

**KANIEN'KEHA / MOHAWK INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE  
REVITALISATION EFFORTS IN CANADA**  
**EFFORTS DE REVITALISATION LINGUISTIQUE DE LA LANGUE  
MOHAWK / KANIEN'KEHA AU CANADA**

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Article abstract

This paper gives an overview of ongoing revitalisation efforts for Kanien'keha / Mohawk, one of the endangered Indigenous languages in Canada. For the Mohawk people, their language represents a significant part of the culture, identity and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. The endangerment of Kanien'keha and other Indigenous languages in Canada was greatly accelerated by the residential school system. This paper describes the challenges surrounding language revitalisation in Mohawk communities within Canada as well as progress made, specifically for the Kanien'keha / Mohawk language.

# KANIEN'KEHA / MOHAWK INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALISATION EFFORTS IN CANADA

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper gives an overview of ongoing revitalisation efforts for Kanien'keha/Mohawk, one of the endangered Indigenous languages in Canada. For the Mohawk people, their language represents a significant part of the culture, identity and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. The endangerment of Kanien'keha and other Indigenous languages in Canada was greatly accelerated by the residential school system. This paper describes the challenges surrounding language revitalisation in Mohawk communities within Canada as well as progress made, specifically for the Kanien'keha / Mohawk language.

## EFFORTS DE REVITALISATION LINGUISTIQUE DE LA LANGUE MOHAWK / KANIEN'KEHA AU CANADA

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article offre une vue d'ensemble des efforts de revitalisation linguistique réalisés pour préserver la langue mohawk / kanien'keha, une des langues autochtones les plus menacées au Canada. Pour la communauté mohawk, cette langue constitue une part fondamentale de la culture, de l'identité et du bien-être des individus, des familles et des communautés. La mise en péril de la langue mohawk / kanien'keha et des autres langues autochtones au Canada a été grandement accentuée par le système de pensionnats autochtones. Cet article explore les défis inhérents à la revitalisation de la langue en cours dans les communautés mohawks au Canada et les progrès réalisés, particulièrement en ce qui a trait à la langue mohawk / kanien'keha.

## WHY SAVING ENDANGERED LANGUAGES IS IMPORTANT

Linguists estimate that at least half of the world's 7,000 languages will be endangered in a few generations as they are no longer being spoken as first languages (Austin & Sallabank, 2011; Krauss, 1992). Krauss's (1992) global outlook for languages in crisis indicated that about 50% of the world's languages will be extinct in this century as they are not being learned as first languages. Speakers of threatened minority languages face enormous pressure to switch to

dominant languages. Other factors leading to language endangerment include natural disasters, war, genocide, and repressive assimilation policies (Crystal, 2000; Nettle & Romaine, 2000). Most disturbingly, of the 90% of the world's languages that will likely eventually disappear (Krauss, 1992), the bulk will be Indigenous languages, since they comprise approximately 60% of the world's languages (McCarty, 2008). To combat the endangered state of Indigenous and minority languages, language revitalisation has emerged as “an area of study and a social movement” (Hale et al., 1992, McCarty, 2008, p. 386). Hinton, Huss, and Roche (2018) defined language revitalisation as “giving new life and vigor to a language that has been decreasing in use (or has ceased to be used altogether)” (p. xxi) or the “activities designed not only to maintain but also to increase the presence of an endangered or dormant language in the speech community and/or the lives of individuals” (p. xxvi). The aim of this article is to describe the challenges surrounding language revitalisation in Mohawk communities within Canada as well as progress made, specifically for the Kanien'keha / Mohawk language.

The case for saving endangered languages is their value to cultural heritage, human rights, and cultural identity. Languages are “carriers of unique environmental understanding, philosophies, and great oral literatures whose loss should be mourned by all” (Hinton, 2008, p. 158). Preserving endangered languages is important for aesthetic, scientific, ethical, and ecological reasons (Kraus, 2007). Hale (1992) emphasized that one of the consequences of language loss is the loss of intellectual and cultural wealth, such as the example of Damin, an extinct auxiliary language in Australia. A language that was acquired during the initiation ceremony of men in the Lardil community in North Queensland, Damin showcased the traditions, norms, and ingenuity of the Lardil community. With its disappearance, a whole episode and history of that people were lost. Hale (1992) made the strong case that language loss deprives the world of diverse linguistic and cultural forms.

In response to the endangered state of many languages, local communities and governments have initiated efforts to revitalise, preserve, and document these languages. Official state or constitutional support is one of the important factors in safeguarding a language (Craig, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2018). Collaborative efforts between major stakeholders including parents, teachers, community members, and government officials is essential (Dupris, 2019; Oberly et al., 2015; Watahomigie & Yamamoto, 1992).

Steps to combat language endangerment or reversing language shift (RLS) can begin on a small scale (Fishman, 1991). Fishman indicated that RLS can be implemented by organized voluntary and community-based efforts without the help of the government, and that it is never too late to save a language. The example of Daryl Baldwin, a man who resuscitated his sleeping ancestral Myaamia language, learnt it and taught it to his family, is encouraging to single

committed speakers (Hinton, 2001). Bilger (1994) succinctly encapsulated the point that: “a single committed speaker can resuscitate a language whereas a million suppressed or indifferent speakers can let their language die in a generation” (p. 20).

