increment. So there was an 18-29 category, 30-39, 40-49, and so on.

5.3 Á:se Tsitewá:ton Age Demographics

With regards to the age demographic, the data displays that the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program has found success in younger students as the majority of graduates from the program. However, the program staff have committed to exploring new avenues of curriculum development and teaching styles to cater to older (40+) students. Out of the data available, Á:se Tsitewá:ton has had a total of 39 students across three cohorts from 2019–2025. While the average Á:se Tsitewá:ton graduate is in the 18–29 age bracket, there have been a total of nine students above the age of 40 who have enrolled in the immersion program from 2019–2025. Out of those nine students, only one graduated with the Advanced-Low distinction expected of graduates of adult-immersion programs. Upon interviewing program director Eric Thompson, I asked the

question "Could you talk about any current efforts within the program to cater to older students?" to elicit his understanding of the implication of the age demographics of KLP students.

Thompson responded:

"I know there are people my generation and older who would love to learn the language, it's not their fault, they feel like they're missing a part of their cultural identity with the language... I've always pushed for people my age to take the program, because I think the two easiest times to take the program are when you're young, or retired. When you have the tenacity and discipline coming off a career, those are keys to success... I would like to see a greater representation of older people [in the program]."

Thompson reaffirmed the program's commitment to serving students of all ages and highlighting the potential audiences in the Ahkwesáhsne community that the KLP would be targeting in the future, with adults approaching retirement age serving as suitable candidates for the program due to increased available time and financial security. Based on an interview with Jari Thompspon, Office Manager at the KLP, the current KLP cohort (2025–2027) out of a class of 16 has four students who are age 60 or higher (J. Thompson, Personal Communication, May 19 2026). This was part of a concerted effort by the program manager and the lead instructor to focus more on the student success of older students, given the data presented to them in the summer of 2025 at the Blue Mountain Conference. As of May 2026, all of the four students have met the fluency benchmark (Intermediate-Low) to continue into the second year of the course (E. Thompson, Personal Communication, May 17 2026).

Looking ahead to the future of the KLP, Thompson affirmed that the ages the program would be targeting for recruitment would be the 18–29 range and the 55+ range, given the amount of available time and typically perceived responsibilities (with regard to children, careers, etc) at both age brackets. This targeting of Ahkwesáhsne community members approaching retirement age is critical, as that particular generation of Kanien'kehá:ka was faced

with the most direct effects of language displacement following the Indian Boarding School era. When the average age of L1 and L2 speakers in Ahkweśáhsne is examined (L1 age: 68, L2 age: 28), it's clear there's a generational gap, represented by the community members currently in their 40s and 50s.

On a personal note, this gap is very clear in my own family. I come from the Benedict and Adams families in Ahkweśáhsne, and two out of four of my grandparents are L1 speakers. However, my parents and their siblings on both sides of the family are not speakers. This is generally the norm in Ahkweśáhsne, where (from my perspective as someone in their 20s) the grandparent generation are speakers, the parent generation is not, and the generation of children of those non-speaker parents are taking it upon themselves to relearn the language they didn't receive in their youth (again, pointing back to the average age of L2 speaker at 28 and the average age of L1 speakers at 68). However, to restore intergenerational transmission of Kanien'kéha each generation will need to take it upon themselves to contribute, learn, and speak, which is why the focus on the generation of Ahkwesasró:non in their 40s and 50s is also critical.

5.4 KLP Gender Data

As is displayed in the table above, two of three of the graduating cohorts (2021 and 2023) were majority women. Looking back to [Chapter 3](#), there is a greater proportion of women L2 speakers than men (53.3% women to 46.7% men). When the gender demographics of [Table 4](#) are analyzed, women make up the majority of adult language instruction in Ahkweśáhsne as well (60% women to 40% men). The data indicates one clear message: Kanien'kehá:ka women are playing a strong role in pushing the language revitalization movement forward at Ahkweśáhsne.⁸

⁸ See Kahterón:ni Stacey's 2024 dissertation for related findings in Kahnawà:ke.

In the last ten years, each of the major immersion sites that were created were all founded by Ahkwesáhsne women. Ionkwahronkha'onhákie in 2019, Á:se Tsitewá:ton in 2019 (J. Thompson, Personal Communication, May 19 2026), and Tsiakwawennatónhe'ts in 2022 (Clute, 2025).

