

Yohahí:yo Yakothahol<sup>^</sup>:u : She Has Found a Good Path  
A Discussion of Commitment to Onyota'a:ka Language Revitalization

By

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B.A., University of Western Ontario, 2003

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#### ABSTRACT

This thesis will discuss commitment to Onyota'a:ka (Oneida) language revitalization. The author draws conclusions on how we as Onyota'a:ka individuals and as an Onyota'a:ka community can make a commitment to language. Through both personal experience and input from the community, the author specifically looks at the concepts of responsibility, motivation, and the Onyota'a:ka way of life as they pertain to and provide insight to a commitment to language. The author will show that commitment to language is a continual process and needs to be more than a commitment to just language but a commitment to Onyota'a:ka ways.

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## Introduction – Origin of Water Drum

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I want to begin this thesis with a story. The Onyota'a:ka (Oneida) have a story that explains the origin of one of our sacred objects; the water drum. The water drum is used in ceremony, during social gatherings, and on a daily basis. It is an integral part of the Onyota'a:ka way of life and here is how it came to be:

“A long time ago when things were new and we all lived in one village, there was a woman. One day she woke up and she was sad. No matter what anybody did to try to cheer her up, nobody was able. She started to think there was something wrong with her because she knew she was supposed to be laughing. She knew the people were trying to lift her spirits but something was blocking it. She left the village and went into the woods, hoping that something in creation could help her.

They tell us, that at that time we still had the ability to communicate with creation. All the different animals gathered around and watched this woman. She found a place to sit in the woods. Some of those animals went up to her and asked her what was wrong. They tried to cheer her up but they were unable. They said, ‘well maybe there is something we can do.’ So they went back to the meeting place to discuss it with all the animals of the forest. They went back to an old tree, a really big tree in the middle of the forest where the animals would have their meetings, their council. They sat down and talked about this woman. When the Creator put animals here that is what he told them. He created them first and told them that in the future I am going to create human beings and you are going to have the responsibility to help them with whatever they need.

They saw that this woman needed their help. They thought about it for a long time. They thought that maybe if they talked to her more, if she came there then they would see what she needed. So they brought her to that place. All the animals asked her why she felt the way she did. ‘I don’t know’ she said. ‘I don’t know what happened, if anything happened. All I know is that I feel sad. That is why I had to leave my village. I am starting to think there is something really wrong with me.’ They said, ‘this is not right. This is not the way Creator intended people to be. Human beings should never be sad for too long.’ Everybody gets sad but nobody should stay that way.

They say that there was a woodchuck. He was really thinking about this woman. He was pulling on his side, on his fur, on his skin. He was leaning against the bottom of the tree on a broken branch. It was broken off and it was rotten and hollow inside. He was leaning on it and pulling on himself. Inside that hollowed out branch was water from the rain. He pulled part of his skin over that broken branch and he started hitting it with his thumb and it made a sound. When it made that sound, the woman stopped and said, ‘what is that sound?’ ‘What sound?’ the

animals said. 'The woodchuck is hitting his skin on that broken branch.' The animals explained. They got him to pull his skin right over top of that broken branch and they got one of the branches from the tree and hit it. It made the sound of a water drum and when she heard that sound, she started to laugh."

This story was told to me during my interview with Lo:t^t Honyust. I had heard Lo:t^t tell this story before but this time it had more significance. From our teachings we are told that words are never said without a listener and there is always a purpose to the spoken word. I believe this story was retold to me during the interview because I was meant to be the listener and because it represents the major understandings I have come to in terms of my thesis topic which is making a commitment to language learning.

## Sadness

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I too at various times, have felt an unexplained feeling of sadness within myself. In *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, Keith Basso describes a feeling of disconnection in terms of place. He states that sometimes we “find ourselves adrift, literally dislocated, in unfamiliar surroundings we do not comprehend and care for even less.” (Basso xiii) Basso accurately conveys the feelings I’ve felt throughout my life. I felt like I was disconnected to who I was as a human being.

I was a child with great parents, family, and friends. Even with a support system, I had a hard time. I equated this feeling of sadness to being the ugly little dark skin girl in my class. I lived in the city and consequently I was usually the only Unkwehu:we, original person, at my school. I had one Unkwehu:we friend in Montessori and even she made fun of me and called me ‘chocolate girl.’ I remember wishing I had blonde hair with blue eyes like all my little friends. My parents raised me as Catholic but it never took. I was around nine when I screamed and kicked so hard on the way to church that when we arrived my father was so upset with me that we turned around and went home. I was never forced to return to church again. My parents also took me a few times to the longhouse as a child. I got my Unkwehu:we name at age seven. I was a shy girl and I remember being nervous about walking the length of the longhouse. I also dreaded being asked to pass out the food, and I remember being scared of the Hatú:wi (false face mask) running around outside.

During adolescence I interpreted this feeling of sadness as the same teen angst that my friends were experiencing. None of the boys liked me and I still felt dark compared to my friends. My friends did not have close families like mine, and most of

them did not understand that sometimes I could not socialize because of a family commitment. My Onyota'a:ka (Oneida) grandparents died when I was in high school and it was really hard for me. I was so close with them. To this day I think about them often and wish for more time with them. When my grandfather died, he visited me shortly after and it scared me. I had never had that type of spiritual experience before. I told my parents but I never told a single friend because I feared they would not understand.

During my university career I began to understand that this feeling of sadness was more about not knowing who I was and not being proud of who I was. I looked hard to find a sense of myself in the usual settler society ways. I traveled to Ireland, Scotland, Italy, and Amsterdam. I took road trips to the east coast and tried living in Kingston, Ontario. I socialized way too much and I ended up majoring in political studies not because it reflected who I was as a person but because it was the only program I found somewhat interesting. Nowhere I went and nothing I did helped ease the sadness deep inside. One night out with friends, I remember a group of guys singing their rendition of the 'I AM CANADIAN' song made famous by the beer commercials. From what I remember it referenced all the 'Indian' stereotypes. I remember crying the whole way home because I was hurt, but more because I was ashamed for not standing up to the group of them when I had a chance.

At the end of my undergraduate degree, I applied to the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria. I will admit that I entered the program with a narrow conception of governance. Governance to me, was about law, organizations, and indigenous peoples in relation to the Canadian government. What I quickly learned was that governance is not so finite. Indigenous governance is about how our people govern



all aspects of our lives in relation to ourselves. When I started the Indigenous Governance Program, I knew I would write my thesis about Onyota'a:ka people but my focus was more within my old concept of governance.

As I learned more, my priorities started to change and I started to care about different things. When I finished my courses, it felt like my sadness had doubled or even tripled. I was truly sad. I was anxious to go home and learn more about what it means to be Unkwehu:we. I mentioned to my professor that when I returned home I was going to learn my language. He advised me that language would be an excellent topic for a thesis. I went home and started to plan how I was going to learn the language.

I quickly learnt that the Onyota'a:ka language is at risk of extinction. Onyota'a:ka language revitalization efforts to date have failed to make adequate progress towards reviving the Onyota'a:ka language. My community the Oneida Nation of the Thames in southwest Ontario is fortunate in that we recognize the importance of language and have more fluent Onyota'a:ka speakers than the other two Onyota'a:ka communities.<sup>1</sup> We have also implemented several different language programs. However, we still struggle to revive our language. As I participated in language learning, I realized that the problem is that we need to make a commitment to learning our language. Therefore, the objective of this thesis is to explain how we can, as Onyota'a:ka individuals and as an Onyota'a:ka community, make a commitment and to learn our language.

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<sup>1</sup> The Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and The Oneida Nation of New York.

## Literature Review and Analysis of Language Pedagogy

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I began to question how I was going to learn the language and started to look into the different methods being used in my community. Debates in indigenous communities and in academia question pedagogy, what pedagogies work, what pedagogies are more indigenous, what pedagogy is truly going to help a community revive a language. For the many questions, there are many responses and thus the debate continues. Language learning philosophies all have their merits and problems. Going into the woods of language material on indigenous languages was simplified by a quote in *Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies* written by Holm, Pearson, and Chavis. The authors ask, “what can linguistic studies do beyond writing grammar books, compiling a complete dictionary, creating a pedagogy for teaching the language, or making tapes of Native speakers?” (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 19) The authors sum up the limitations of linguistic studies with this question. In my own analysis of the literature, I conclude that linguistic studies is in fact limited in the way Holm Pearson and Chavis describe, and I believe that the success of language pedagogy depends on a commitment from the people.

Mary Elijah’s *Twateyentet Onyota’a:ka: Empowering Oneida Voices* is a discussion of the Oneida of the Thames language situation, the Oneida of the Thames Language and Cultural Centre, and the Centre’s five-year plan to improve the language situation in the community. Elijah discusses the various Onyota’a:ka efforts to date such as, “documentation and archiving of ceremonies; language banking of speech samples from master speakers; Oneida language teacher certification granted by Band Council

and; community based curriculum review, development and implementation.” (Elijah iii) Elijah provides a necessary first look at the Onyota’a:ka language situation. Her overview of the practical needs of the Oneida of the Thames community is useful, but her further discussion of a need for societal change focuses too much on settler society and changing their perception of the Oneida of the Thames community as opposed to societal change from within the community.

*The Green Book of Language Revitalization: In Practice* edited by Leanne Hinton and Ken Hale provides a non-specialized reader with information on a wide variety of language pedagogy. In the chapters, *Language Revitalization: An Overview* and *New Writing Systems*, Hinton discusses different pedagogy including pedagogy focused on literacy. Literacy has been an integral part of many indigenous language revitalization efforts. According to Hinton, there are both pros and cons to literacy. The pros of literacy include: the pride that accompanies a written language, documentation of the language, practical uses in day to day life such as the ability to write notes, and engendering new areas of language use such as artistic endeavours like poetry and song.<sup>2</sup> Hinton also explains the cons of language revitalization efforts that include or are focused on literacy: mass literacy is never achieved, written indigenous languages are used less than written English, and once a language is written down and people can read it, a community loses control over who has access and how it is used.<sup>3</sup> This is specifically true for indigenous peoples as we often face controversy over appropriation and maintaining our culturally valuable and sensitive sacred information. Hinton argues that gaining literacy in an

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<sup>2</sup> Hinton, Leanne, “New Writing Systems,” in *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, Leanne Hinton and Ken Hale Eds. (San Diego California: Academic Press, 2001), 239-240.

<sup>3</sup> Hinton, 240 – 241.

indigenous language takes as long as literacy in English.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this leaves no time and energy to focus on oral communication and wastes time on pedagogy where the best-case scenario is language preservation.

Many indigenous communities are moving away from focusing their language revitalization efforts on literacy because it has not proven successful and because in the past indigenous peoples never wrote their languages down on paper. Although there was no writing system, indigenous people did document. Hinton points to the Sioux and how they counted in winter on buffalo hide.<sup>5</sup> Onyota'a:ka people used wampum belts. However, this is not the same as a writing system and when put in context of language revitalization, does not serve the same purposes. The Onyota'a:ka, like many indigenous peoples, are moving away from focusing on a writing system and literacy. In the past few years, language revitalization efforts in my Onyota'a:ka community such as language nests and the Master-Apprentice Program have refocused on the oral aspects of the language such as speaking, listening and understanding.

There is pedagogy that does not root itself in European thought. Instead, it roots itself in indigenous thought<sup>6</sup>. One example of this is language nests. Within *The Green Book of Language Revitalization: In Practice*, is the chapter by Jeanette King called *Te Kohanga Reo: Maori Language Revitalization*. King discusses the Maori Language Nest called Te Kohanga Reo. Language Nests root their philosophy in the family unit, creating a group that is like the extended family and teaching the language in this group. The first

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<sup>4</sup> Hinton, 249.

<sup>5</sup> Hinton, 242.

<sup>6</sup> Language nests and the Master-Apprentice Program are examples of pedagogy that are rooted in indigenous thought.

language nest was the Maori's Te Kohanga Reo. "The principle aim of Kohanga Reo is to raise Maori children as speakers of Maori in a whanau [Maori concept of family] environment which will 'affirm Maori culture.'" (King 123) According to King, the Te Kohanga Reo requires commitment from families to provide an external language environment in order for success.<sup>7</sup> Language nest programs such as the Kohanga Reo are considered good practice in that they are being well received, and participation is increasing because of the focus on cultural identity, and graduating children are fairly bilingual.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, every program has drawbacks. In the case of the Te Kohanga Reo, proficiency is still undetermined. It is questionable whether the education a child receives after the Kohanga Reo can add to the language base provided, and at the crux, families are unable to provide a rich language environment at home and thus children do not use Maori outside of the classroom because no one else does.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, Tsi Niyukwaliho:t^, the alternative traditional school in my Onyota'a:ka community, has adopted a new approach/pedagogy for learning the Onyota'a:ka language. Although they do not call their program a Language Nest, it fundamentally fits the Language Nest definition and is based on similar principles as the Kohanga Reo. Tsi Niyukwaliho:t^ focuses on honouring the family unit and learning the language as you would as a child. Tsi Niyukwaliho:t^'s curriculum is based on the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka people and more than fifty percent of the

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<sup>7</sup>King, Jeanette, "Te Kohanga Reo: Maori Language Revitalization," in The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice, Leanne Hinton and Ken Hale Eds. (San Diego California: Academic Press, 2001), 123.