The revitalisation of Indigenous languages is also an ethical matter and a human rights issue. The United Nations has been at the forefront of advocating for Indigenous rights, advocacy which includes language and education. The United Nations *Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2008) states that “indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons” (Article 13.1). Article 14.1 states that “indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning” (United Nations, 2008).

Among the most eloquent speakers on the importance of language revitalisation are Indigenous peoples themselves:

“If we lose our language, we lose who we are” (cited in Maracle, 2002, p. 398) – said by an instructor of Mohawk immersion programs, reiterating the importance of languages to the well-being of their community.

“Language is the foundation of the healing of our people” (cited in Maracle, 2002, p. 399) – said by a Mohawk student.

“Language is in our DNA. It is who we are” (cited in Rosetta Stone, 2006) – said by Dr. Kaherakwas Donna Goodleaf, executive director of Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitíohkwa Language and Cultural Centre in Kahnawá:ke, a Mohawk territory in Quebec.

“It’s at the core of what defines us.... Our language is deeply rooted within our culture as well as within our ceremonies and our ways of life” (cited in Walz, 2014) – said by Karihwakátste Cara Deer, co-director of the language nest program, Iakwahwatsiratátié, in Kahnawá:ke.

The sentiments shared are similar to those expressed in other Indigenous communities (McCarty et al., 2009). Language is considered an integral and fundamental part of being Kanien'kehá:ka, even for those who do not speak the language. While one can be Kanien'kehá:ka without speaking the Kanien'keha language, there is still recognition that the language is important to cultural and social identity. For example, Nicholas (2009) described an analogous situation among the Hopi youth, who, although they do not speak their native language, participate in the Hopi way of life. While it is believed that language “is only *one* of the many ways to experience and learn one’s culture,” there is no denying its importance to Indigenous communities (Nicholas 2009, p. 321, emphasis in original).

## THE STATUS OF CANADA'S INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

For First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada, their Indigenous languages represent a significant part of the culture, identity (Canadian Heritage, 2005) and general well-being of individuals, families, and communities (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The 2016 Census of Population estimated the Indigenous identity population at 1,673,785, about 4.9% of the total population. The largest Indigenous group was First Nations (58.4%), followed by Métis (35.1%) and Inuit (3.9%). More than 70 Indigenous languages have been identified and grouped under 12 language families, namely Algonquian languages, Inuit languages, Athabaskan languages, Siouan languages, Salish languages, Tsimshian languages, Wakashan languages, Iroquoian languages, Michif, Tlingit, Kutenai, and Haida. Of the total population surveyed, 213,225 people reported an Indigenous language as their mother-tongue (“the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the person at the time the data were collected” – Statistics Canada, 2019). Of this group, 1,295 people reported Kanien’keha as their mother-tongue, an increase from the 2011 census which showed only 545 people (Statistics Canada, 2016). Kanien’keha is considered an “endangered” (Canadian Heritage, 2005) or “threatened” language (“Mohawk”, 2018). In 2016, the 260,550 speakers who reported speaking an Indigenous language (a 3.1% increase from 2006), were more than those with an Indigenous language as a mother tongue (213,225 people, Statistics Canada, 2017). This statistic is encouraging as it points to more people learning an Indigenous language as a second language. Statistics Canada (2017) reported that 228,765 respondents used an Indigenous language in the home. The most spoken Indigenous language was Cree with 96,575 speakers, followed by Inuktitut with 39,770 speakers (Statistics Canada, 2017).

With regards to Indigenous language use in Canada, endangerment was greatly accelerated by the policies of the Canadian government from 1879 to 1986, which aimed to systemically eradicate Indigenous languages, cultures, religions, identity, and communities (Bilash, 2011). Government-funded residential schools, run by churches, were established and Indigenous children were forcibly enrolled. In these schools, children were subjected to all manner of abusive acts (Grant 1996), including that they were forbidden from speaking their native tongue. Students who disobeyed were punished. The residential school system “made integration into the dominant culture mandatory and laid the foundation for the linguicide of Aboriginal languages. It broke the link between parent and child preventing the natural transmission of language and culture to the next generation” (Bilash, 2011, p. 137). Bilash (2011) emphasized that the objective of any RLS effort should first and foremost aim at restoring pride in the Indigenous language. Drapeau and Corbeil (1996) suggested some strategies that Indigenous communities in Quebec can undertake to ensure the survival of their ancestral languages. These included increasing, strengthening, and consolidating the use of their Indigenous languages within the family, community, and all public domains, and improving and enhancing language

skills at schools. They further suggested that the government provide legal, official or constitutional support for languages “beyond the limits of local communities” through “enshrining their status in the Canadian Constitution or in a Quebec law” (Drapeau & Corbeil, 1996, p. 298). Bilash (2011) was optimistic about language revitalisation efforts because: 1) language use is intrinsically linked to land use and Indigenous treaty rights; 2) Elders are an important resource based on their wisdom, authority, and knowledge of the culture (McKay-Carriere, 2009; McKay-Carriere & Bilash, 2010); 3) there is interest in Indigenous languages in universities with the establishment of graduate programs; and 4) some linguists are involved in preservation efforts. Indigenous languages like Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut are thought to have a high probability of long-term survival based on the comparably large number of speakers reported in the 2011 Canadian Census. The predicted long-term survival of Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut was attributed not only to their large population sizes, but also to their distinct syllabic orthographies, and the isolation of their communities from major population centres (McBride, 2014).

