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PURSuing AN UNDERSTANDING OF RELATIONSHIP MAKING WITHIN LANGUAGE
REVITALIZATION: CONVERSATIONS WITH INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE ACTIVISTS

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REVITALIZATION: CONVERSATIONS WITH INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE ACTIVISTS

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Dedication

✧ For my sons, Winterhawk and Oh-hah-moe, and for my elders, ancestors, and the language activists here and in the future!

Maacagiraac, Hooweihoo!

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Maacagiraac and hoowehoo to my family, my ancestors, my loved ones, and those who have mentored me throughout this long journey. There are far too many names to name, and anyone who knows me, is well aware of my inability to remember names.

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You all have my heart. Our love overflows as we continue to work with each other, sharing in this long beautiful and difficult journey.

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Abstract

We are born into a universe of pre-existing relationships (kinship, ancestral lineage, social and interpersonal, environmental, economic, political, etc.), in addition to the many relationships made intentionally or inadvertently throughout our lives. Within the context of community-based Native American and Indigenous language acquisition and revitalization (LAR), how does the presence or lack of wellness and holism impact the group members' abilities to combat community-based internal language endangerment? Pursuing an understanding of Indigenous relationship making in adult language learning groups reveals an interconnected network of relationships amongst mentors, mentees, and peers to maintain and sustain long-term LAR efforts. Through this multivocal experimental ethnography, an autoethnographic narrative is combined with interdisciplinary research and transcultural conversations with long-term Indigenous language activists (champions, warriors, or practitioners). The Indigenous experience across space and time is documented to reveal complexities of LAR life stage knowledge and an analysis of the social efficacy of LAR methodologies for wellness and positive productive social relationships.

This work utilizes Indigenous collaborative research methodologies, poetics, and meaningful visual graphic guides (illustrations) to represent processes of reflection through truth telling, storywork, and meaning making. With over 330 years of combined experience stretched across nearly a century, the Indigenous language activists' LAR journeys are discussed to unpack significant social experiences in tandem with LAR methodologies. These experiences reveal ongoing community-based issues which complicate LAR social experiences and outcomes. Ongoing internal issues raise questions about how LAR efforts are interconnected with the creation of healthy Indigenous speech communities, self-care, camaraderie, and a multiplicity of

issues causing internal language endangerment. The conversations with Indigenous language activists detail the beginnings of their LAR journeys and analyze issues of access to knowledge, gatekeepers (colonized and assimilated minds), kinship dynamics, language prestige, and lateral violence and oppression, to identify methods they have used to move beyond and resolve such issues.

At the center of this work, is seeking to understand how LAR work is relationship work. After decades of Indigenous endangered language research carried out by scholars across the world, there is now a good understanding of the technical methods of language acquisition. However, posing the questions, what is actually being revitalized and for what future, posits a deeper reflection on the definitions and creation of LAR methodologies which prioritize social wellness and teach to the creation of healthy interpersonal positive and productive relationships amongst Indigenous adult language groups.

A Note on Terminology

Native American and Indigenous individuals who have intentionally participated in language acquisition and revitalization (LAR) of their ancestral indigenous language(s) for more than a decade, are referred to as “language activists” within this dissertation. However, some who have shared their words and stories with me, don’t necessarily refer to themselves as an “activist.” Some describe themselves as language champions, practitioners, warriors, students, “revitalizationists,” first language speakers, second language speakers, and learners. My choice to use “activist” is simply because language journeys, a life committed to LAR, is based solely on *action* in some form or another.

The use of “Indigenous” represents both Native American and Indigenous people, as well as those who identify themselves by their unique cultural names. The use of the term “Indigenous” in this dissertation is employed as an inclusive term of all first peoples who have experienced Western colonization and continued impacts by colonial settler states. When necessary, the terms used by each language activist will be utilized during their specific discussions. Terms such as “Indian” and “tribal,” are used in such instances, even though contemporary efforts of decolonization pushes for the departure from such colonial descriptors. Any mistakes with proper spellings of names/words and accent marks or particular orthographies are my own.

The use of the term “ancestral language” is used to identify the language connected to the first peoples who encountered colonization. It is these languages, including their shifts over time, that are being championed, learned, and revitalized today. In reference to any assumption about the writing systems (orthographies) used to represent my own ancestral languages and those of the language activists, I’ve made every effort to utilize the spellings I’ve been provided with and

have found through my own research. However, complicating these representations is the fact that there are almost always multiple writing systems being employed within Indigenous communities. Some have been adopted by Indigenous governments or schools, while others are representations of individual spelling systems and phonetic spellings.