5.5 Initial and Graduation Fluency Levels

The success of the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program in its graduate fluency rates has established it as one of the most efficient and effective form of Kanien'kéha revitalization programming in Ahkwesáhsne. Á:se Tsitewá:ton has maintained an Advanced-Low average for the last four years in its graduate fluency levels. At Á:se Tsitewá:ton, the 2025 class had fourteen students, all of whom graduated with at least an Advanced-Low fluency level or higher. This achievement speaks to the teaching prowess of the instructors and the unique position Ahkwesáhsne occupies, with the highest population of L1 speakers in the territories, which provides KLP students with ample conversation time in natural speech environments. Also, students coming into Á:se Tsitewá:ton tend to have fluency levels in the novice range, or sometimes even as high as intermediate because of the childhood immersion programs in operation in the territory of Ahkwesáhsne. These higher fluency levels prior to admission speak to the strength of the childhood immersion programs in the community in preparing students for adult level immersion. In the future a more systematic comparison of the efficacy of immersion programs across childhood and adult contexts would be an important avenue for continued study, to further inform policy decisions by local stakeholders such as band councils and language teachers.

5.6 Field of Work Post-Graduation

As is displayed in [Table 5](#), over half of the graduates from adult immersion go into a Kanien'kéha-related field, with a quarter going directly into teaching at the childhood or adult levels. In examining current adult language courses offered in the community of Ahkwesáhsne, twelve out of the fifteen instructors are graduates of adult immersion, with four of them coming from the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program and the other eight from immersion programs in other Kanien'kehá:ka communities. These statistics display the impact graduates of adult immersion are having in the community after graduation from the two-year programs. Decaire emphasizes the importance of adult immersion programming in his 2023 dissertation where he states:

"almost all other structures that exist in the Kanien'kéha revitalization system currently depend on adult immersion programs to produce speakers to work in and run such structures. Almost all (approximately 90%) of current instructors, for example, in all Kanien'kehá:ka elementary immersion programs in all communities are graduates of an adult immersion program, in effect making adult immersion programs “feeder programs” for other structures" (p. 87).

As the L1 population in Ahkwesáhsne continues to age, the younger generation of L2 speakers will begin moving into more language revitalization roles in teaching, curriculum development, policy-making, strategic development, translation, and more. With the development of a skilled core of L2 Kanien'kéha speakers in Ahkwesáhsne, the multifaceted goal of reestablishing intergenerational language transmission and restoring Kanien'kéha primary usage among peer groups becomes more attainable.

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

Based on the data and historical context presented in this chapter, the two-year adult immersion program Á:se Tsitewá:ton is the most effective vehicle of Kanien'kéha revitalization

currently in operation in Ahkwesáhsne. Building on the foundation provided by the Root Word Method curriculum and utilizing the living language embodied by the elder generation of L1 speakers in the community, the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program trains students to an Advanced-Low level of fluency within 2000 hours of instruction time, delivered over two academic years.

The unique structure of the program allows Ahkweśáhsne to increase its number of L2 speakers by 10–15 people biannually, providing measurable fluency deliverables in specific time frames to an efficiency and efficacy unlike any other language program or school in operation there. Within their most recent cohort that graduated in the spring of 2025, all fourteen students graduated at an Advanced-Low level of proficiency or higher, one of the first times that occurred not only in Ahkwesáhsne but in any Kanien'kéha adult immersion program since they began operating in 1999. Looking forward, its critical policy makers and governments at the band, local, state, provincial, and federal level invest heavily in adult immersion programming not only in Ahkwesáhsne but across the Kanien'kehá:ka Territories.

6: Conclusion

6.1: Summary

This thesis started with a vitality survey of Kanien'kéha and attempted to answer two main questions: 1) What does Kanien'kéha vitality mean? and 2) What is the current state of Kanien'kéha vitality on the Ahkwesáhsne Territory? The second chapter began with a broad overview of the importance of Indigenous language vitality, defining it, and discussing its relationship with the health of the land, the people, and our ceremonies. Then with that broader context established, [Chapter 3](#) transitioned to updating DeCaire's work in establishing a holistic series of vitality factors to assess Kanien'kéha, while expanding the demographic data to incorporate age and gender demographics. The purpose of [Chapter 3](#) was to provide a level-set for the community of Ahkwesáhsne in the critical point we have reached with regard to the vitality of Kanien'kéha. With only 275 L1 speakers left, the time for radical change and action is now. We cannot wait any longer.