### *Challenges for revitalisation*

Burnaby (2007) acknowledged that language revitalisation is one of the many complex unresolved issues in Indigenous communities in Canada. Looking at the Canadian context, some possible threats to successful language revitalisation efforts are: 1) the large number of languages; 2) the constant presence of English as a hegemonic or global language; 3) the growth of individualism as opposed to community life; 4) the daily preoccupations or strains of urban-industrial-professional-personal life; and 5) the paucity of language research (Bilash, 2011). Pesco and Crago (2008) described the diversity of Indigenous communities both linguistically and culturally as a major challenge of performing research on Indigenous languages in the Canadian context. Hence, research findings in one community may not be applicable to other Indigenous communities. Another challenge is the “many pressing needs” facing Indigenous communities. According to the 2011 Census (Statistics Canada, 2013), Indigenous people make up 4% (1.4 million) of the Canadian population and have a younger population (46%) compared to the non-Indigenous population (30%). The Indigenous population grew over 15% from 2006 to 2011 (23% for First Nations, 16% for the Métis, and 18% for the Inuit). The rates of poverty, unemployment, life expectancy, suicide, school-drop outs, infant mortality, health issues, and inadequate welfare funding or services are all significantly higher than the national average (Assembly of First Nations, 2011a).

Indigenous communities are constantly negotiating with the federal government for an improved quality of life, which is their basic right. Indigenous language and education are intrinsically connected to Indigenous cultural, economic, and social rights. The Assembly of First Nations (2011a) identified Indigenous youth as a huge resource in Canada’s economy, but they need to be equipped with the necessary skills, stating that a

fair and equitable education for First Nation youth [is needed to] build First Nation economies and create safe and secure communities for First Nation people.... Investing in First Nation education is a long-term, sustainable stimulus plan for Canada's economy.... The future of Canada depends on strong First Nations (p. 1).

There is much to be done to revitalise Canada's Indigenous languages, including teacher training, language research and resource development, curriculum planning, and implementation (Burnaby, 2007). Fishman (2001) addressed the question of why it is so hard to save threatened languages. He focused on 5 reasons: 1) the loss of a traditional language is part of the growing trend of departure from traditional culture and the sense that one can still ethnoculturally identify with a language and culture without speaking the language; 2) RLS efforts for a threatened language are portrayed as parochial, anti-social mobility, and anti-modern; 3) it is difficult to maintain a balance between the differentiated and shared domains / functions of the threatened and dominant languages; 4) for threatened languages to expand, they require reinforcement from both minority and dominant language communities; and 5) it is challenging to portray RLS efforts as not being contrary, but rather complementary, to national and international interests. Hinton (2008), evaluating Indigenous education in the United States, observed that bilingual education has largely proved to be an ineffective approach for RLS. She suggested that immersion programs should be the preferred option for revitalisation and maintenance of endangered languages (p. 159).

#### ASSESSING THE LANGUAGE VITALITY OF KANIEŃ'KEHA

The 2016 Statistics Canada Census estimated that Kanien'kéha, the most spoken Iroquoian language, has 2,350 speakers, concentrated in Ontario (67%) and Quebec (29%), with an ethnic population of 24,000 ("Mohawk", 2018). The six main Mohawk communities (or dialects) are Six Nations (Ohsweken) in Ontario, Tyendinaga in Ontario, Ahkwesahsne in Ontario and Quebec, Kanehsatake in Quebec, Kahnawà:ke in Quebec, and Wahta in Ontario (Mithun, 2004). In the language surveys of the Assembly of First Nations and Statistics Canada, Kanien'keha is not listed among the Indigenous languages slated for long-term survival, an issue which concerns Mohawk parents, educators, and community leaders. Maracle (2001) held the view that Kanien'keha is on the edge of extinction in her home Tyendinaga Territory. The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke and the Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitiohkwa Language and Cultural Center conducted a survey on the status of Kanien'keha in their community (Kahnawà:ke). The language survey results (Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke, 2014) revealed that only 27% of the 376 people surveyed regarded themselves non-speakers, an encouraging statistic suggesting that the majority of Kahnawà:ke citizens are engaged with their language. The majority group was beginners (44%) while the minority group (12%) was advanced or fluent

speakers. Of the population surveyed, 16% claimed they were at the intermediate level. Sullivan et al. (1992), in their instruction of the teacher-education program with Algonquin, Cree, Micmac, and Mohawk students, observed that proximity to an urban centre or mainstream community predicted the amount of language use in the Indigenous community. The more isolated Indigenous communities in Quebec, such as the Cree and Algonquin communities, use their Indigenous languages more in their homes, families, and community. On the other hand, in the Mohawk communities in Kanensatake and Kahnawà:ke, which are close to Montreal, English is primarily used in most settings. The trend of more Indigenous language use on reserves or in remote Indigenous communities is generally the norm (Norris, 2004). Pittenger, an instructor of Mohawk teachers, suggested that Mohawk people have become more assimilated in the white mainstream culture because of the proximity to Montreal compared to other Indigenous groups (quoted in Sullivan et al., 1992, p. 217).