<sup>8</sup> King, 125.

<sup>9</sup> King 125-126.

teaching day is conducted in the language.<sup>10</sup> Tsi Niyukwaliho:t^ uses oral instruction to teach the children and changes the classroom environment by providing lessons outside in nature.<sup>11</sup> The school teaches children of all ages. In attempting to resolve the issue of an external language environment, Tsi Niyukwaliho:t^ offers classes for the parents at night in order to promote language use in the home and thus continue to promote the Onyota'a:ka language. Alas, attendance at night classes is small and inconsistent.

Another chapter within *The Green Book of Language Revitalization: In Practice* is *The Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program* By Leanne Hinton. Within the language revitalization movement, there has been a push towards incorporating elders or honouring elders as they are the sources of indigenous languages. According to Hinton, the Master Apprentice Program, developed in California, “is a program that teaches native speakers and young adults to work together intensively so that the younger members may develop conversational proficiency in the language. It is designed to be a one-on-one relationship between the ‘master’ (speaker) and the ‘apprentice’ (language learner), who together constitute a team.” (Hinton 217) This program reflects a reverence for elders and incorporates elders as a major component of the program. This program is very much a reflection of the reverence and honour indigenous communities give and/or promote within the communities today. This program has many positive attributes such as training the apprentice to be a teacher and creating intergenerational bonds. Unlike a classroom, the program is taught in the activities of daily life, contributes to positive self-

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<sup>10</sup> Elijah, Mary Joy, *Twateyentet Onyota'a:ka: Empowering Oneida Voices*, (London Ontario: Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, 2002), 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> Hlebowicz, bartosz, Alicja Fron, Marek Hyjek, “The Role of Education in Identity Formation Among American and Canadian Indigenous Communities: Case Studies of Three Haudenosaunee/Iroquois Groups,” *Sylff Working Papers*, 21 (2004): 17-18.

esteem of the elders, and is a relatively simple concept to grasp.<sup>12</sup> Although this program has many positive attributes, it also has weak aspects. First, it is not a year-round program and thus could allow for a deterioration of language skills during the rest period.

Although the program is promising theoretically, practically, this program requires a very strong commitment from the participants and, because of this, some teams do not complete the program.<sup>13</sup> The Oneida Language and Cultural Centre started a new program in 2006 that honours Onyota'a:ka elders and is based on the Master Apprentice pedagogy. The elders involved really enjoy the program because of the connection and fun they have with the students.<sup>14</sup>

*In Language and Literacy Teaching for Indigenous Education: a Bilingual Approach*, Norbert Francis and Jon Allan Reyhner talk about language immersion pedagogy. Semi and full immersion are learning pedagogies that have been implemented for many years to facilitate learning a second language. Francis and Reyhner describe immersion as,

“the complete integration of language and content teaching for significant blocks of instruction time, during which learners receive substantial amounts of comprehensible input in the second language (‘substantial’ being, in fact, an understatement: in an early immersion program, L2 [second language] medium instruction for kindergarten and first grade could take up as much as 60-70% of the school day, decreasing to perhaps 30% by the sixth grade).” (Francis and Reyhner 108)

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<sup>12</sup> Hinton, Leanne, “The Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program,” in The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice, Leanne Hinton and Ken Hale Eds. (San Diego California: Academic Press, 2001), 225 – 226.

<sup>13</sup> Hinton, “The Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program,” 225-226.

<sup>14</sup> Olive Elm, Interview, September 2006.

Hinton says that the power of immersion is that it focuses on children who are the quickest learners of a language.<sup>15</sup> Alternately, Hinton explains the obstacles that immersion programs must deal with. Immersion programs often have to deal with strict education laws that may limit the amount of time allotted to second language use. Immersion has not solved the problem of children needing to practice their language skills with others outside of the context of the classroom; English continues to dominate external environments such as recess and home life. Finally, Hinton states that immersion still has to deal with parents/families with concerns that the level of education will drop if there is a focus on two languages.<sup>16</sup> Francis and Reyhner argue that without an external environment rich in the second language, revitalization by means of immersion programs cannot happen.<sup>17</sup> Creating an external environment rich in language use is dependent on the commitment of the parents and the community of the immersion student. This creates a problem with immersion programs as they do not incorporate the parents and the community in their program to ensure that an external environment is present.

In the Oneida Nation of the Thames, Standing Stone Public School uses full immersion to teach its kindergarten students and thereafter Onyota'a:ka is taught as a second language up until grade six.<sup>18</sup> Standing Stone Public School is the main educational environment for Onyota'a:ka children. The children attend Standing Stone

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<sup>15</sup>Hinton, Leanne, "Language Revitalization: An Overview," in The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice, Leanne Hinton and Ken Hale Eds. (San Diego California: Academic Press, 2001), 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> Hinton, "New Writing Systems," 240.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Norbert, Jon Allan Reyhner, Language and Literacy for Indigenous Education: A Bilingual Approach, (Buffalo, New York: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2002), 109.

<sup>18</sup> Elijah, 7-8.



until grade seven, when they are transferred to the local municipality for Junior High and later Secondary School. It has already been stated that immersion programs need an external environment where the children can converse using the language they learn at school. In Oneida of the Thames, it is unfortunate that the families of children that attend Standing Stone cannot provide this environment and therefore the children lack that important factor for learning the language.<sup>19</sup> According to Mary Elijah, Director of the Oneida Language and Cultural Centre, ‘the Oneida language program as it has existed over the years, has produced some familiarity with counting, some simple disjointed vocabulary, a repertoire of children’s songs and recitations but no communicative language functions among children or adults, nor has it yielded learners willing to voice interlanguage at the novice level outside of the classroom.’ (Elijah 8) Immersion pedagogy has failed to produce a single language speaker in my Onyota’a:ka community.

In *Making Dictionaries: Preserving Indigenous Languages of the Americas*, Frawley, Hill, and Munro discuss the important role of lexicography in the revitalization of Indigenous languages. According to this text, “making dictionaries of such endangered languages [indigenous languages] can be the last best shot at preserving them or intervening in their rapid disappearance... dictionaries can take preservation one step further and be instruments of revitalization.” (Frawley, Hill & Munro 16) There have been numerous attempts to document the Onyota’a:ka language in dictionary form. The most complete dictionary published to date is the *Oneida Dictionary* written by Karen Michelson and Mercy Doxtator in 2002. There are other less complete glossaries such as,

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<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, in neither case do the parents of these children speak the Oneida language; therefore it is not and cannot be supported in their homes, unless a child has a fluent grandparent in residence. There may be enough of these situations to produce some fluency, yet new speakers of any age have failed to emerge.” (Elijah 7-8)

*Honeyote'a:ka: Kawennakalatatu*, Elda Antone in 1982, *Tekalihwathe:tha (A Picture Dictionary)*, edited by Angela Antone et al. in 1981, and *Tsi' Niyukwalihót^*, edited by Marla Cornelius, Mercy Doxtator et al. in 1985. These smaller picture dictionaries are more like teaching tools rather than actual dictionaries.

Many linguistic scholars work hard at producing dictionaries and glossaries of indigenous languages as a means of preservation. Hinton explains that documentation can be used in revitalization efforts in terms of curriculum and vocabulary development and as spelling references.<sup>20</sup> Hinton adds that the Maori and Hawaiian language programs incorporate documentation but focus on audio documentation.<sup>21</sup> Although written documentation, audio, and/or visual are useful instruments of revitalization, they also hinder the revitalization process. A great deal of time is spent creating these documents and they are not always complete in that they lack the, “rules and patterns of interaction.” (Hinton 112) Documentation cannot compare to true interaction and personal participation. What is most important to note is that focusing on documentation is an acceptance of defeat, an acceptance that the language will not survive.<sup>22</sup> Scholars and indigenous communities focus on documentation as if it is already decided that the endangered language is dead. Onyota'a:ka continue to focus on documentation. As part of its commitment to the Onyota'a:ka language and culture, the Oneida Language and

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<sup>20</sup> Hinton, Leanne, “A Dictionary for Whom? Tensions between Academic and Non-academic Functions of Bilingual Dictionaries,” *Making dictionaries: preserving indigenous languages of the Americas*, Eds. Frawley, William, Kenneth C. Hill, and Pamela Munro (Berkeley California, University of California Press, 2002), 156.

<sup>21</sup> Hinton, “Language Revitalization: An Overview,” 11.

<sup>22</sup> Hinton, “New Writing Systems,” 240.

Cultural Centre devised a plan, which includes documentation in the form of teaching and resource materials, audio and video, and high quality language resources.<sup>23</sup>

For many scholars and indigenous language activists, utilizing multimedia is a separate pedagogy in itself and an excellent source of preservation. Multimedia provides more dimension and interaction with the speakers themselves, whereas one-dimensional written documentation does not allow for multi-level interaction. At the Oneida Language and Cultural Centre there is *Twatey^tete Onyota'a:ka – 48 Lessons* 2003. This is an audio introduction to the Onyota'a:ka language. It prompts the listener to repeat the Onyota'a:ka words similar to travel language tapes. There is also, *Foster Elijah – Traditional Teachings CD*. This is a rare tape as Foster is one of the Oneida of the Thames traditional wolf clan chiefs and is very wise in traditional teachings and ways. *Finding Our Talk – Oneida: Our Music is Our Language*, highlights Tsi' Niyukwalihó:t^, the alternative traditional school in the Oneida Nation of the Thames and the Oneida unlicensed radio station. Finally, there are Volumes one and two of *Lotiw^na'ta:shu Elders' Video*. This is a collection of interviews with members of the Oneida Nation of the Thames community. Some interviews are conducted only in the Onyota'a:ka language and some are conducted in English. Many of the individuals share their Unkwehu:we names and their history in the community. Like other forms of documentation, multimedia documentation does not compare to personal interaction and takes time and energy away from oral language learning.

Not all language revitalization programs are discussed herein. However, those discussed represent the founding philosophies of most pedagogy and are all the programs

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<sup>23</sup> Elijah, 27-28.

that have been in practice or still are in practice in the Oneida of the Thames community. These pedagogies have all had limited success. For the pedagogies focused on literacy, students were capable of reading and writing the language and their proficiency depended on length of study. The pedagogies that honour the indigenous family and a way of life are recreating an indigenous sense of family and way of life in the community while, at the same time, teaching the language. Pedagogy that honour and revere elders, incorporates elders in a positive way and benefits both the older and younger generations. This principle, within indigenous communities, is important to the indigenous way of life and at the same time important in teaching language. Immersion has had some success with indigenous languages in that many children can communicate in the language to some extent and have an adequate vocabulary. If, unfortunately, the language is lost, documentation has provided indigenous communities and academics with language resources. However, that pinnacle goal of a new generation of language speakers has yet to be achieved.

Onyota'a:ka teachings tell us that in Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) medicine societies, there are helpers that provide the tools for ceremony such as tobacco, masks, and regalia. These helpers also provide the know-how, the speeches, knowledge, order and rules. If we look at language revitalization as a medicine ceremony, linguistics is like our helpers. Linguistics has effectively provided the tools such as grammar books, dictionaries and tapes and the know-how being the different pedagogies. However, just as in Haudenosaunee medicine societies, the tools and know-how are useless unless there is an act of volition on the part of the individual or people receiving the medicine. Medicine societies require a commitment from the receiver. The receiver needs to commit to being

sincere and believing in the medicine. The teachings tell us that unless there is this commitment, the medicines will not work. This is the same with language revitalization. In order for what linguistics has provided to work, an act of volition is required on the part of the Onyota'a:ka community and indigenous communities worldwide. Linguistics cannot do or provide this for the people. In our case, the Onyota'a:ka people themselves have to commit to language revitalization. Therefore in the end, linguistics is limited in what it can do for indigenous language revitalization and whether pedagogy is successful or not is dependent on the people.