For example, each of my ancestral languages are being represented in written forms of the Latin/Roman alphabet and are also English language translations that may or may not be a community wide agreed upon direct translations of the ancestral language meanings. Furthermore, none of my specific ancestral languages currently have agreed upon or tribal government adopted and endorsed orthographies. Therefore, my ancestral languages written in this dissertation are representative of my own understanding of contemporary written orthographies of each language and/or my own phonetic spellings of the words and phrases I know. Fair warning, I have a bad right ear and my enunciation is still that of a language learner, not a fluent speaker. Also, I'm biased. I listen more and sound out my words according to a select group of fluent language speakers that I have relationships with and that I am more successful at understanding. These are the speakers that I gravitate towards because I have positive relationships with them.

Their specific pronunciation and enunciation are unique amongst some of the larger family groups of speakers. Added to this, the contemporary orthographies being developed today for each of my ancestral languages are combinations of a variety of writing systems found in historical ethnographic and linguistic texts and contemporary language materials created by outsider academics, different intergenerational language speakers and learners, and rogue language scholars. Each is slightly different. In short, the existence of the variety of writing systems are reflective of the vibrant speech patterns and dialects that still exist amongst the

remaining fluent speakers and the second language learners within each of my ancestral language communities. Each of my communities are still negotiating the best written representation of our oral languages. This dissertation is not intended to be an example of my ancestral languages' grammar and writing systems. It is an explication of ancestral memory and language medicine.

A Note on Font

Throughout this dissertation I utilize two types of fonts; Times New Roman for the body text, figures, and bibliography; Calibri is used for the transcriptions of the conversations (narratives) between myself and the Indigenous language activists, as well as the Meaning Making visual guides, illustrations, and scripts. These are used to signify and amplify the switch from the standard academic essay format and the personal creative narrative sections.

A Note on the structure of the Graphic Illustrations: ♦ Meaning Making Visual Guides ♦

Each graphic style illustration is a representation of a creative personal interpretation of my own meaning making process. These visual guides are used to reframe and contextualize complicated layers of information (storywork). These are also intended to elicit emotional interactions with the reader. These illustrations contain references to characters in traditional stories, such as the basket people who eat away at humans (physically and spiritually), as well as my own interpretations of historical events, oral narratives, memories, dreams, and interactions with some of the Indigenous language activists. In many of my illustrations, the stories are carried along a journey made by my own guides/helpers, Ceesha ‘Wolf’ and Naagaga ‘Snapping Turtle,’ who are medicine beings providing a commentary of humor, conscience, ethics, love, fear, and all the inbetween emotions and lessons.

Stylistically, these are a work in progress. My preference was to have only graphite sketches. After some encouragement, I began to ink the illustrations but after the first few, I disliked the hard lines of the ink. Instead of disposing of these early mistakes, I’ve kept them here as a reminder of the layers of work that I’ve given to these illustrations, and at any point in this journey, pausing and shifting styles to what feels the best a necessary part of this work.

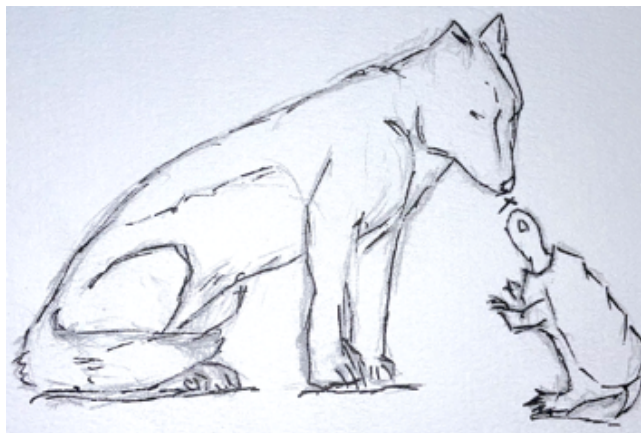


Figure 1: Ceesha ‘Wolf’ and Naagagaa ‘Snapping Turtle.’ Graphite and ink on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2019.

A Note on the structure of the Conversations with Indigenous Language Activists

Each of my conversations with Indigenous language activists were recorded and transcribed. These were then edited for length and clarity. These were provided to each speaker who chose to make additional clarifications, edits, or leave as verbatim. Each transcription is represented as a dialogue between myself and the speaker(s). In-between sections of the dialogue are meaning making reflections labled “Starlog Notes.” These are my own meaningful interpretations of key points, reflections, and additional facts when necessary.

Symbols

The “◆ Starlog Notes” sections are used to define additional concepts to orientate the reader along the journey across the universe of relationships. The relationships are represented as galaxies. Each filled with a sea of stars signifying memories, dreams, and emotional and meaningful experiences.

The following symbols are used to signify specific meaningful sections, particularly creative autoethnographic narratives and poetics through textual and graphic style illustrations.

[✧ Meaning Making]: The outlined star symbol represents a personal creative interpretation of the meaning making process.