To judge the vitality and endangerment of Kanien'keha, four different scales were used. Bauman's (1980) proposed scale of language vitality, a favourite among a number of language surveys in Canada (Burnaby, 2007; Canadian Heritage, 2005), classifies languages as flourishing, enduring, declining, endangered, critical or extinct/sleeping. Based on Bauman's scale, Kanien'keha is declining, that is, "a significant part of the adult population...still speak the language, but only a portion of young people and children know the language and most use the nationally or regionally dominant language instead" (Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 34). The language is also endangered on this scale because "elders know and use the language, but...parents of childbearing age by and large use a different language with their children, thus disrupting intergenerational transmission" (Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 34).

Another scale of language vitality is Fishman's (1991) graded typology of the status of threatened languages, the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS). In assessing the Kanien'keha language using Fishman's eight-level GIDS, Kanien'keha is at stage 6 (in the process of attaining intergenerational informal transmission), and stage 4 (where it is used in the lower levels of education and fulfils compulsory education requirements). Although most Kanien'keha immersion schools are under the supervision of the Mohawk community, they are largely dependent on government funds. For Fishman (1991), stage 6 (intergenerational transmission) is the most crucial stage for RLS.

The UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages (UNESCO, 2003), on its six-level scale of Language Vitality and Endangerment, classified the Kanien'keha language as "definitely endangered" because it is no longer being learned as a first language by children in the home. UNESCO (2003) based its assessment on nine factors: 1) intergenerational language transmission; 2) absolute number of speakers; 3) proportion of speakers within the total population; 4) shifts in domains of language use; 5) response to new domains and media; 6) materials for language education and literacy; 7) governmental



and institutional language attitudes and policies (including official Status and use); (8) community members' attitudes towards their own language; and 9) type and quality of documentation.

Based on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) of Lewis and Simons (2010), Kanien'keha is a threatened language since it is losing speakers although it is used in conversations across generations ("Mohawk", 2018). EGIDS is a 13-level scale developed from a synthesis of Fishman's GIDS and UNESCO's 6-level scale (Lewis & Simons, 2010).

From the above-mentioned scales, it can be ascertained that Kanien'keha is indeed an endangered language in dire need of revitalisation efforts.

### KANINIEN'KEHA IMMERSION PROGRAMS: LESSONS LEARNED

The most common approaches to language revitalisation include "school-based programs, children's programs outside the school, adult language programs, documentation and material development and home-based programs" (Hinton, 2001, p. 7). With school-based programs, three main educational programs are teaching endangered language as a subject or a foreign language (for instance, teaching Kanien'keha at the University of Western Ontario), bilingual education, and immersion programs. Since the 1970s, Mohawk communities, in collaboration with the Canadian federal government, have instituted several immersion programs for adults and children (Hoover & The Kanien'kehá:ka Raotitíóhkwa Cultural Center, 1992; Maracle, 2002). Bilingual education is the preferred type of education among First Nation communities. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN, 2011b) school survey indicated that 17% of First Nation schools offered Indigenous language immersion programs, compared to 88% which provided bilingual programming or Indigenous language classes. Most Indigenous language immersion programs were concentrated at the pre-kindergarten and primary (kindergarten to Grade 3) levels. The schools which offered bilingual programming or Indigenous language classes largely focused on kindergarten to middle-year (grades 6 to 9) levels. Funding was the biggest challenge that First Nation schools faced. Other concerns were student attendance, parental and community involvement, teacher certification and specialization, infrastructure, and student health and nutrition (AFN, 2011b). With regards to Kanien'keha documentation and material development, several dictionaries, language books (Kanatawakhon-Maracle, 1992, 1993), and descriptions of grammar (Mithun, 1996, 2004, 2006, 2009) have been developed. With regards to family-based programs at home, there is a need for linguistic surveys and interviews in Mohawk communities to determine the extent to which there is intergenerational transmission, and which language strategies parents or caregivers use in maintaining their Indigenous language. In the next section, Kanien'keha revitalisation strategies employed in adult and child immersion programs are reviewed and presented as three case studies. The lessons from these programs are valuable for Indigenous language revitalisation.

### *The Onkwawenna Language Project*

Richards and Kanatawakhon-Maracle (2002) described the perspectives of two instructors on a successful adult Kanien'keha immersion program which started in September 1999 at the Six Nations Reserve in Southern Ontario. The program targeted adult learners who had some knowledge of the Kanien'keha language with the aim of creating fluent speakers by combining cultural and language activities. The adult learners had the opportunity to practice and interact in Kanien'keha with fluent speakers in the community who were willing to support them. One interesting aspect about the program was that the instructors, Brian Owennatekha Maracle and David Kanatawakhon-Maracle, acquired fluency in Kanien'keha as adult learners. Therefore, they brought their personal experience and strategies as adult learners into their pedagogy. The instructors expressed that they were motivated to develop the program because the community had few fluent speakers, which was an impediment to the daily usage of the language. Although the community held once-a-week classes regularly for years, the instructors were dismayed that fluent speakers were not being developed. Those previous classes offered less opportunity for active language use and attendance of students was poor as most dropped out after a few weeks. The advantage of the new adult immersion program was that students learned Kanien'keha through conversation. The program also demanded commitment and devotion from students and instructors. Instructors constantly developed and planned new materials as well as sought funding for the sustainability of the program. Owennatekha sought to create speakers of his "dying language" who would in turn be transmitters of the language: "[w]e have to create our own speakers who will obviously know the grammar and the method and then use them to teach" (Richards & Kanatawakhon-Maracle, 2002, p. 374).