### **Thon^sa'nikuhlo'tahánke Tsi' Niyukwalihó:t^ - Methodology**

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As I endeavour to research the Onyota'a:ka language with the Onyota'a:ka people, I must first declare my ethical commitment to the Onyota'a:ka nation. Thon^sa'nikuhlo'tahánke Tsi' Niyukwalihó:t^, “be the way of our ways”, exemplifies my ethical commitment. ‘Thon^sa'nikuhlo'tahánke’ is a way of thinking with your mind. ‘Tsi' Niyukwalihó:t^’ is the Onyota'a:ka ways, culture, beliefs, teachings and principles. Thon^sa'nikuhlo'tahánke Tsi' Niyukwalihó:t^ was described to me to mean, ‘my mind is focused on the task taking into account our ways and beliefs.’ My research respects the Oneida nation of the Thames community and the Onyota'a:ka people. My research design is based on the understanding of Thon^sa'nikuhlo'tahánke Tsi' Niyukwalihó:t^.

To clarify my methodological approach, I must first explain why I do not apply already developed European academic methodological approaches. I believe these approaches do not respect or honour the Onyota'a:ka community and indigenous

communities worldwide. They are inherent to a colonial framework and worldview and therefore cannot fully honour the knowledge of Indigenous peoples. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Smith describes community action research as research that “enable communities but also enable indigenous researchers to work as researchers within their own communities. Community action approaches assume that people know and can reflect on their own lives, have questions and priorities of their own, have skills and sensitivities which can enhance (or undermine) any community-based projects.” (Smith 127) Although community action research is a positive move in the direction of honouring indigenous knowledge, these methodological approaches still fall short. These methodologies still give power to the researcher, ownership and use of knowledge are still issues, and who speaks for the community is often not scrutinized. In the example of Community Based Participatory Research, which is specifically designed for interaction and study of indigenous peoples and property, this methodology gives little weight to the knowledge of indigenous peoples in comparison to Western knowledge. For example, Fletcher explains that the Community Based Participatory Research model is a “research design [that is] no longer based solely on Western science, but incorporate[s] Aboriginal and Indigenous ways of knowing. As a result everyone benefits.” (Fletcher 31) But I believe it is not enough to merely incorporate indigenous ways of knowing. Put this way, the indigenous ways of knowing are implied to be inferior. These types of research designs do not honour the value of Indigenous knowledge and therefore I did not utilize these research designs for my project.

In Linda Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, she discusses a research design called Kaupapa Maori. She explains that Kaupapa Maori is, "research which is 'culturally safe', which involves the 'mentorship' of elders, which is culturally relevant and appropriate while satisfying the rigour of research, and which is undertaken by a Maori researcher, not a researcher who happens to be Maori." (Smith 184) Smith also states that the creator or founder of Kaupapa Maori works from a Maori worldview. The four major principles of Kaupapa Maori require that research "is related to 'being Maori'; is connected to Maori philosophies and principles; takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Maori, the importance of Maori language and culture; and is concerned with 'the struggle for autonomy over our own cultural well being.'" (Smith 185) It was in reading about Kaupapa Maori that I was inspired to create a research design that honoured an Onyota'a:ka way of life and worldview.

In order for my methodological approach to honour an Onyota'a:ka way of life and worldview, I need to Thon^sa'nikuhlo'tahánke Tsi' Niyukwalihó:t^, "be the way of our ways." Thon^sa'nikuhlo'tahánke Tsi' Niyukwalihó:t^ is the Onyota'a:ka equivalent to the Kaupapa Maori. It is about being Onyota'a:ka because our language is connected to our identity as Onyota'a:ka. It is connected to Onyota'a:ka philosophies and principles because it honours our ways and traditions. It takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Onyota'a:ka people, our knowledge, our language, and our way of life. Further, it is about struggling for autonomy over our Onyota'a:ka cultural well being because it is about taking language revitalization into our own hands. Basing the methodological approach on the principle of Thon^sa'nikuhlo'tahánke Tsi'

Niyukwalihó:t^, ensures that this project is not only a scholastic endeavour but that it is a project for the language, the community and the people.

The way hence I hope to explain how we can as Onyota'a:ka individuals and as an Onyota'a:ka community make a commitment and learn our language is by relating my own personal experiences in learning the language. Therefore, in order to draw conclusions on the main research question I will ask myself, how can I as an Onyota'a:ka individual make a commitment and learn my language? I will immerse myself in language activities in the community and I will draw conclusions from my personal participation in language learning. There will be plenty of self-reflection, self-analysis, and personal commentary that will show an Onyota'a:ka woman attempting to learn her language.

My personal participation in this research honours Thon^sa'nikuhlo'tahánke Tsi' Niyukwalihó:t^ in that it follows Onyota'a:ka teachings about leadership. I am part of the wolf clan and this clan is considered to be pathfinders. The wolf clan members are the ones that go ahead of the people and find the right path and direction for the people to take. The wolf clan is responsible for guiding the people in the way that will be most beneficial and that honours the Creator. More specifically, I am a descendent from the wolf title, Kanuhkwe'niyo. This title and its descendents are said to have the responsibility of looking after provisions and sustenance for the people. We, as descendants of Kanuhkwe'niyo, need to ensure that the people are provided for. This is not limited to food but to anything that the Onyota'a:ka people need such as our language.



Further, another Onyota'a:ka teaching is that our unkwehu:we names provide insight as to our purpose in life and our responsibilities to the community. My personal participation is in line with this teaching. My Onyota'a:ka name is Tsyoy<sup>^</sup>tha which means 'she re-plants.' From the teachings I have received, my name explains that my responsibilities in life are to literally re-plant seeds as well as figuratively re-plant seeds of thought for the Onyota'a:ka people. With this research, I will re-plant the seeds of thought on how to make the commitment to learning our language.

This research will not be simply based on self-reflection, self-analysis and personal commentary. My research will include teachings and insight I receive from interviews with various individuals who are involved in language efforts in the Oneida of the Thames community. My research participants represent all groups within the Onyota'a:ka community, such as elders, youth, men, women, members of the longhouse and those with Christian beliefs. All these groups have something to contribute to the research. Further, participants will be limited to Onyota'a:ka people as determined in the traditional manner. Traditionally, membership was determined by a biological connection to the Onyota'a:ka people and a role within the community.<sup>24</sup> This is how the Onyota'a:ka people will be identified in this research.

I interviewed four individuals from the community. Prior to the interview, the interviewee was asked about being interviewed and the topic was explained. When the interviewee agreed to the interview they chose the location. Two of my interviews were conducted at the longhouse in the Oneida of the Thames community, one was conducted at the Oneida Language and Cultural Centre and the fourth was conducted at the Oneida

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<sup>24</sup> Whereas today, membership is determined through the elected band council system. Membership is given to those with at least one Onyota'a:ka parent.

Youth Centre. The ideal was to make the location convenient for the interviewee. Each interviewee was given oyukwa'u:we, tobacco. Giving tobacco is customary protocol according to Onyota'a:ka teachings. Individuals give tobacco when asking for advice, help or information. Tobacco signifies thanks, sincerity and good intent.

My first interview was with Yehawí:, She Carries Ninham. Yehawí: is twenty-six years old and has a six-year-old daughter. Yehawí: is bear clan and lives in the Oneida of the Thames community. Yehawí: participates in the Master-Apprentice Program and is currently working at the Oneida Youth Centre. I consider Yehawí: my friend. I met her a couple years ago when we both worked at the London, Ontario Friendship Centre. Yehawí: has a singing voice that is deep, controlled, and powerful. She taught me how to sing. She is shy and reluctant to speak, but when she sings she is a different person. Her voice is her gift. In the interview she shared her struggles and joys of learning the language.

I also interviewed my friend, Lo:t^t, He's Poor Honyust. Lo:t^t and I met when he became friends with my partner. Lo:t^t is thirty-one years old and is known throughout the community and in most Haudenosaunee communities as a traditional man with great knowledge. At around the age of twenty, Lo:t^t left college to learn our traditional ways full time. He is very conversant in the language, he can eloquently conduct the ceremonies in the longhouse, and he is depended on for his knowledge of our traditional way of life. Although Lo:t^t is just five years older than myself, he has taught me so much about our ways. It is for this reason and because he is such an eloquent and passionate speaker that I interviewed him.

I owe most of my language learning to Olive Elm, Wathahí:ne, She walks along the road. Olive is bear clan and sixty-six years old. Olive is a language teacher who is patient and kind. Her sweetness always made me comfortable around her and I truly learnt the most from her. Olive and I would meet three times a week for about a year. We would spend one hour to two hours working together on the language. Olive has been involved in language teaching for most of her life. She has worked as a teaching assistant, translator, teacher, and interviewer. She has dedicated her work to teaching the language and helping others to learn. Olive teaches at the Oneida Language and Cultural Centre. In her spare time she is part of many groups including the Oneida Gospel Choir, which sings all their songs in the language.

Finally, I interviewed Howard Elijah, K<sup>^</sup>niwat<sup>^</sup>nláh, barrier/fence of our people. Howard and his brother Bruce have always helped my family and so many others with our traditional needs such as family feasts, wakes, and medicines. I have appreciated the teachings that Howard has shared with me and I owe a lot of my knowledge of our traditional ways to him. Howard has always been accepting and inviting. When I began to attend ceremonies and learn our ways, he always encouraged my language learning. Howard is a funny man. Most of the time we are laughing together and our interview was no different. He shared some great stories and teachings about the language that have helped to ground this thesis in the teachings. I consider all of my interviewees friends and teachers. I cannot fully express my appreciation to my interviewees, but I will try to accurately reflect their sentiments and words.

Originally, I had intended to include in my research an interview with an individual that was unmotivated to learn the language. I had wanted to include this

interview in order to compare which motives yielded better commitment. In the end, I felt that this inclusion could be harmful to the individual. In terms of protecting identities, the function of anonymity is difficult within small indigenous communities and I question whether one's identity could truly be protected. Finally, my decision to omit an interview with an unmotivated individual was also rooted in my desire to focus on the positive. By focusing on the negative, I felt that it would have give power to those things that keep us from commitment and the reader would inevitably find commonalities. In this thesis I wanted to focus on the positive motivations that indigenous people could relate to.

## Responsibility

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In *Language Death*, David Crystal discusses the concept of responsibility and language revitalization. Crystal focuses on responsibility in terms of how it is given away or passed to another person, organization, school or program.<sup>25</sup> Crystal explains that “people may be very ready to agree that their language needs to be maintained, but do not feel that they themselves have to be involved; they expect others to do it for them.” (Crystal 118) Like the people Crystal describes, I have always felt that indigenous languages were important, nevertheless, I have not felt any sort of responsibility towards learning. I have always heard that the language is everyone’s responsibility. Hearing this, I assumed I did not need to be involved because someone else would be responsible.

At the end of my stay in Victoria, British Columbia, I felt as though physically and mentally I was no longer where I was supposed to be. I can remember feeling anxious to return home. To an extent, I felt like I had let someone or something down because I was not actively working towards learning the Onyota’a:ka language. This feeling was a newfound sense of responsibility. At that time, I did not understand where this sense of responsibility had come from. To be honest, it felt as though one day I awoke feeling this way.

It is this sense of responsibility that has helped me to commit to learn the Onyota’a:ka language. My own sense of responsibility is one of my driving forces behind learning and it is one of the major motivations that have helped me to continue to learn. Once I began to actively learn the Onyota’a:ka language, I began to feel a sense of continual completion in that I was upholding my responsibility. My own sense of

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<sup>25</sup> Crystal, David, *Language Death*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 118-119.

responsibility played such an integral part in creating commitment. In order to discuss how we as Onyota'a:ka individuals and as an Onyota'a:ka community make the commitment to learning our language, we must understand where an Onyota'a:ka sense of responsibility is born.

The concept of responsibility is largely ignored in language debates and yet, responsibility is inexplicitly delegated through language pedagogy. Responsibility is delegated to a tripartite of archetypes, the child, the mother and the fluent speaker.

A great deal of the responsibility is delegated to the youngest archetype of the indigenous community, the child. He/she is the quickest language learner and he/she does not have other responsibilities.<sup>26</sup> The child is the targeted language learner in most of the pedagogy discussed in the literature review including immersion and language nests. Immersion programs are mostly directed at children because they can be implemented within the school systems and, therefore, learning time can be dedicated to language. The aim of language nests is to raise a child as an indigenous language speaker.<sup>27</sup> Language nests do require others, like parents, to take responsibility but again, the primary language learner is a child of the indigenous community. Language nest curriculum is also geared to language that a child would learn.

Since the child is the primary archetype targeted as an indigenous language learner, logically, the parents are also targeted. Many linguists support responsibility being given to the parents as a key to success in indigenous language revitalization. According to Grenoble and Whaley, the authors of *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization*, it is important that parents learn the language first as, "it is the

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<sup>26</sup> Hinton, Leanne, "Language Revitalization: An Overview," 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> King, 123.

responsibility of parents to teach language to children, and so the adult generation must be educated first, this view might alternatively be dubbed the ‘mother’s knee approach’ signalling that language is best learned and mastered in the home.” (Grenoble and Whaley 57) In most indigenous communities many parents are single and it is most often the mother that takes care of the child when the union splits. Therefore, the mother is responsible for the majority of child development and rearing, educational choices and what language is used in the home. In the case of immersion programming and language nests, the mother is then held responsible for creating a language environment outside of the classroom because she is the primary caretaker of the child.<sup>28</sup> A specific requirement of language nest is that the parents are required to attempt to provide as much language as possible to the child outside of the classroom.