[Chapter 4](#) used the concept of *Tentewatate 'nikonhrakétsko'* to reclaim Kanien'kéha historical narratives for the empowerment of the Kanien'kehá:ka and the revitalization of Kanien'kéha as the method of knowledge transmission. This concept was applied to an interview with Owennatékhá Brian Maracle, exploring the history of the Root Word Method curriculum and the inception of its use with the establishment of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa adult immersion program in Ohswé:ken in 1999. Tracing the RWM and adult immersion development over the years through an interview conducted entirely in Kanien'kéha was a necessary first step to reclaiming the history of Kanien'kéha revitalization told first and foremost in Kanien'kéha. This historical narrative, combined with Owennatékhá's previous academic work, will serve as a

reminder for language practitioners and revitalizationists of the efforts of previous generations in pushing the Kanien'kéha revitalization movement forward. The concept of *Tentewatate'nikonhrakétsko'* is based on reframing the narratives of past generations and their work in language revitalization as a source of inspiration and knowledge transmission for those of us engaged in this work now.

This led to [Chapter 5](#), which started by discussing the history of adult immersion in Ahkwesáhsne, specifically focusing on the establishment of the Ahkwesáhsne Cultural Restoration Program. The ACR started in 2014 as a mentor-mentee style program targeted at cultural teachings, and that program transitioned to the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program in 2019, using a traditional two-year adult immersion approach. At the point of that transition, the RWM curriculum was used by the instructors who were alumni of the Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa program in Ohswé:ken. The graduate demographics of the Á:se Tsitewá:ton program were then discussed, highlighting the implications of age, gender, fluency, and career field post-graduation, establishing two-year adult immersion as the most effective form of language revitalization programming in Ahkwesáhsne.

6.2 Tá:we Ientewate'nikonhraié:ra'te': Looking Forward

The underlying goal of this thesis was to research the state of Kanien'kéha vitality to create a sense of urgency and responsibility in my home community to motivate the people of Ahkwesáhsne to take action toward Kanien'kéha reclamation. Once that was established, I sought to display the history and efficacy of Kanien'kéha adult immersion to provide a roadmap of the best way toward said reclamation of Ahkwesáhsne Kanien'kéha. We need collective,

concerted, and immediate action to ensure that our language and our ways remain healthy for the future generations.

This will require critical stakeholders such as the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, the Mohawk Council of Ahkwesáhsne, and the Mohawk Nation Council of Chiefs to provide immediate long-term investment into adult immersion programming so we might train a generation of advanced second-language adult speakers, who are able to reintroduce Kanien'kéha into the home where it belongs, so that children might learn first and foremost from their families. I understand the goal of the Kanien'kéha revitalization movement to be restoration of intergenerational language transmission in natural learning environments as well as the refortification of Kanien'kéha speaking peer groups, and significant investment into adult immersion programming is the most effective and efficient way to do that.

In terms of where I hope this research will go in the following years, the speaker census will have to be updated on an annual or bi-annual basis to account for the growing number of L2 speakers, as well as the aging population of L1 speakers in the community. I hope that the teachers and academics working in Kanien'kéha revitalization and adult immersion can formulate fluency standards that render ACTFL obsolete and define Kanien'kéha fluency on our own terms, using our language.

Looking forward, I hope to see Kanien'kéha blossom in every corner of our nation. I hope to see Kanien'kéha films, plays, and read poetry, newspapers, novels, and textbooks, suitable for all ages and relevant to everyday life. I want to see our government evolve and bring together the best of our original democracy with new technologies and ideas to create something lasting for the future generations. I want to see our people learn language not just to speak to each other, but to be able to recenter themselves in *Tsi Niionkwarihò:ten* [our ways/culture] so

they might relearn how to be in relation not only with each other, but with the land itself, so we can reestablish kinship relationships, heal the political divides among us, and utilize our collective power and authority through *Ska'nikòn:ra* [one mind] once more. All of this so in 50 years when me and my friends are old, we can sit on the porch together and laugh in the language, and watch our grandkids do the same while they sing, dance, and play in the grass. In closing, I provide an excerpt from my personal Kanonhweratónhtshera that I write now as a call to action to the Kanien'kehá:ka people.