Richards and Kanatawakhon-Maracle (2002) focused on the program in its second and third years which they referred to as cohort II and cohort III. Owennatekha was the director, coordinator, and instructor of cohort II, a nine-month daily program over the school year period in 2000-2001. The second part of Cohort II was a six-week follow-up in the summer of 2001, directed by Kanatawakhon-Maracle, with the support of speakers from the Mohawk community. Cohort III contained students who continued or joined the program in September of the 2002 school year. Every day, students met in a house with different Elders. This supportive environment was conducive for student learning. In other situations, Elders (fluent speakers) have been known to correct or chastise learners for mispronouncing words: "if you can't speak our language right, don't speak it all" (Hinton, 2008, p. 165). Margaret Peters of the Akwesasne Mohawk Board of Education shared the criticism that students sometimes faced for not being able to speak the language correctly: "For a long time the speaking skills of Kanien'kehá:ka students have been criticized because they mispronounce words" (Burns, 2006a, para. 18). Fluent speakers can sometimes be brutal to learners instead of being encouraging.

Fortunately, this was not the case at the Onkwawenna adult intensive program. Adult learners discussed and reviewed activities and outings. They prepared, served, and ate lunch together daily, another context for conversation. They also worked with fluent speakers from the Mohawk community in describing and supervising activities in the kitchen with the aim of practising vocabulary. Basic grammatical structures of Kanien'keha were taught in the first term and oral and writing proficiency in the second term. Hence, instruction was given in a comfortable and supportive but highly demanding environment. The communicative approach was adopted after lessons were learned from the first year. In the first year, the program revolved around the use of textbooks, and this was not very effective. There were many opportunities provided for applying the language. For example, students created fictional dialogues between speakers for some projects and researched selected topics in Kanien'keha.

Kanien'keha is a polysynthetic language with a different grammatical structure from English (Baker, 1996) and has a rich vocabulary and morphology. Students had to learn and understand that the structure of Kanien'keha was not like English; that its verbs and nouns include at least a prefix, root, and suffix. To master the grammar, students were told to write down the root form of verbs and nouns and orally practise conjugating them in their full inflected forms. An important approach was to memorize the pronominal prefixes and endings which were necessary for verb use. Another instructional problem was students' reliance on writing to learn the vocabulary and grammar of Kanien'keha instead of focusing on pronunciation and listening. There was also an issue of cross-linguistic transfer, where students read Kanien'keha with an English intonation. Additionally, students expected to be fluent speakers after the program, which the instructors saw as unrealistic. Instructors had to give explanations in English because students constantly asked for translations. A "bilingual" approach was adopted in the program, a move several students applauded. Students appreciated hearing different fluent speakers during the summer session.

The instructors noted that Kanien'kehá:ka students were not motivated by grades like their non-Mohawk colleagues: "Native students need strong social reasons; they need to see the language as important to their community or to their own lives as Natives" (Richards & Kanatawakhon-Maracle, 2002, p. 380). The most successful students were those who wanted to participate in community events (for example, in those tied to the Longhouse) and did not want to raise their children only in English. Committed students with a sense of pride of their language tended to excel. Additionally, students who had received some university training were able to grasp the structure and logic of Kanien'keha faster. The program effectively achieved its aims: "Create speakers: that's it. Create speakers and with that create that ripple effect. Those speakers will increase language in their own home, and they'll increase knowledge in the circles around them and gradually create more awareness and knowledge and

use of the language throughout the community” (p. 383). In 2016, the adult Kanien'keha program celebrated its 17<sup>th</sup> graduation ceremony (Maracle, 2016).

#### *Survey of four adult Kanien'keha immersion programs*

Maracle (2002) conducted a study on four adult Kanien'keha immersion programs in Kahnawà:ke, Tyendinaga, Wahta, and Six Nations to find out what factors accounted for student retention in these programs. She consulted students, administrators, instructors, and two Elders in the survey. Since 1985, the adult immersion program had been touted and primarily used as the way to achieve language preservation and revitalisation in the face of declining use of Kanien'keha in the home and the community. Some recommendations were offered by the participants interviewed.