Finally, responsibility for language is delegated to the fluent speaker. The fluent speaker is given this responsibility because he/she holds the knowledge needed for language transmission. Programs such as language nests and the Master-Apprentice Program require that the fluent speaker take on even more responsibility. Language nests utilize the fluent speaker as a way to provide a language rich environment for the children to learn. The Master-Apprentice Program requires the fluent speaker to play a main role within the pedagogy. Without the fluent speaker, the Master-Apprentice pedagogy would not work. The fluent speaker is also given a lot of responsibility in terms of documentation. Both written and audio-visual documentation require the fluent speaker to help translate or provide audio-visual scenarios and language interaction.

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<sup>28</sup> King, 123.

When we look at the Onyota'a:ka community, we see how the delegation of responsibility in language pedagogy plays out explicitly within the community itself. When discussing the concept of responsibility with Olive, she explained that, “[the language] is the young people’s responsibility and they have to be responsible to want to learn.” (Olive) Yehawí: identifies with the mother archetype and thus feels responsibility is delegated to her to learn the language and teach her daughter and future children.<sup>29</sup> Olive also spoke about a recent statement from the Oneida Nation of the Thames’ elected council. Recently, they delegated responsibility to the fluent speakers of the community as holders of language knowledge.<sup>30</sup> Olive explained that, “it is their responsibility because they are the ones that are fluent. I guess I shouldn’t say responsibility, but it’s them that we should turn to.” (Olive) When we look to a specific indigenous community such as my Onyota'a:ka community, we see how the delegation of responsibility by language pedagogy is being reiterated and reflected in the community because the community now delegates responsibility to these three archetypical persons as well.

Personally, I am not archetypical. I no longer consider myself a child and although some would argue I am still a youth, I still do not fit the child archetype because I do not have several hours of instruction time a day and I do have adult responsibilities such as money, bills, and work. I also am not a mother. I do not have any children under my care except when I sporadically take care of my nieces. Finally, I am nowhere close to being fluent in the Onyota'a:ka language. My ability to speak Onyota'a:ka is limited to small conversations and ceremonial speeches. As responsibility is not delegated inexplicitly or explicitly to me, I began to question myself about my responsibility.

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<sup>29</sup> Yehawí: Ninham, Interview, September 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Olive Elm, Interview, September 2006.



My sense of responsibility exists on several levels. I feel responsibility to my family. My grandparents were both fluent Onyota'a:ka speakers. I vividly remember them in their living room happily conversing in Onyota'a:ka together. None of my immediate family speaks Onyota'a:ka fluently; however, my father is fluent in the Mi'kmaw language. My sister has two daughters named Wahsutí:yo and Teyoswáthe. Both are very interested in learning the Onyota'a:ka language. I feel a sense of responsibility to learn the Onyota'a:ka language as it would honour my grandparents, provide at least one person in the immediate family with the language, and provide a language environment for my nieces.

As I became more involved with the longhouse community, I experienced a new level of responsibility to that community. There are only a handful of people to speak in ceremony. Although women do not usually speak, there are exceptions such as planting, strawberry and midwinter ceremonies. At these times women stand with the men and give thanks. I feel a sense of responsibility to learn the Onyota'a:ka language because I could act as another community member with the ability to give thanks.

As part of the longhouse community I have learned some of the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka about responsibility. These teach the Onyota'a:ka about who has responsibility for language and why they need to be responsible. These teachings have come to mean a great deal to me in my life. As a believer in these teachings, I believe I have a responsibility to learn the language because of what these teachings impart to us as Onyota'a:ka.

The story at the beginning of the thesis explains how Creator gave the animals responsibility. Their responsibility is born or located in their relationship with human

beings. Like the animals, the sense of responsibility felt by human beings is born or located in relation to someone or something. In terms of the Onyota'a:ka language, Onyota'a:ka responsibility is born in our relationships with family, community, and the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka. Taiaiake Alfred wrote in his book, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* that “accountability in the indigenous sense needs to be understood not just as a set of processes but as a relationship.” (Alfred 91) When I think about where my sense of responsibility and the sense of responsibility felt by my interviewees are born, it is in our relationships. We feel accountable to those/the things we are in relationship with.

In our conversations, the interviewees expressed a sense of responsibility to their family. Howard expressed an appreciation for his grandparents who were an integral part of his learning of the language. It was his relationship with his extended family that sparked a sense of responsibility,

“One day your uncle comes along, its not your father, its your uncle that comes along and says, okay now its time for you to learn how to do this. And that is what my uncle did to me. He went to do a ten day feast, I was over at my grandma's, he got there and said that he was going to do a ten day feast, he said I think it's time you start learning. So we went. He didn't ask me if I wanted to go. He didn't beg me or whatever. He told me I had to go. So when your uncle tells you to do something, you do it. When your father tells you, you say, I want to watch baseball or I got something else to do. That is how we are with our parents and I guess that is why we have uncles so that they can do that for us. And that was my beginning. I just feel real lucky that I had that. I cannot imagine not having it. I cannot imagine, as an Oneida person, I can't imagine an Oneida person that can't speak the language. It's just beyond me. It's beyond me that I would even be teaching the language because I guess I'm really appreciative of my grandparents. My parents were young, just like young people are and they were not always committed to what is going on. But your grandparents are always there for you. So that is how it was for me.” (Howard)

Howard's relationship with his grandparents and extended family is what has made him feel a sense of responsibility to teach the Onyota'a:ka language.

There exist numerous smaller communities within the Onyota'a:ka community itself. The longhouse community is one with a strong connection to the Onyota'a:ka language. In terms of a sense of responsibility, Lo:t^t feels strongly towards the longhouse community. For Lo:t^t, it is his connection with elders from the longhouse community that has created a sense of responsibility towards the language,

“I have had special relationships with older people, like Oliver Jacobs, he was a very good friend of mine. On the first peacemaker's journey I went on, he was my partner. Part of that was me taking care of him and helping him, but the trade off was that he gave me an understanding of how we are supposed to be. When I woke up in the morning I would wake up early, 6:00 o'clock, 6:30 a.m. I would get up and he would be sitting there, he'd be dressed, washed up, he would have his ribbon shirt on, his hair would be combed and everything. When I looked at him he would be smiling. He would say Shekóli. He is Onondaga but he spoke to me in Oneida because he knows I'm Oneida. He would say Shekoli and I would say Shekóli and then he'd say W^hni:yo, it is a beautiful day. Then I'd say H^ W^hni:yo [yes, it is a beautiful day]. I would get up and get myself ready. Then we could go have breakfast or whatever. I look at it now, he taught me that there was a reason why we say that everyday. Some days were raining and he still said whanisliyo. The reason why he said that was because there is never a bad day. You hear people say on the radio, 'oh its miserable outside, it's raining out,' but the earth needs the rain. That day is the way that the Creator gave it to us. If we are complaining, then we are complaining about what Creator gave us and we should never do that. You have to be humble and thankful for whatever day Creator gives us. We do not have control over the weather, whether it's sunny or how cold it is. So you never say that it is a bad day, everyday is a good day. That is how you are supposed to look at the world and that is how you are supposed to look at your life; everyday is a good day. So that is what he would say to me, wahnisliyo. That kind of stuff, is what you learn from the older people and that is the kind of stuff they learned from their grandparents and on and on and on.”  
(Lo:t^t)

Lo:t^t spoke about his relationship with Oliver Jacobs and others like Oliver as the reason why he feels a sense of responsibility to learn the language and the Onyota'a:ka way of life. He explained that it is because they learnt from their ancestors that we can learn from them and therefore, it is our responsibility to continue the cycle of learning. Lo:t^t explains,

“that is what I try and give back to the kids, what I’ve learned. Compared to what those older people knew, I know very little. But the little that I know has helped me in my life. I look at the way it has made me feel when I was down or needed help. I talked to those older people and they were able to help me. That is what we are told. Whatever it is that you have, if you see somebody that needs help it is all of our responsibility to help that person.” (Lo:t^t)

Lo:t^t shows us that his responsibility is born in his relationships with the elders of the longhouse community. Now that he has language knowledge, he feels responsible to pass that language on to the future generations.

There exists a strong relationship between the people that go to the longhouse for ceremonies. They believe in the same things and they give thanks together; this creates a strong relationship. Lo:t^t told me a story about an accident he once had. He had stayed up all night at a wake in the community. On the way home he had fallen asleep at the wheel. He was hurt and in pain. The accident made him question his purpose in life. Three days later he was asked to go to Tonawanda, New York for ceremonies and he reluctantly agreed. While at ceremonies, he was then asked to sing Ostowa^kó:wa, feather dance.<sup>31</sup> He explains that it was at this moment, his relationship with the longhouse community answered his question about life’s purpose and created a sense of responsibility for him,

“We get to the time when we are going to dance Ostowa^kó:wa, feather dance. They come to me and ask me to sing feather dance and I’m like, I don’t know. I’ll try. I just got into an accident and I haven’t tried to do anything since then. So I’ll try and sing a few songs. I got up there on the bench and I start singing. We were sitting there in the longhouse in Tonawanda and I start thinking that we have this responsibility as men to learn that song so we can give thanks. I was still in that phase where I was wondering why I am still here. I’m lucky, there is a reason I am still here but what is it? So I’m sitting on the bench and all of a sudden, this is it. To help out with the ceremonies because its our responsibility to do that. Its not here to make me feel better about myself, its here because it is what was given to our people in the beginning to give thanks. And

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<sup>31</sup> Ostowa^kó:wa or Feather dance is the dance Haudenosaunee dance to give thanks. This dance is an integral part of the Haudenosaunee ceremonial cycle as it is one of Kaye Niyoliwake, the four sacred ceremonies.

that's it. Very simple. Sitting there singing Ostowa^kó:wa on the bench in Tonawanda, I almost started to cry. ... I sang a few songs and I asked another guy to finish. It was really meaningful for me to sing that day. Again, giving thanks that I am still alive and still able to sit here on the earth and sing that song, to be able to give thanks to Shukwaya'tísu for everything we have here on behalf of the people in that longhouse." (Lo:t^t)

A great deal of responsibility is felt by Lo:t^t towards the rest of the longhouse community. It is this relationship between the people that go to the longhouse for ceremonies that created this sense of responsibility.

Having a relationship with the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka people also creates a sense of responsibility for people. For the Haudenosaunee people there is the teachings of the K^tyohkwanhásta' – the people are in circle.

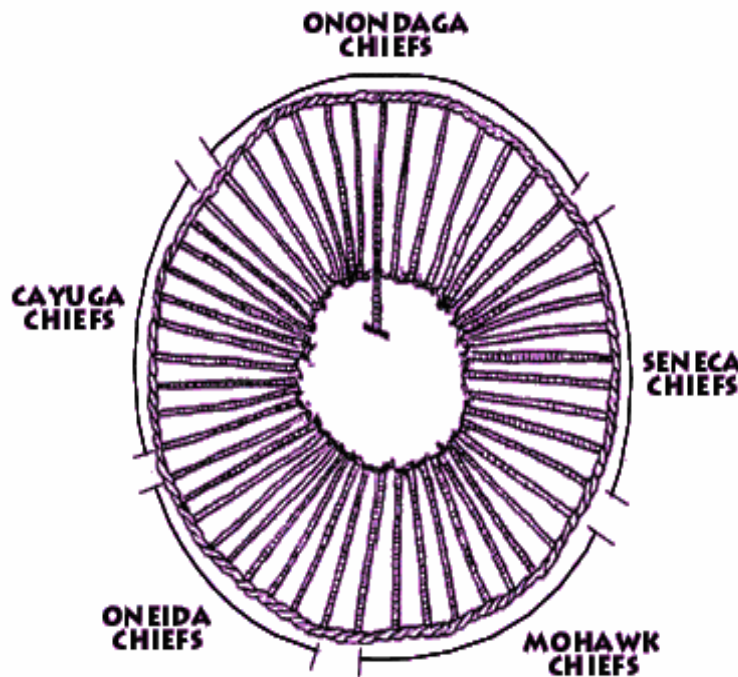


Figure 1.0.<sup>32</sup>

Figure 1.0. is a drawing of the K^tyohkwanhásta'. The centre circle represents our responsibilities, which include, land, ceremony, medicine, songs and language.<sup>33</sup> Each

<sup>32</sup> Wampum Belts, <<http://www.tyendinaga.net/amsp/youth99/wampums/pg2.htm>> (15 January 2007).

string facing the centre represents every individual within the Haudenosaunee confederacy.<sup>34</sup> Most importantly, the K<sup>^</sup>tyohkwanhásta' as a whole can represent the Haudenosaunee traditional conceptualization of responsibility. The K<sup>^</sup>tyohkwanhásta' teaches us that every individual has responsibility to language. It also teaches that every individual is connected or has a relationship with the rest of the Haudenosaunee confederacy and it is this relationship that creates responsibility. To have a relationship with this teaching is to feel a sense of responsibility to learn the Onyota'a:ka language.