*Tsitewaweientéhta 'n ne onkwawén:na tánon tsi niionkwarihò:ten ne káti sénha
aontetewaié:rite' tsi nítsi aekiónhnheke' tánon taetewatawénrie tsi nikari:wes
kenh aetewè:seke' ieronkwe'nà:ke ne iethi'nisténha onhóntsia.*

[Let us relearn our languages and our ways so that we might be more correct and righteous in how we live and mingle with each other for as long as we will be here on the back of our mother, the Earth.]

Tho niihtónhak ne onkwa'nikòn:ra.

[Let our minds be that way.]

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Appendix

Appendix A: Census Information Example for Internal Community Use

Name	Gender	Age	District of Ahkwesáhsne	Address	L1 or L2	Children?	Children Speakers?
John Doe	M	50-59	St. Regis	N/A	L1	Yes	No

Appendix B: Census Information Example for External Use

District of Ahkwesáhsne	Gender	Age	L1 or L2	Children?	Children Speakers?
St. Regis	M	50-59	L1	Yes	No

Appendix C: Karihwanontha'shòn:'a (Owennatékha Interview Questions)

1. Enwá:ton' ken ahsekhro:ri' onkha ní:se? (Oh nahò:ten yesá:yats, Oh nisa'terò:ten, To nítisá:yen, ka'nítisé:non).
 - a. Can you tell me who you are? (What's your name, your clan, how old are you, where are you from)
2. Ka'nón:we wahsatehyá:ron'? Ka'nón:we wahsatéweyenhste' (tsi yontaweya'táhkwa nok ohná:kon thí'). Othén:nen ken onkwehonwenéha wahseweyentéhta'ne' shiseksá:'a?
 - a. Where did you grow up? Where did you study (secondary school and after?) Did you learn any Mohawk when you were a child?
3. Ka'nón:we wesayó'ten' ohná:ken wahsateweyenhstá:ko'?
 - a. Where did you work after you finished studying?
4. Oh ní:yoht tsi wahseweyentéhta'ne' ne onkwawén:na? Oh nisa'nikonhrò:ten tho shikahá:wi? Othén:nen ken tekyattíhen tsi nisa'nikonhrò:ten ohná:kon wahsá:ronke'?
 - a. How did you learn our language? How did you feel at that time? Was there anything different about your mindset after you became fluent?
5. Kátke wetshyentérha'ne' ne Kanatawakhon? Kátke tahsatáhsawen' skáttne aeseniyó'ten' ne Kanatawakhon?
 - a. When did you meet David Maracle? When did you start working together?
6. Wetshyé:nawahse' ken aharihwahserón:ni' ne the Root Word Method?
 - a. Did you help him formulate the Root Word Method?
7. Oh nahò:ten ne Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa? Oh nahò:ten kén:ton ne Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa ne saorihwà:ke?
 - a. What is Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa? What does it mean to you?
8. Wahyayé:nawahse' ken ne Kanatawákhkhon Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa ahserihwahserón:ni'?
 - a. Did David Maracle help you plan Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa?
9. Oh ní:yoht wahseriwahserón:ni' ne Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa? Oh nontyé:ren?
 - a. How did you go about planning Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa? Why?
10. To niyohserà:ke Onkwawenna wesayó'ten'? To nihá:ti wahsheri'hónnyen'?
 - a. How many years did you work there? How many people did you teach?
11. Oh ní:yoht wesayó'ten' ne thí:ken tyiontyé:renhte niyohserá:ke? Oh ní:yoht wahsheri'hónnyen'?
 - a. How did you work in those first few years? How did you teach?
12. Tsi tsyotáhsawe ne Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa, Oh nahò:ten sentorá:se tho shikahá:wi tsi nítisi wesayó'ten' nok wahsheri'hónnyen'?
 - a. At the start of Onkwawenna, what was hard for you at that time in how you worked and taught?
13. Oh ní:yoht wa'tehserihwaté:ni' tsi nítisi wesayó'ten' nok wahsheri'hónnyen' tsi nikarí:wes Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa yéhse'skwe?

- a. How did you change the way you worked and taught in the time you were at Onkwawenna Kentyóhkwa?
 - b. To niyohserà:ke Onkwawenna wesayó'ten'? To nihá:ti wahsherihónnyen'?
 - i. How many years did you work there? How many people did you teach?
14. Othén:nen ken ó:ya íhsehre ahsí:ron'?
- a. Is there anything else you'd like to add?