The coordinators recommended that before an immersion program is initiated, the administrators or designers must first set the goals (maintenance or fluency) and teaching strategies for the program. They suggested that teaching the language should not be the sole target but also how to equip students with the skills to transmit or teach the language to others. Teaching methods should be oriented towards a communicative-oral technique and use a practical approach. In their opinion, Kanien'keha language learning should be made fun and practical for students: writing skills can be developed later. They advised that a team-teaching approach should be adopted in classes. The coordinators stressed the importance of creating a comfortable and supportive environment and providing healthy foods as beneficial to adult learners. The curriculum of some programs included menu planning and food preparation. Planners should also make provisions for the different dialects of the students. One key point that the coordinators stressed was the need for immediate action by planners and organizers of adult immersion programs. While getting all the details right and having all the necessary conditions ready before starting are important, the coordinators cautioned that “there was no time to waste” and immediate action had to be taken (Maracle, 2002, p. 397).

The instructors recounted the lessons learned from their teaching experience at different levels of adult immersion. Effective delivery of instruction was aided by professional qualifications and the availability of accommodation for instructors from different territories. Instructors found that they were sometimes over-prepared and had to be flexible in their teaching methods when employing written materials, visuals, and audio tools. The speed of adult learning was slower than that of children. Maracle (2001) made a similar comment that adult learning involves more repetition and a slower pace than teaching younger students. The instructors recommended that the goals of an immersion program should target fluency and a communicative-oral approach because “[t]here is no reason whatsoever why our people in our communities can't be bilingual” (Maracle, 2002, p. 398).

All students expressed a strong personal desire to learn and communicate in Kanien'keha as a motivating factor. Most students were motivated by a strong identification with the Kanien'keha language as an essential element to their sense of identity and community as a Mohawk person. Many adult learners acknowledged being able to use the language in their homes and communities upon completion of their programs. They appreciated that they were aiding revitalisation efforts by passing the language to their children and grandchildren in their homes. Some had also learnt how to teach Kanien'keha in their immersion programs. Students rated their learning experience as positive, fun, and socially interactive. Students who withdrew from the programs cited domestic concerns, health issues, and financial problems. Funding was one of the biggest issues for students, as was accommodation, especially if coming from a different community. They reiterated that previous knowledge of the language was essential before enrolling in an adult immersion program. Some suggestions by students on ways to make the language experience more enriching (Maracle, 2002) were:

1. The learning time of the program should be extended so that students can consolidate skills;
2. The program could be divided into various levels of language proficiency based on a pre-test before enrolment;
3. A form of testing could be developed to assess students' performance or fluency at different stages of the program;
4. More materials, audio-visual aids, books, resources, and facilities were needed;
5. Team-teaching (at least two instructors) should be continued;
6. Activities to socialize outside class while using the language were beneficial and should be continued; and
7. Incoming students should acquire some knowledge of Kanien'keha (e.g., through night classes) before enrolling.

Maracle's (2002) assessment of the findings of this survey highlighted the points already expressed by the coordinators, instructors, and students. Funding appeared to be the biggest obstacle to the length and sustainability of immersion programs. Crawford (1996) referred to the "dependence on federal funding" as "unfortunately a universal phenomenon in Indian education and one that fosters program instability...however, alternative resources are usually lacking" (p. 56). For example, in November 2006, the Canadian Heritage Department announced that it would cut funding to language preservation efforts. The Canadian government had promised the Indigenous communities \$172.5 million over an 11-year period for the "protection, preservation and maintenance of Aboriginal languages" (Burns, 2006b). Instead, the government announced

that only \$35 million (\$5 million a year for seven years) would be allocated for language issues (Burns, 2006b). This led to a protest rally, "National Protest to Save Our Legacy" on Parliament Hill on December 5, 2006. Elementary-aged students from the Kanien'keha immersion program in Akwesasne Territory joined the protest. Such a cut would have adversely affected the development of resources for language programs. A second issue raised by the survey was that hiring practices of instructors should be fair and consistent. Also, students should be prepared before entering an immersion program and should investigate its goals and duration before registering. Maracle (2002) suggested that administrators of long-term immersion programs should set admission criteria for students to evaluate their suitability for the program.

### *Kanien'keha immersion program in the Kahnawà:ke community*

The Kahnawà:ke community enjoys some control over its own education, health, and social service systems, under the guidelines set forth by the province of Quebec and the Indian Act. It also has a police service and several media outlets including the CKRK Kanien'keha radio station. The community has a Library and Document Centre with over 3,000 books and documents on Iroquois / Haudenosaunee topics, and a photographic archive with over 3,000 photos (Hoover & Kanien'kehá:ka Raotitióhkwa Cultural Center, 1992). The Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center initiated the Kanien'keha immersion program for children (Karonhianóhnhha Tsi Ionterihwaienstáhkwa), the first in Canada (Hoover & Kanien'kehá:ka Raotitióhkwa Cultural Center, 1992). Hoover and Kanien'kehá:ka Raotitióhkwa Cultural Center (1992) considered the program a success because it was attended by more than half of the children in the community. They claimed that were it not for the non-availability of trained teachers, more children would attend the immersion program. Additionally, in the Kahnawà:ke community, "the trend over the last 50 years of each succeeding generation speaking less Mohawk has been reversed" (Hoover & Kanien'kehá:ka Raotitióhkwa Cultural Center, 1992, p. 281). From nursery school to Grade 4, the children are taught entirely in Kanien'keha. At the elementary level (grades 4 to 6), they receive 60% of their instruction in Mohawk and 40% in English. On the other hand, some parents opt for their children to attend the English-language elementary school (Kateri School) in the community. This school offers 25- to 30-minute classes in Kanien'keha at least once a week to all the children. Children in the immersion school and the Kateri School have French as a third language. The strong sense of community and the importance of language to cultural identity are a credit to the success of language revitalisation in Kahnawà:ke (Hoover & Kanien'kehá:ka Raotitióhkwa Cultural Center, 1992).