Prior to returning home from Victoria, British Columbia, I had never felt a sense of responsibility towards learning the Onyota'a:ka language. I always assumed others would take care of the language and that if one day I did feel as though I want to learn then the language would still be active within the community. What is vital to understanding responsibility is where it is born or created in human beings or more specifically, Onyota'a:ka people. A sense of responsibility towards the Onyota'a:ka language is not only found in the delegation of responsibility done in language pedagogy but is also created in relationships with others and to things. For Onyota'a:ka people, the relationships with our family, our community and the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka people are what create a sense of responsibility towards the language.

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<sup>33</sup> Lo:t<sup>^</sup>t Honyust Interview, September 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Lo:t<sup>^</sup>t Honyust Interview, September 2006.

## Motivation

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When I think back to childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood I do not remember ever feeling truly motivated to learn my language. However, I do remember instances where I wanted to learn my language.

When I was around the age of six, my parents enrolled me in a youth group called Little Beavers at the local Friendship Centre. Ray John Sr. was the instructor of the group. We did different traditional activities together and we learned about being unkwehu:we. I remember one night Ray John Sr. was teaching us about the Onyota'a:ka language. He gave us all a written document and asked us to read a section. I was chosen to start the reading. I knew nothing of the Onyota'a:ka language except a few words. I sat there in agony trying to read the page and wondering what all the weird symbols meant. Ray John Sr. said to me, "Anyo Anyo." I interpreted this as him helping me with the first few words. I repeated what he said and everyone laughed. I was the only one that did not know that "Anyo" means "Come on." I remember wanting to learn some Onyota'a:ka words after that in order to be like the rest of the group and not be singled out again.

During the summer months, Mi'kmaw people pick blueberries as seasonal work in Bangor, Maine. I can remember going almost every summer up until I was in my early teenage years. Summers in Maine are extremely hot and picking blueberries is hard and painful work. Children often get in the way of work or in my case, eat the profits. As an alternative, a school was set up for all the Mi'kmaw children. Everyday we would go to learn and play while our parents picked blueberries. I remember being motivated to learn the Mi'kmaw language. All the little Mi'kmaw boys and girls knew how to speak

Mi'kmaw and classes were sometimes instructed in both Mi'kmaw and English. I remember wanting to be like the other children and speak Mi'kmaw.

I can also recall another instance when I wanted to learn my language. I remember asking my father repeatedly to teach me Mi'kmaw. I remember wanting to speak Mi'kmaw with him and be able to visit my relatives in Nova Scotia and speak Mi'kmaw with them. He bought me a few tapes of Mi'kmaw songs and he taught me a few words, but the momentum soon died.<sup>35</sup>

I have been learning the Onyota'a:ka language actively for a year and six months now. I have dedicated hours to learning and I continue to have a drive towards learning the Onyota'a:ka language. This attempt to learn has been ongoing and my longest endeavour at language to date. In order to draw conclusions on how can we as Onyota'a:ka individuals and as an Onyota'a:ka community commit to learning our language, I had to look at what is Onyota'a:ka motivation.

In order to distinguish between my previous desires to learn an indigenous language and this attempt to learn the Onyota'a:ka language, the socio-educational model of second language acquisition created by Robert Gardner is useful. According to this model, my reasons above would not be considered motives as the other features of motivation did not accompany them. According to Gardner, "a 'reason' is not motivation. ... if one is motivated, he/she has reasons (motives) for engaging in the relevant activities, expends effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to

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<sup>35</sup> Although I feel a connection with my Father and the Mi'kmaw language, I have focused my learning on the Onyota'a:ka language for numerous reasons. Primarily, geography plays a large role as I am close to the Oneida Nation of the Thames and very far from my father's community, which is located near Sydney, Nova Scotia. I am also involved with the Oneida Nation of the Thames community and therefore feel a stronger connection to the language. As well, as I begin to learn more about the nature of Unkwehu:we people, women and mothers are to be honoured in a special way and my learning of the Onyota'a:ka language is a way to honour my mother and her/our Onyota'a:ka ancestors.



achieve the goal, enjoys the activities, etc. Without the associated motivation, a reason is just a reason, not a motivation.” (Gardner 243) Therefore because my reasons for learning an indigenous language were not followed by engagement in relevant language activities, effort, persistence, attention, desire to achieve or enjoyment in language activities, my reasons were simply reasons and not motivation.

Theories of second language motivation have produced several categorizations for the different motives involved in second language learning. These categorizations are created to aid in the understanding of motivation. Primarily, there is the instrumental/integrative dichotomy. Gardner and Lambert define instrumental motivation as “an instrumental orientation toward the language learning task, one characterized by a desire to gain social recognition or economic advantages through knowledge of a foreign language. The perspective in this instance is more self-oriented in the sense that a person prepares to learn a new code in order to derive benefits of a non-interpersonal sort.” (Gardner and Lambert 14) Instrumental motivation focuses on the utilitarian purpose of learning a language. Gardner and Lambert explain that, “the notion of an integrative motive implies that success in mastering a second language depends on a particular orientation on the part of the learner, reflecting a willingness or a desire to be like representative members of the ‘other’ language community, and to become associated, at least vicariously, with that other community.” (Gardner and Lambert 14) Integrative motivation focuses on the integrative purpose of learning a language.

The application of Gardner and Lambert’s instrumental/integrative dichotomy is problematic in the case of the Onyota’a:ka language-learning situation. First, Gardner and Lambert focused on the French language in Canada when studying second language

acquisition. In this case, the instrumental motivation category has more meaning than in the case of the Onyota'a:ka. Learning French yields numerous economic advantages such as employment and social recognition as being bilingual in the two official languages of Canada, whereas, learning the Onyota'a:ka language does not yield economic opportunities because there is not a lot of employment associated with the Onyota'a:ka language. Social recognition would be from within the language community and therefore would also be an integrative motive, thus blurring the distinction between the two categories. Further, applying this dichotomy to the Onyota'a:ka language-learning situation would mean that every motive would be integrative as it is about or concerned with being part of a community.

In *Orientations to Learning German: Heritage Language Learning and Motivational Substrates*, Kimberly Noels focuses her studies on heritage language learners. A heritage language learner is defined as “a native speaker of the target language or have been exposed to the language at home from an early age.” (Noels) Along with utilizing the instrumental/integrative dichotomy, Noels defines another motivation dichotomy, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to Noels, “intrinsic motivation is the form of motivation by which “a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external prods, pressures or rewards.” (Noels) Noels divides extrinsic motivation into three subcategories of self-determined motivation. The first category of extrinsic motivation is called, *External Regulation*, which is when individuals are motivated to receive a reward or to avoid a negative repercussion.<sup>36</sup> The second category of extrinsic motivation is called, *Introjected Regulation*, which is

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<sup>36</sup> Kimberly A. Noels, “Orientations to Learning German: Heritage Language Learning and Motivational Substrates,” in The Canadian Modern Language Review (2005).

motivation that is concerned with the ‘self concept,’ and are motivated by avoiding feelings of ‘guilt and anxiety of a job poorly done.’ (Noels) The final category is *Identified Regulation*. Identified regulation is concerned like the second subcategory with the self-concept. Learners are motivated to learn because it is important to their self-concept.<sup>37</sup> The focus of Noels’ work was university students taking German classes who identify as having a German heritage/background.<sup>38</sup>

The application of the second dichotomy, intrinsic and extrinsic, is more fitting in that it looks at individuals learning the language of their heritage. However, there are still some issues with its application. First, Noels is focused on university students taking German classes, a cohort that is very different from the average Onyota’a:ka language student. Secondly, none of the motives described by the Onyota’a:ka are intrinsic as there is always a more self-determined reason behind learning the Onyota’a:ka language. That being said, extrinsic motivation is also not a perfect fit. Although there are motives rooted in rewards and avoiding negative consequences these motives are also intertwined in the self-concept thus negating the application of the first extrinsic subcategory. At the same time, all these categories are also rooted in the colonial mentality that honours the individual. Onyota’a:ka motivation is not individualistic in nature but honours the collective community.

Before we can discuss Onyota’a:ka motivation I need to explain how I came to define what is Onyota’a:ka motivation. Onyota’a:ka motivation is determined through collaboration of my own motivations to learn the language and the motivations of my

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<sup>37</sup> Noels.

<sup>38</sup> Noels.

interviewees as we are all motivated individuals. Gardner defines motivated individuals as those who:

“expend effort in attaining the goal, they show persistence, and they attend to the tasks necessary to achieve the goals. They have a strong desire to attain their goal, and they enjoy the activities necessary to achieve their goal. They are aroused in seeking their goals, they have expectancies about their successes and failures, and they demonstrate self-efficacy in that they are self-confident about their achievements. Finally, they have reasons for their behaviour, and these reasons are often called motives.” (Gardner 243)

According to Gardner’s definition, I could not be categorized as a motivated individual in my past desires to learn an indigenous language. I would argue that Gardner would categorize me now as a motivated individual in my attempt to learn the Onyota’a:ka language. I would also argue that Gardner would describe my interviewees as motivated individuals.

Howard has spent the last few decades dedicated to teaching and helping others learn the Onyota’a:ka language. He began as a concerned father who wanted his children to learn the language. With his help, Tsiniyukwaliho:t^ was built and a new education option was provided to the community. This option focused on the Onyota’a:ka language and the Onyota’a:ka way of life. He contributes not only as a teacher but with fundraising endeavours and trips to and from Oneida, Wisconsin to collaborate with other Onyota’a:ka about language revitalization.

Olive has been involved with language initiatives within the community for sixteen years. She has been a part of language committees, took a native language-teaching course at university, was a teaching assistant and now teaches at the Oneida Language and Cultural Centre. At the age of sixty-six, she still continues to spend her

time teaching the language and helping to organize language initiatives within the community.

Lo:t^t left school in his early twenties to dedicate his time to learning the Onyota'a:ka language and the Onyota'a:ka way of life. He learnt the Onyota'a:ka language at Standing Stone School and in highschool, but the teaching was limited to vocabulary and did not focus on sentence composition. Lo:t^t has spent numerous years learning through interaction with elders and friends who know the language. He then began to spend his free time at Tsi niyukwaliho:t^ and now is a full-time teacher and teaches the children at Tsiniyukwaliho:t^ the language and teachings he knows.

Finally, Yehawí: also learned Onyota'a:ka vocabulary at Standing Stone School but was not motivated to learn the language until a few years ago. She has participated in many of the language programs and activities both in the community and in London, Ontario, the closest municipality. Yehawí: is currently an active member in the Master-Apprentice Program within the community and dedicates her time to learning the language.

These four individuals expend effort into language learning and teaching. They are persistent and are participants in the many initiatives enacted in the community. These four individuals also show a love for the language and are intent on achieving their goal of teaching or learning. Howard, Olive, Lo:t^t, and Yehawí: are four motivated individuals.

I have discussed responsibility and its impacts on one's commitment to learning the language. A sense of responsibility can be a motivation for learning the language. Personally, I am motivated by my sense of responsibility that is born in my relationships

with my family, my community and the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka people. On top of my sense of responsibility, I am motivated to learn the Onyota'a:ka language to serve several other motives.

At the beginning of my language learning I was motivated by the urgency of the Onyota'a:ka situation. When I was in the community it astounded me to see that hardly anyone speaks the language anymore. I would hear stories about being able to go to the store and converse with the cashier in the language. I sometimes wonder whether we would ever get back to that. It also pained me when I saw the same few speakers trying to teach the language as there are not many left that are capable of handling the demands of teaching. This was one of my primary motivations for learning the language.

The language itself, the idea that it has existed for so long as part of the Onyota'a:ka people, also motivated me. The Onyota'a:ka language is one of the most beautiful sounding languages I have heard. When I hear the language I sometimes simply enjoy listening to it as it has its own unique rhythm.

I am also motivated to learn the language to pass it on to future generations within my family. My nieces, Wahsutí:yo and Teyoswáthe, are integral in my motivation because I want to pass the language on to them. To date, they can both introduce themselves and they both know a small vocabulary. I hope to be able to pass on more of my language knowledge to them. Further, I hope to one day have children and be able to speak to them in Onyota'a:ka. This is my biggest dream and one of my strongest motivations for learning the language.

As I began to learn about the traditional beliefs of the Onyota'a:ka, I started to be motivated by other things. I became motivated to be able to communicate with the

physical and spiritual world. I learnt how to properly thank plants before I picked them and how to properly thank an animal after its death as my partner is a hunter. I was also motivated to be able to communicate with the spiritual world. I learnt how to speak to the spirits in terms of the medicines.

Finally, with more knowledge of Onyota'a:ka beliefs I began to be motivated by the notion of liberating an intended Onyota'a:ka existence. I began to believe that there exists an Onyota'a:ka nature innate that will be freed through the learning of the language.

Onyota'a:ka motivation is rooted in the urgency of the language situation. Many fluent speakers are elderly and dying. This feeling of urgency motivates Onyota'a:ka language speakers and learners. The interviewees all expressed a sense of urgency and how it has motivated them to learn. Yehawí: expresses frustration with people who are not learning the language: “look how many grandmas we have right now, they are going quickly. Two years ago there was about two hundred and in that time till now, there is under a hundred speakers left. There is not that many. Some communities only have two or three like Oneida, Wisconsin. They can count on their hands how many speakers they have.” (Yehawí:) Yehawí: is angered by others who are not participating in language activities and do not see the urgency in the matter. Lo:t^t was so motivated by the urgency of the language situation that he quit school in his early twenties to learn the language full time. At the time he thought, “right now we still have a few people ... we still have a few older guys I can go to. Right now I need to be spending time with the older people instead of going to college and school. That school is always going to be

there.” (Lo:t^t) This sense of urgency felt by the interviewees is what motivates them to learn the language.

Onyota’a:ka motivation is concerned with the survival of the language itself. Indigenous languages are beautiful systems of sound and communication that have existed for thousands of years. Learning the language because one is motivated by the existence of the language itself is to see the beauty in the sound and systems of an indigenous language. The language itself is what motivates Yehawí:. She explains that to hear the language motivates her to learn,

“watching the older ones speak, when they speak to each other or I hear it on the radio, that just motivates me, like one day I will know what that means. As soon as they start talking, I just want to be right in it, in the conversation. I feel like I am right there, it is just so close. ... When I was a summer student at N’Amerind [London, Ontario, Friendship Centre] I used to work with the Life Long Care program. They would have lunch and bingo every Tuesday. I used to go there. I was helping out as a summer student but after awhile, I started forming relationships with those grandmas so I volunteered. I would just go there every other Tuesday and catch up with them. What I would do was just sit there. I knew when they were talking about me but they would talk in the language. I would just sit there and listen to them talk and that was a motivator for me.” (Yehawí:)

Yehawí: connects to the sound of the Onyota’a:ka language and it is this sound that is a motivation.

The Onyota’a:ka language continues to exist through the transmission of language from generation to generation. Olive spoke about how passing the language onto the future generations is one of her strongest motivations to continue teaching,

“I’m not passing my language down and I’m sixty-six years old. When I go, I’m taking my language with me. I can’t say that I’m going to leave my language with my daughter, I can’t say that. I’ve made up my mind and that’s my passion, I’m going to pass it on to somebody. Even if it is not my own children, somebody that is willing to take it. We are here, as elders, as speakers, trying to offer this to our kids, our people.” (Olive)



Olive is an example of many people, who, although fluent, chose not to teach their children the language. Olive now feels a sense of motivation to pass the language on. Yehawí: also expressed motivation in passing the language to the next generation. She wants to pass the language on to her children because, “for me it’s knowing I can pass something on because someone passed it on to me. That is what I intend to do, when I have more children and with my daughter now. I want to make sure the language stays in the family, in the home.” (Yehawí:) Passing the language on to the next generation is a strong motivator for Onyota’a:ka people.

When Onyota’a:ka start to learn and believe Onyota’a:ka traditional beliefs, more motivations to learn the language arise. Onyota’a:ka beliefs dictate that language is necessary for many things. First, language is necessary for communication with the physical world. Without this communication, Onyota’a:ka belief states that the physical survival of the people is at risk. The subsequent understanding of the necessity of language for physical survival motivates the Onyota’a:ka to learn the language. Lo:t^t explains how the language is necessary for communication with the physical world and how physical survival is dependent on this communication: “We can’t pick medicine and put tobacco down using English and we can’t do our medicine ceremonies in English. If we have another epidemic come along and they talk about this influenza, avian flu, we have medicine to stop it, to help us get through it so that we are going to survive. That is what their doctors are looking for. They are looking at science to provide that and we use what the Creator provided for us.” (Lo:t^t) Onyota’a:ka beliefs dictate that the physical survival of the Onyota’a:ka people is dependent on our ability to communicate with the

physical world and therefore this motivates Onyota'a:ka who believe in the traditional teachings to learn the language.

Lo:t^t also speaks about communication with the spiritual world such as communication with the Creator and medicine societies and how this allows for the continued Onyota'a:ka physical survival. This is another motivator for Onyota'a:ka people who follow Onyota'a:ka traditional beliefs. Lo:t^t explains that:

“it [small pox] killed some of our people but we knew how to stop it and that is what we did. We went back to our ways, we burned tobacco and we asked the Creator what to do. It was our medicine societies that helped us. If that is what we need to do again, then that is what we will do. But if we can't do that, if we don't know our language and we don't understand those things that come to us, because the answers will come to us. If we don't have the ability to understand the answers when they are presented to us then we will be lost too. (Lo:t^t)

Onyota'a:ka motivation is rooted in communication with the spiritual world because Onyota'a:ka beliefs dictate that it is necessary to be able to fight diseases that could harm our people.

Spiritual survival in the sense of the after-life is dependent on the ability to communicate in the language. In the Onyota'a:ka belief system, when we die we return to the skyworld. Lo:t^t explains the necessity of the language in terms of our spiritual survival,

“In the skyworld, our ancestors are not going to speak English. They are going to speak unkwehuwené:ke [indigenous languages]. When we pass away, we are going to come to a road with a fork in it, there is going to be one way with just a few footprints going that way and another way with lots of footprints. At the split, that is where the four beings are going to be waiting for you. On the other side there is going to be another four beings. One road is Deyalukawako's road or Shukwaya'tísu's road, the other is his brother's road. If we do everything according to what the Creator told us then when we get up there, the four beings are going to ask us, what is your name, Náhte' yesayáts. Are you going to be able to understand what they are asking you? Then they will ask Náhte' Nis^'talót^,' what clan are you? Then they are going to look at you to see if you are dressed in your outfit. If you are able to do those things, if you know your name, your clan,

and you have your outfit on, then they are going to let you pass into Creator's land. The other thing they are going to ask you for, is a song – if you are man. It's your name, your clan, your song, the ability to speak your language and your outfit. In order to get through there. For women, you don't need to have a song because women give life, which is part of their responsibility. (Lo:t^t)

According to this belief, Onyota'a:ka spiritual survival is dependent on communication in the language as it is a requirement for entry into the skyworld and as it is needed to communicate with others in skyworld. This also motivates Onyota'a:ka that follow the traditional teachings.

Within the interviews, a sense that there is an intended existence for Onyota'a:ka people arose and that Onyota'a:ka people are motivated by a desire to liberate this intended existence.<sup>39</sup> In the story, the animals say to the sad woman, “this is not right, this is not the way Creator intended people to be.” Their statement implies that there is an intended existence for human beings. In terms of the story, the animals are explaining that Creator did not intend for human beings to be sad for long periods of time. Lo:t^t explains that Onyota'a:ka belief tell us that each nation had an intended existence, an existence outlined and given by the Creator,

“Really we are all human beings. What makes us different, what makes us distinct is what the Creator gave to us in the beginning. In the beginning, the Creator gave the La'slu:ni: (Carries an axe / White people) their own ways, what they had to follow. They forgot, they forgot about who they were. The Latihú:tsi (black people), the same thing. He gave them their ways, their ceremonies, their language. If you go to Africa then you can find people, Latihú:tsi that still speak their language and still practice their ceremonies. Same thing if you go to Asia. Shukwaya'tisu gave them their ceremonies, their language, everything.” (Lo:t^t)

According to this teaching each nation has an intended existence that includes an intended language and an intended way of life.

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<sup>39</sup> The term intended existence is not academic in nature but in reference to the continuing story that begins each episode of thought throughout the paper.

Lo:t^t took the idea of an intended existence and related it to the Kaswentha or Two Row wampum. The Kaswentha teaches us about the separation between Unkwehu:we and settler society and is accompanied by an analogy of a canoe and a ship travelling down the same river. The canoe holds the Unkwehu:we people and everything associated with being Unkwehu:we and the ship holds the settler society and everything associated with being a settler. The canoe represents an intended unkwehu:we existence that is separate from settler society,

“You go back to that two row wampum and that’s where it is, one path is ours, the other path is theirs. What is told to us is that we follow what is in our path what is in our canoe and that is what is following that one road. The canoe is going down the river and everything that was given to us by the Creator is in that canoe and that is what we are supposed to carry with us. What the white people, that is what is in their ship when they came across the ocean. That is what was given to them or what they adopted. Those were the things that they are going to try and push on us. Some people are going to want them. That is what the older people say. ...If that is all we are concerned with is what they brought then we are going to find ourselves not being able to get along and find ourselves falling into the river instead of maintaining our canoe and following that path that was given to us in the beginning.” (Lo:t^t)

The Kaswentha explains that unkwehu:we and settler society were originally intended to be separate. As stated above, those in the ship or settler society will try to push their existence on to unkwehu:we people as settler society has done since its arrival.

In *The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom*, Michel Foucault cautions us to be sceptical of the concept of ‘liberation’ of a human nature suppressed by oppression in its various forms:

“I have always been somewhat suspicious of the notion of liberation, because if it is not treated with precautions and within certain limits, one runs the risk of falling back on the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression. According to this hypothesis, all that is required is to break these repressive deadlocks and man will be reconciled with himself, rediscover his nature and

regain contact with his origin, and re-establish a full and positive relationship with himself. I think this idea should not be accepted without scrutiny.” (Rabinow 282)

Foucault is sceptical of the intended existence that the Onyota’a:ka traditional teachings describe and that processes of settler society pushing their existence on unkwehu:we people has concealed this intended existence. Foucault also does not believe that removing the ‘deadlocks,’ or the beliefs and ideas that constitute our colonial mentalities can free this intended existence. However Foucault and Onyota’a:ka differ as Onyota’a:ka are motivated to learn the language in order to liberate an intended existence.

With a desire to liberate an intended existence, Onyota’a:ka are motivated to learn the language, because:

“insofar as gaining a deep and profound appreciation for the teachings and wisdom within Onkwewonwe cultures is the path to transformation and decolonization on a personal level, one can only begin the journey by committing oneself to understanding the Onkwewonwe spirit and mentality uniquely contained and conveyed in Onkwewenna, indigenous languages. In understanding our self-identity, who we are as people, even in our names and the way we refer to ourselves, our languages provide the means of confidently re-rooting ourselves in the solid ground of our heritage.” (Alfred 256)

As believers of Onyota’a:ka traditional teachings, Lo:t^t and Howard are motivated by the liberation of an intended Onyota’a:ka existence. For Lo:t^t it is about the intended existence separate from settler society:

“I had to ask myself, being a part of that education system and looking at going to college or going to university and asking what am doing it for? So I can get a good job, so I can make lots of money and I can be successful. But success in terms of what, in terms of western society, having lots of money, having a nice car, having a nice house, that is what I was looking at. I came to that understanding, the realization that those things aren’t important. If I want to be the best anything, I don’t want to be the best I can be in western society, I want to be the best person according to our society. According to who we are as Unkwehu:we. So that’s what I had to look at, if I’m going to be anything then I

am going to be the best Unkwehu:we I can be. Because that is who I am. I know that no matter what I do, when I go out there that is who they are going to see, they aren't going to see somebody who they can look at as an equal they are going to see an Unkwehu:we first. That's what I looked at and I thought well, if I am going to do that then I have to go home and I need to do what I need to do to look at what does that mean to be Unkwehu:we." (Lo:t^t)

For Lo:t^t going home and learning the language are how he began to understand what it means to be Unkwehu:we. Howard also spoke about being motivated by the liberation of an intended existence:

"The values, the way we look at the world, the way we give thanks to this world is different, our whole lifestyle is completely different from non-native society. To me, I've been out there, I've worked out there, there is nothing that appeals to me out there. In a sense, it's wasting your time, wasting your life. I'd rather do things in my life that is about who I am and the way we look at our world, the reason why we do our ceremonies, the reason our language is important."  
(Howard)

Liberating the existence that the Creator intended Onyota'a:ka to experience then motivates Onyota'a:ka people who believe in the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka.