While the immersion program has been successful in creating speakers, there is still more work to be done. There are people in their 20s, 30s, and early 40s whom Hoover and Kanien'kehá:ka Raotitióhkwa Cultural Center (1992)

referred to as the “lost generation”: they are Mohawks who cannot speak the language because of the lack of opportunity (i.e. schooled in the pre-immersion era). Hence, a common linguistic situation in Kahnawà:ke is grandparents and grandchildren (now teenagers) conversing in Kanien’keha but speaking in English to the lost generation. One negative consequence of this linguistic situation, Hoover and Kanien’kehá:ka Raotitíohkwa Cultural Center (1992) commented, was that teenagers used Kanien’keha in public as infrequently as their immediate elders (those in their 20s, 30s, and early 40s). Instead, they reserved the use of Kanien’keha to private domains, among family and friends. The teenagers explained that they thought it was disrespectful to speak in Kanien’keha in front of an immediate elder who had no speaking ability in the language. While Kahnawà:ke’s environment may be conducive to the total restoration of the Kanien’keha language, the community has to pursue some language strategies to ensure this is possible. Hoover and Kanien’kehá:ka Raotitíohkwa Cultural Center (1992) suggested that language classes should aggressively target adult speakers and that a concerted and determined community effort could be made to use Kanien’keha in most domains, if not all. Since 2004, an adult immersion program called Kanien’keha Ratiwennahní:rats Adult Immersion Program has graduated more than 50 students, according to Dr. Kaherakwas Donna Goodleaf, executive director of Kanien’kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitíohkwa Language and Cultural Centre (Rosetta Stone, 2006). There is a continuing effort to revitalise their Kanien’keha language, with technology playing a major role. Apart from airing television shows in Kanien’keha, the Language and Cultural Centre collaborated with Rosetta Stone, the language software company, to produce teaching software for Kanien’keha, the first of its kind for an endangered language. Rosetta Stone released the Kanien’keha language software in 2006 (Rosetta Stone, 2006). Additionally, a language lab was created where the software could be assessed. The Language and Cultural Centre hopes to make this software available to people including in their homes and workplaces (Rosetta Stone, 2006).

All three case studies indicate that language revitalisation efforts for Kanien’keha are possible and can be very successful. The lessons to be learnt for other immersion programs are setting the goals for the program, securing other logistics (funding, accommodation, curriculum development, teaching methods, and language policy) and introducing cultural content in class. The involvement of Elders, a supportive environment, availability of resources and a committed spirit are also important to positively change the status of endangered languages. In the following section, recent developments and legislation concerning Indigenous language rights in Canada are identified, along with their impact on the revitalisation of Kanien’keha and other endangered Indigenous languages.

### *Indigenous language rights in Canada*

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) published its report in 2015 concerning Canada's residential school system for Indigenous children (TRC, 2015a). As part of its Calls to Action, the Commission made several important recommendations concerning Indigenous languages (TRC, 2015b). The TRC identified five Calls (13-17) to Action which related to Indigenous language and culture: recognition of Indigenous linguistic rights as Indigenous rights (Call 13); enactment of an Indigenous Languages Act (Call 14); appointment of an Indigenous Languages Commissioner (Call 15); creation of post-secondary courses, degrees, and programs in Indigenous languages (Call 16); and reclamation of Indigenous names changed through residential schools (Call 17) (TRC, 2015b).

The current federal government has expressed support for the recommendations of the TRC. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated in December 2016 that: "I commit to you that our government will enact an Indigenous Languages Act, co-developed with Indigenous Peoples, with the goal of ensuring the preservation, protection, and revitalization of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit languages in this country" (Trudeau, 2016). As a result, the Indigenous Languages Act (Bill C-91) was developed by the Department of Canadian Heritage and three national Indigenous organizations: the Assembly of First Nations (AFN); the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK); and the Métis Nation of Canada (MNC). In response to Call 14 of the TRC (2015b), the Indigenous Languages Act follows these five principles:

- 1) Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
- 2) Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
- 3) The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.
- 4) The preservation, revitalisation, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
- 5) Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages (p. 2).

Indigenous language policy in Paraguay and Bolivia could also inform the Canadian context (Gomashie, 2018). In Paraguay, less than 3% of the population self-identified as Indigenous in the 2002 census, while over 80% reported speaking the Indigenous language Guarani. No other country in the New World has documented such a high proportion of the non-Indigenous population speaking an Indigenous language. Guarani has become a symbol of Paraguayan national identity (Choi, 2003). While the historical, cultural, linguistic, and social factors in Paraguay differ from the Canadian context, future campaigns on Indigenous language preservation and revitalisation in Canada could be targeted at the national audience. This suggests a campaign to convince the Canadian public that it should be a Canadian attribute to learn an Indigenous language. In the spirit of reconciliation, Canadians could be encouraged to



adopt, learn, and speak an Indigenous language. Canada could emulate Bolivia, which recognised all 36 Indigenous languages as official in the 2009 Constitution (*Constitución Política del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia*, 2009). Additionally, the Bolivian Constitution made it a requirement for government officials to learn an Indigenous language. Marc Miller, a Quebec Liberal member of parliament, showed how it is possible to learn an Indigenous language. He delivered a statement in Kanien'keha to the House of Commons, "a first in a Canadian legislature," to a standing ovation (Tasker, 2017). He was motivated to learn Kanien'keha in the spirit of reconciliation. I hope other government officials and political figures will be encouraged by his example.

Language legislation alone does not guarantee the survival of Indigenous languages but raises awareness of this issue. Language revitalisation requires effective implementation and planning at all levels. Grassroots and community efforts could be stifled without adequate funding, long-term planning, implementation, and commitment. A major target for language revitalisation efforts is intergenerational transmission, where children acquire the language at home from parents, family members, or other caregivers. Adults' use of their ancestral language daily contributes to the health of the language. A collaborative report by Indigenous scholars and the First Peoples' Cultural Council on Indigenous languages (Galley et al., 2016) offered practical advice on language revitalisation. The report highlighted community-based Indigenous language revitalisation initiatives across Canada, like Indigenous head start centres, daycares, and preschools, which were programmed for early childhood with the purpose of providing the children with language and cultural awareness. Preschoolers spent about 30 to 60 minutes per day learning songs, phrases or words in the Indigenous language. Language nests have also created fluent speakers. Additional approaches include youth language and culture camps, after-school language programs, adult language classes, adult immersion programs and camps, mentor-apprentice language learning, language houses, courses for silent speakers, and Elder groups. All these strategies have also been identified in important research work on language revitalisation across international and global contexts (Coronel-Molina & McCarty, 2016; Hinton & Hale, 2001; Hinton, Huss & Roche, 2018). Other resources to increase the use of Indigenous languages are phrasebooks, dictionaries, pedagogical and reference grammars, radio and television shows, multimedia lessons, email groups, and social media websites (Hinton, Huss, & Roche, 2018). Kanien'keha language activists, teachers, and other Indigenous language revitalisationists also face challenges related to teaching, curriculum development, policy, and administration (Galley et al., 2016). It is hoped that effective implementation of the Indigenous Languages Act (Bill C-91) "may allow speakers of endangered languages [such as Kanien'keha] to claim some public space for their languages and cultures from which we can all benefit" (Romaine, 2002, p. 210).

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this article examined Kanien'keha revitalisation efforts in Canada. Residential schooling, initiated by the Canadian government, played a major role in the endangerment of Indigenous languages. The goal of the policy was "eliminating Aboriginal peoples as distinct political and cultural entities and must be described for what it was: a policy of cultural genocide" (TRC, 2015a, p. 133). Indigenous communities, students, linguists, teachers, administrators, and organizations are now reclaiming their languages, cultures, heritages, and identities. They consider their language to be a part of their identity, culture, and spirituality. For them, "language is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values, and fundamental notions of what is truth. Our languages are the cornerstone of who we are as a People. Without our languages, our cultures cannot survive" (AFN, 1990, p. 192). In spite of the ongoing challenges facing the restoration and maintenance of Indigenous languages (ranging from inadequate funding, lack of resources, and discrimination), programs of Kanien'keha language immersion for children and adults have been successful. The data from the 2011 Census were encouraging for Indigenous language revitalisation efforts because "the number who reported being able to converse in an Aboriginal language exceeded the number who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue, which suggests acquisition of an Aboriginal language as a second language" (Statistics Canada, 2015). The successful Kanien'keha immersion programs reviewed here provide lessons for other Indigenous language programs. The 2016 Census report on Indigenous languages showed an increase in the speaker population of Kanien'keha, with revitalisation programs as a contributing factor. Bilingual education is another approach that is being utilized for Indigenous language preservation and revitalisation.

The dominant presence of the official languages of Canada, more English than French, remains a continuing threat to revitalisation of Indigenous languages. However, the low number of speakers of an Indigenous language should not deter revitalisation efforts. A large number of speakers does not necessarily ensure the long-term survival of a language (Krauss, 2007). A few hundred committed speakers can do much more for their language than a few thousand unconcerned speakers, to paraphrase Bilger (1994, p. 20). Intergenerational continuity is important. UNESCO's (2003) report on language vitality and endangerment indicated that certain areas which are in urgent need of attention include language documentation, pedagogical materials, the training of local linguists, the training of language teachers, new policy initiatives, public awareness raising, and technical, logistical, and financial support. Peters made an interesting point that immersion programs should consider that "fluency is a lifelong process" (Burns, 2006a). Hence, language revitalisation efforts require long-term planning, engagement, and commitment. To conclude, I hope that AFN's (2007) vision for Indigenous languages will be realized: "By 2027, First Nations languages will be revitalized and in common use in First

Nations homes, communities and nationwide. Canada will respect and ensure the protection of our languages as evidenced through legislation and long-term sustainable investment” (p. 9).

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