## The Onyota'a:ka Way of Life

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When I began this project I started under the assumption that learning my language would end the sadness I described at the beginning of this thesis. I focused solely on learning the Onyota'a:ka language and I did not concern myself with learning about other aspects of the Onyota'a:ka way of life. In my language learning, I chose to focus on language that reflects everyday life. To an extent, the language and the way I chose to learn helped me with my sadness, but at the same time, I felt I still needed something more.

As I continued to learn, I allowed my focus to widen and I began to learn more about the other aspects of the Onyota'a:ka way of life such as land, ceremony, medicines and song. I went on several trips to the traditional territory of the Onyota'a:ka in New York State, I attended ceremonies at the longhouse, and I took an active role in my family's medicine practices, and I learnt and participated in community medicine. I also started to sing.

Like the woman in the story, I, too, was stunned by the sound of the water drum. I can remember the first time I heard my friend Yehawí: sing with a water drum. We were both working at the Friendship Centre in London, Ontario. We worked in the same room but our work areas were divided by a large partition. One day I heard someone playing the water drum and singing. I remember wondering who was singing so beautifully and with such a strong voice. I did not think it was Yehawí: because she was always so shy and quiet. It was Yehawí: singing. Her voice was so powerful and deep and she steadily beat the water drum. After I heard her sing, I asked her to teach me. We practiced at work

for a couple weeks and then she invited me to join her singing group and I have been singing since then.

When I think about singing and the sound of the water drum I think about my friend Lo:t^t . It is a pretty amazing experience to hear Lo:t^t sing whether he is singing at our community socials, in ceremony, or just on the porch of the longhouse. Lo:t^t has one of the best male voices I have ever heard and he also has a large memory bank of songs. If he sings slowly, I tend to feel relaxed and when he sings up-tempo I am energized.

I feel so good after hearing the water drum. If I am upset or someone else is upset, I will pull out my drum and play for myself or for them. The water drum has always been able to help me in sad times. Learning to play the water drum and singing our traditional Onyota'a:ka songs have meant just as much as learning the language. Therefore, in terms of how can we as Onyota'a:ka individuals and as an Onyota'a:ka community make the commitment to learning the language, it is important to re-evaluate the basis or root of my original assumption that language alone could end my sadness.

The basis for my original understanding of language was my acceptance of linguistic and community discourses as they position language as superior and separate to other aspects of the indigenous way of life and the compartmentalization of language into the categories of everyday language and ceremonial language.

Linguistic discourse does recognize a connection between language and the indigenous way of life. According to Hinton, "language and culture are closely intertwined. One important reason many people want to learn their ancestral language is that they want to regain access to traditional cultural practices and traditional values. It is



often said that language is the key to and the heart of culture.” (Hinton 9) Although linguistic discourse recognizes a connection between language and the indigenous way of life, linguistics position language as the ‘key’ or the ‘heart’ of the indigenous way of life. This labelling isolates language and puts it in a position of superiority over other aspects of the indigenous way of life.

The notion that language is superior is also reflected in community discourse. The importance I put on language at the beginning of my learning was largely derived from the narratives and voices of the community that pushed language as the, “prima facie evidence of indigeneity.” (Alfred 245) In *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, Alfred interviews Kawinehta, a woman from the Six Nations reserve in Ontario. She argues that language is everything about being Unkwehu:we,

“Before anything else you have to have the language. What good is knowing all those other things if you don’t know the language? Like if you know June is strawberry time, what good is it if you can’t do the ceremony that goes with that? And when you have a meeting, if you don’t have the Thanksgiving Address, everybody’s going to be thinking what they want to think, they’re not going to think as one. I think language is the whole thing: it’s beliefs, its culture, its custom, it’s what’s important.” (Alfred 184)

Kawinehta reflects Hinton’s description of language as the ‘key’ or ‘heart’ of the indigenous way of life. Again, language is positioned as superior to the other aspects of the indigenous way of life.

Linguistic discourse also allows for the separation of language and the indigenous way of life by arguing that language can be learned without attachment to culture. In *The Green Book of Language Revitalization In Practice*, Hinton states that, “one does not automatically gain the culture by learning the language. Language is a very changeable form of behaviour, and if language is taught outside of and without reference to the

traditional culture, then that language will be devoid of the traditional culture.” (Hinton 9) As discussed in the literature review, there is language pedagogy that is not rooted in indigenous philosophy still being put forth as a viable option for indigenous language pedagogy and is still being implemented to learn indigenous languages. Hinton’s statement also shows how linguistic discourse sees and upholds a distinction between everyday and ceremonial language.

Olive spoke about the difference between everyday language and ceremonial language in our interview together. She refers to ceremonial language as the ‘high language.’ She says that although everyday language is used in the longhouse, you do not hear ceremonial language outside of ceremony.<sup>40</sup> Both Olive and Howard refer to ceremonial language as being more advanced than everyday speech. Howard equated ceremonial language to a university education and explained that individuals need to work up to this advanced level of language,

“We have to put ourselves at their [the children’s] level. We cannot expect to bring them to this level [points to longhouse]. In my learning, when I was younger, no one ever sat down and told me the creation story. No one ever sat down and told me about the clan system and what the ceremonies meant. I remember going to the longhouse. I had my little outfit on and I was dancing. My grandmother told me I had to dance and my grandfather was telling me that I had to do this and that. It was a belonging and safeness. I knew we had to go there, I knew we had to do something but I didn’t really understand what it was. It wasn’t until I was older, that they told me what this and that means and why we do this.” (Howard)

Howard argues that he did not learn ‘ceremonial language’ until he was older. In his own description of his childhood we see that he was taught about ceremony and was exposed to ceremonial language throughout childhood. Although he was not asked to speak at

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<sup>40</sup> Olive Elm, Interview, September 2006.

ceremonies and specifically learn about ceremony until he was older, he learned through observation as a child.

In our interview together, Olive rhetorically questioned whether historically we used ceremonial language everyday.<sup>41</sup> In the past, our daily lives were intertwined and involved with ceremony and therefore our ceremonial language was also more intertwined and involved in our everyday lives. The focus of our everyday lives was simpler in that we focused on survival. Today, some Unkwehu:we still practice and believe in our longhouse teachings, some Unkwehu:we have decided to practice and believe in Christianity, and some Unkwehu:we believe one of many other belief systems now known by our people through interaction with settler society. Our everyday lives have changed and have become less spiritual in their evolution. Today we focus on the necessities of western society such as school and earning an income. Our everyday language is reflective of this change in focus. The compartmentalization of language into everyday and ceremonial is a reflection of the evolution of our society away from our spirituality, the many options of beliefs available to our community, and consequently the acceptance of these beliefs by many community members.

The compartmentalization of language into everyday and ceremonial is also rooted in the adoption of the English language and the subsequent lack of language fluency within the community. Because most people are no longer fluent, ceremonial language is often taught as a prescribed outline such as the Kanuhelatunksla. The Kanuhelatunksla is one of the ways with which Haudenosaunee give thanks to all of creation. The speaker begins by giving thanks for the people, giving thanks for everything on the earth and in the sky, and ends by thanking the Creator. This opening

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<sup>41</sup> Olive Elm, Interview, September 2006.

address is said at the beginning and end of all ceremonial gatherings and important meetings. The Kanuhelatunksla is a living entity that changes with every fluent speaker. Each fluent speaker can elaborate on each item of the Kanuhelatunksla, making every recitation different but at the same time following a general format. Since today most people lack fluent language ability, the Kanuhelatunksla is often taught as a speech with a prescribed order and sentences to learn. A fluent speaker intertwines ‘everyday language’ as part of the Kanuhelatunksla. Without fluency, everyday language and ceremonial language appear more separate. Olive compared my knowledge of the Kanuhelatunksla as a new language learner to herself, a fluent language speaker:

“you give thanks to the trees because you get your sugar from it. That’s how you learned. But I learned that trees also give us shade, they give us warmth in the wintertime because of the wood, and they give us beauty. If that was all said, you would not understand because you just learned the outline.” (Olive)

The link between everyday language and ceremonial language is in the fluent elaborative description of the trees. My lack of fluency makes the Kanuhelatunksla appear very different from everyday speech. In the past, when my Onyota’a:ka community had more fluent speakers the separation between everyday and ceremonial language was nonexistent.

Part of the compartmentalization of language is rooted in the difference between the European lens and the indigenous lens. Leroy Little Bear explains the difference between European languages and Unkwehu:we languages in Taiaiake Alfred’s book, *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Little Bear states that: “European languages, ... centre on nouns and are concerned with naming things, ascribing traits, and making judgements. Onkwehunwe languages are structured on verbs; they communicate through descriptions of movement and activity.” (Alfred 14) With the push and later

acceptance of Western languages on indigenous territories, including Onyota'a:ka territory, indigenous mind frames have changed, and we have adopted a new lens and now look at language as Europeans look at their own languages. This is what leads us to categorize language into everyday and ceremonial.

The compartmentalization of language into 'everyday' and 'ceremonial' is rooted in our colonization. Our movement away from the spiritual, our lack of fluency, and seeing the world through the settler's lens is all a result of the colonization of indigenous peoples. Logically, prior to contact our lives were different. We were a people unaffected by colonialism and focused on one way of being in the world taught to us through our traditional teachings. We spoke fluent indigenous languages and we saw the world from our own indigenous perspective. To compartmentalize language in this way is to accept our colonization. Once I re-evaluated the root of my understanding of language as superior and separable from the indigenous way of life and re-evaluated the compartmentalization of language into everyday and ceremonial, in my mind I began to reposition the Onyota'a:ka language in respect to the Onyota'a:ka way of life.

Because of the strong effect the water drum and song has had on me personally, I began to connect language and song as having a commonality and being equal. I then began to logically apply this commonality to land, ceremony, and medicine. All the aspects of the Onyota'a:ka way of life share the commonality of communicative sound. For myself, all aspects of the indigenous way of life have moved me emotionally. Land, ceremony, medicine, song and language have all touched my sadness in some way. What I remember most about what specifically touched me are the sounds that communicate.

Linguists recognize songs as a form of language and recognize the linguistic benefits that songs can provide. In *Havasupai Songs*, Hinton explains the importance of songs in terms of further understanding language itself,

“Reduction and deletion rules that operate in spoken language are often inoperative in songs, thus allowing us to see unreduced versions of words and sentences that would otherwise be very difficult to obtain... We can also gain a good deal of semantic and syntactic understanding of a language by looking at it in sung form, because of the unusual ways in which language is used in songs. Forms that we do not know whether to segment may, in a song, be broken up and permuted in ways that show that they are indeed segmentable. Certain contractions that are rare in spoken language are used repeatedly in the songs in various ways, giving us an excellent body of data on aspects of language that we might not otherwise be able to analyze adequately. Constructions and lexical items will be used in highly unusual ways in songs too, and an analysis of the semantic extensions necessary to allow for these usages can give us a new depth of insight into their meanings.” (Hinton 3)

According to Hinton, songs are important tools to further understand Unkwehu:we languages. Although Hinton continues to position language as superior, she makes a strong connection between language and song.

Songs serve a much greater function than simply providing further insight into language; songs can communicate like language. In *Flutes of Fire*, Hinton explains what she discovered about the communicative and unifying power of singing in the case of the Dieguenos and Kiliwas:

“these two tribes shared no language in common and most of the individuals who were at this gathering had never seen each other before. Yet, they all knew the same songs. And the songs that weren’t known to both tribes nevertheless belonged to genres known to both, so singing along was easy. ... You can’t help but realize, as you are dancing back and forth, vibrating with music, that this form of intertribal communication has been important for thousands of years – song overcoming the barriers of language and creating unity, asserting kinship, passed from one community to the next by decades and centuries and millennia of intertribal gatherings.” (Hinton 41-42)

Hinton shows that songs can unify across tribal lines and can communicate friendship and good sentiments. Hinton looked at intertribal communication (but I also wanted to know about communication between people of the same community.)

The use of songs has always been an important aspect of the Onyota'a:ka way of life. Looking at the Onyota'a:ka history, we see that songs played a more integral part in communicating than they do now. According to Howard, we communicated with song as much as we did with language,

“If we look at our people historically, we could almost say we were a society that sang everything that we did. In the beginning, when they went hunting they would sing, that is the song Lah<sup>^</sup>tésh<sub>a</sub> [Standing Quiver Dance]. They would sing through the bushes wherever they were going. Everything they did was with singing. When they were going to give thanksgiving they sang Ostowa<sup>^</sup>kó:w<sub>a</sub>. Ostowa<sup>^</sup>kó:w<sub>a</sub> is like the opening [Kanuhelatunksla], that is what you are singing. The most amazing songs you'll hear are when we have our condolence. Those songs are so awesome, the songs that they sing to those men. It's like they are talking to them but they are singing. That is what draws them, that is what clears their minds... and everything we did socially, we sang and we sing when we do our medicines.” (Howard)

The examples provided by Howard show the commonality between language and song. He shows that both language and song are used to communicate within the Onyota'a:ka way of life.

When we look at language and song as different sounds that communicate, language no longer is the unique entity it has developed into over the years. Language is connected to other sounds such as songs because they are both capable of communicating. Hinton explains that groups can also communicate with “gestures, smiles, touch, eating and drinking together, dancing and singing.” (Hinton 41) Onyota'a:ka people also communicate using these social interactions. When I think of communicative sound, there are numerous other sounds in the Onyota'a:ka way of life

that are communicative and that personally, have communicated powerful messages. The sound of water falling at Chittenango Falls<sup>42</sup> in New York State communicates a sense of belonging. The sounds of clapping and cries at ceremony communicate unity; the sounds of our masks men communicate hard working medicine; and the sounds at our wakes communicate the abrupt end of a life. These sounds are like songs and are like language in that they communicate a message. Looking at language as sound positions language as equal to other sounds and as just one sound within the Onyota'a:ka way of life.

In *Peoplehood*, Holm, Pearson, and Chavis discuss what they term the "Peoplehood Matrix." The Peoplehood Matrix is made up of four factors that contribute to peoplehood or group identity: language, sacred history, place territory, and ceremonial cycle.<sup>43</sup> The authors state that, "Language is not primary; it is simply an equal part of the matrix." (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 19) This statement reflects my new conception of the Onyota'a:ka language in relation to the Onyota'a:ka way of life and at the same time reflects a view of language that is rooted in the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka.

In *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*, Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine echo the position of language put forth by Holm, Pearson, and Chavis. They position language as an equal part of the larger political matrix of indigenous peoples. They argue that language death is not just a language issue but that there are numerous non-linguistic factors that contribute:

"languages do not exist in a vacuum. In fact, the term *ecology* is a particularly apt one to use in connection with languages, in several senses. The word ecology

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<sup>42</sup> Chittenango Falls is located in New York State. This water fall is along where the Onyota'a:ka and Haudenosaunee believe the Peacemaker travelled.

<sup>43</sup> Holm, Tom, Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis, "Peoplehood: A model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies," *Wicazo Sa Review*, Spring (2003): 12-13.



comes from the Greek *oikos*, meaning ‘home.’ A language can only thrive to the extent that there is a functioning community speaking it, and passing it on from parent to child at home. A community can only function where there is a decent environment to live in, and a sustainable economic system. To understand why languages are born, and why they die, then, entails looking not just at the languages themselves, but at all aspects of the lives of the people who speak them.” (Nettle and Romaine 79)

Nettle and Romaine link language to home or land, to community, to the environment, and to a sustainable economic system. They reflect an understanding of the importance of language but also the importance of other aspects of the political group identity.

Nettle and Romaine show how language is misconstrued as superior and isolated in their explanation of language and conflict:

“because languages and dialects are often potent symbols of class, gender, ethnicity, religion and other differences, it is easy to think that language underlies conflict. Yet disputes involving language are not really about language, but instead about fundamental inequalities between groups who happen to speak different languages. It is easy to lose sight of this point when language is often such a prominent symbol in the much larger struggle for minority rights.” (Nettle and Romaine 19)

Thus, because language is such a visual marker of conflict many assume that it is the core of the conflict. In actuality, the conflict is rooted in a struggle for more than language; it is rooted in the struggle for the indigenous way of life.

Onyota’a:ka traditional teachings position language as an equal part and connected to the indigenous way of life. The Onyota’a:ka traditional teachings tell us that language is one of the original gifts given to us by the Creator at the beginning of our time on the earth. Lo:t^t explains, “it is all a part of our culture, what was given to us in the beginning. You will not understand that unless you go back and listen to those stories about where it came from originally. We always have to go back and look at our creation story and our understanding of who we are. We always go back and look at how things

began, how things were intended for us to be.” (Lo:t^t) When we go back and look at our creation story, we see the intention for language to be equal to the other gifts given by the Creator. Sky Woman brought few things with her when she fell from the skyworld, the most notable being tobacco and strawberries. These two items are integral to the Onyota’a:ka way of life. But she also brought the language from the skyworld as that is what she spoke when she landed on the turtle’s back. As was discussed under the motivation heading, when we return to skyworld, the people will be speaking Onyota’a:ka just as they did when sky woman fell. When we look at language from a perspective rooted in the Onyota’a:ka creation story, language is a gift given to us in the beginning no greater than any other gift.

Lo:t^t speaks firmly about not separating language from our way of life, “it’s all a part of culture. When we talk about culture, language and songs are a part of that. You cannot separate those things. You cannot separate language, you cannot separate singing, and you cannot separate ceremony. All of those things are a part of who we are. That is what we are taught.” (Lo:t^t) Lot^t explains that all these things land, ceremony, medicine, song, and language are all a part of who we are as a people; they are all part of our group identity and cannot be separated. This goes back to Holm, Pearson and Chavis’s peoplehood matrix and the interconnectivity of the four factors.

## The Conclusion

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Writing this conclusion is the most difficult part about writing this thesis because I do not have an all encompassing solution to my original question. In the end, I can only draw conclusions on how I as an Onyota'a:ka individual have been able to make a commitment and to make some progress learning the language.

I even question whether others would consider me committed to language learning. I have learned quite a bit of Onyota'a:ka vocabulary; I am able to converse with others in the language to a certain extent; I know numerous ceremonial speeches; I have learned how to conjugate full sentences; I was recently asked to teach the language to beginners; and I continue to learn the language today. However, I am not even close to fluency; I continue to spend the majority of my day working on school and employment, and I admit that the language is not my sole focus in life. This thesis itself is a good indication of this. I have dedicated many hours to writing this thesis and although it discusses the Onyota'a:ka language, it is also about the completion of my Master of Indigenous Governance degree and has taken me away from learning the language because of the hours required to research and write. All this being said, I consider myself committed, and whether someone else would consider me committed really comes down to his or her definition of commitment.

This makes me realize that I have yet to define the term commitment in my thesis. In *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, Taiaiake Alfred questions commitment as a quality,

“What is this quality? Internal strength, perseverance, tenacity, and indomitable will are all traits that characterize people and groups who have been successful in transforming themselves, their environments, and their adversaries. These traits reflect an unbreakable commitment to the struggle for truth that is the backbone of

any movement for change on a personal or societal level. Onkwehonwe have already demonstrated incredible commitment and courage simply in surviving the constant and vicious assaults from colonial forces on their dignity and on the very idea of their existences over the past 500 years. The challenge for those of us seeking to move beyond mere survival, to engender social and political movements taking us to a place beyond colonialism, is to convince Onkwehonwe to draw on our inherent and internal resources of strength and to channel them into forms of energy that are capable of engaging the forces that keep us tied to colonial mentality and reality.” (Alfred 179)

I love this definition of commitment because it is focused on unkwehu:we people involved in an ongoing process against colonial forces. From my experience as an Onyota’a:ka individual trying to commit to language learning, unkwehu:we people create commitment; it is an ongoing process, and it is about fighting the colonial forces.

The commitment process began for me with an internal journey of self-awareness. The recognition of sadness within myself and the recognition of a need was also a realization of indigenous colonization, the colonial mentality, and personally, the extent to which I was colonized. For me as an Onyota’a:ka individual trying to commit to language learning this was a necessary first step. I took stock of my life experiences and critically looked at them for their colonial influences.

The next step in my commitment to language learning was evaluating the various pedagogy that exists and that are in place in my Onyota’a:ka community. Besides evaluating the academic literature, I also took part in the different pedagogies. I spent time with Olive Elm learning how to read and write the Onyota’a:ka language. I went to Tsi’ Niyukwalihó:t^ where the classes replicated language nest format. I spent time with Norma Jamieson at her house learning one-on-one as dictated by the Master-Apprentice format. I spent time at Standing Stone School and observed the language integration outlined as immersion. I have used dictionaries and audiovisual documentation at home alone. I have tried every language pedagogy available within the Onyota’a:ka community

and I quickly came to the conclusion that whether any of these pedagogy are success is dependent on the people. Therefore my ability to commit is entirely dependent on myself.

An enormous part of my continual commitment is a realization of responsibility. Prior to trying to learn the Onyota'a:ka language, I never felt a sense of responsibility and I have never considered myself committed to language learning. I directly relate my sense of responsibility to my continued commitment to language. Part of the commitment process is understanding where this responsibility comes from. Unlike the child, the mother, and the fluent speaker, responsibility is not delegated to individuals like myself that do not fit within the archetypal structure. My sense of responsibility was not delegated, but grew in my relationships with family, community, and the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka. The conclusions I drew in terms of how can I as an Onyota'a:ka individual commit to language learning is that the commitment process is always in relation to family, community, and the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka people.

Another important conclusion about the commitment process involves motivation. Again, prior to this attempt to learn the Onyota'a:ka language I have never felt truly motivated. Part of the commitment process is an understanding of motivation and the motivated individual. Motivation is the effort put forth because of a particular reason. Motivation is not the reason itself. In order to understand motivation, I looked at the academic categorizations of motivation and was hard pressed to apply them to the Onyota'a:ka situation. As part of the commitment process, I needed to understand the motives that were truly motivating me to continue to commit to language learning. In the motivation section, I divided my motivations into two groups: those motivations that

existed prior to learning and believing in the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka people, and those motivations that grew from this learning and belief. Prior to the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka, my motivations were focused on the urgency of the language situation, the language itself and the transmission of language across generations. Post Onyota'a:ka traditional teachings, my motivations focused on communication with the physical and spiritual world and by the regeneration of an intended Onyota'a:ka existence. It was an integral part of the commitment process to understand the motivation behind the commitment and that more motivations grew from my knowledge of the traditional teachings of the Onyota'a:ka.

The most altering part of the commitment process was being able to experience song. Prior to experiencing songs, I saw language as isolated and superior to other aspects of the Onyota'a:ka way of life. It is this assumption about language that formed my original thesis question and that made me start the commitment process by focusing solely on language. This assumption was my acceptance of linguistic and community discourse and the compartmentalization of language into everyday and ceremonial. As I widened my focus of learning, I began to desire something more than the language. When I experienced song I began to link language and song together and see them as equal parts of the Onyota'a:ka way of life and as both being worthy of commitment. This led me to thoughts about the land, ceremony, and medicine. I found that all the aspects of the Onyota'a:ka way of life had one commonality which was a creation of sounds that communicate powerful messages about who I am as an Onyota'a:ka. When I thought about every aspect in these terms they became equal and one was never more superior than the other and to that effect, they were all linked in that they are part of the

Onyota'a:ka way of life. It is this that allowed me to reposition language in my mind not as superior and isolated, but as equal to land, ceremony, medicine and song. Therefore commitment to language is never commitment simply to the language but a commitment to language, land, ceremony, medicine and song equally. Therefore, in terms of how can I as an Onyota'a:ka individual make the commitment to language, it is important to understand that as Onyota'a:ka we cannot make a commitment to language alone and therefore the focus of commitment needs to be Onyota'a:ka ways.

As I attempt to conclude, I think about the story of the water drum, my interviews and the fire/spirit within. In the Onyota'a:ka language, the spirit that is symbolized by a fire is called Atunhetsla. What I learnt about Atunhetsla is that: "we all have a fire within us. At different times things happen to us in our lives and sometimes that fire is really strong but when things don't go the way we want them to go, then that fire can get low. It will make us cold. That is even what they say about when we pass on. That fire goes out and that is why are bodies get cold." (Lo:t^t) In the story, the woman's atunhetsla was low and what helped her was the sound of the water drum:

"That is what they say, that drum that they made, even though they didn't know what they made at the time. The sound that was produced went inside of that woman's ear. There was a part inside of that woman that was hurting. ... that sound carried through the air and went into her ear and wherever she wasn't feeling good, the sound of that drum went right to that spot and doctored that spot and took it away. From there, she was able to be happy again." (Lo:t^t)

Her fire was built up again by the sound of the water drum. This is one of the reasons it was given to our people. Lo:t^t told me that: "those are some of the things we were given to take care of our fire. So when our fire gets low, we know we can come to the social, we can hear that drum and those songs and it is going to lift us up, lift up our spirit and it is going to be a medicine." (Lo:t^t) This story teaches the Onyota'a:ka about many

things, but most importantly it highlights the power of the water drum but also the power of Onyota'a:ka ways.

As the woman in the story journeys from sadness to laughter, I too have journeyed a path from my feelings of sadness to a happiness that is the result of a commitment to Onyota'a:ka ways.



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