[◆ Starlog Notes]: Starlog Notes represent my personal meaning making moments throughout the conversation transcriptions and the illustrations. The solid star symbol is used to signify a moment of reflection along this language journey. A “pause” in the conversation transcription sections to provide additional information to clarify a statement, interconnected meanings, facts, and/or memories elicited from the discussion. References to supporting texts, concepts, or other narratives in the dissertation are also provided here.

[► PLAY]: Signifies the beginning of a conversation transcription section.

[■ STOP]: Signifies the end of a conversation transcription section.

[_____]: The line symbol shows where the conversation transcription is not sequential or the topic changes. Because of the length of the conversations, each narrative has been edited for length and clarity. I make note at the beginning of a few narratives explaining when they are sequential and why.

Prologue: Locating this Journey Midway Between the Land and the Stars

There is still much that I have to learn. This dissertation is a multivocal experimental ethnography which includes autoethnography, interdisciplinary research, transcultural conversations with Indigenous language activists, and meaning making reflections. The stories and experiences I'm sharing of my own and those I've been entrusted to share in this dissertation are meant to aid in an understanding of how Indigenous people can better craft their ancestral language journeys through an awareness of the relationships they engage, create, and maintain. Whether a person is beginning their own language journey through an introduction to the language from a text or have been around speakers their whole life, navigating the threads of Indigenous language acquisition and revitalization (LAR) is far more than just learning the language or cultural practices. In my conversations with dozens of Indigenous long-term language activists, it has become overwhelmingly apparent that the revitalization of ancestral languages is not balanced with methodologies for the revitalization of a life cognizant of and invested in relationship wellness. Each language journey is unique, as are the complexities and issues causing internal community language endangerment. This dissertation represents nearly a decade of collaborations and conversations with Indigenous language activists to discuss, define, and reflect upon these complexities in the context of their own positionality, LAR backgrounds, and ongoing work.

My own ancestral language journey is located between rooted spaces across the land and is boundless across the vast space of the stars. My path has shifted with the seasons, but holds steady to the prayers that my ancestors, family, and I have crafted. This fluid positionality is natural because my ancestral peoples came from both within the land and from the sky and were known for their travels across shifting landscapes. Each utilized the stars to navigate across space

and time; these stars continue to be guides as reinforcing memories and stories holding knowledge from creation through contemporary times. While concepts and phraseology of “space and time” has been used by many academics (Ella Cara Deloria, Émile Durkheim, James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Vine Deloria Jr., Gerald Vizenor, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Brandy Nālani McDougall, Joshua Hinson, etc.), I’ve been raised with this phrase and the interconnectivity and meaningfulness of it throughout my life. I’ve chosen this concept of actions across space and time and the practice of looking to the stars to help me create meaning making visual guides (graphic style illustrations and poetics) for the plethora of stories and experiences shared within this dissertation. The use and symbolism of the stars is also used as a reminder of the many unknowns encountered throughout each person’s language journey. I have no idea how far I will progress in my LAR work within my lifetime. I only know that as an Indigenous person, I’ve been placed on this journey since before my birth. Prayers offered up by my ancestors are very much a guiding force, an unknown force at times, which calls me to keep moving forward.

Making sense of this language journey is to first acknowledge that I am not here alone, nor is my responsibility just to the academic institution or organized tribal institutions. This dissertation is not intended to classify the vitality of specific tribal languages, nor survey the demographics, language endangerment or resilience. This is about the Indigenous experience. The human-to-human experiences infused by the fight for ancestral language continuance and the history of language endangerment causes. My own language journey is central to this dissertation research and writings. It spans a multiplicity of diverse and sometimes contradictory spaces of my ancestral Nuxbaga ‘Native People’ and Newe ‘The People’ Indigenous communities on Turtle Island (North America). My ancestral lines merge and diverge into

flowing rivers of memory and ceremony, stretching back to creation. With this said, I am very aware of how my voice and research is contributing to the literature within the fields of Indigenous language studies and sociocultural and linguistic anthropology. I am not an outsider academic looking within. Many of the language activists I converse with here, I have actively collaborated with and maintain positive and productive relationships with. Still, after many years, I continue to have much to learn on this language journey and my journey to becoming an elder knowledge keeper amongst my own peoples.

To begin with, the reciting of names is customary with any personal and formal introduction in my cultures. While my positionality is fluid, I'm forever tethered to my ancestral origins and the pre-existing relationships I have been born into. Yet, because of the legacy of colonization, each of my families continue to learn more about our own histories, as well as the cultural and ancestral relationships, which leaves an unknown space of names and relations that we are still seeking to know. What I have been taught thus far, is each of my ancestral families have shifted in their existence together through collaborations, warfare, marriage, trade, knowledge sharing, and ceremony. There are many names for my matrilineal and patrilineal families and tribes. This journey begins with my own story and understanding of how my family and I have arrived here. Navigating through this history is a bit long winded, but necessary in explaining how unique an Indigenous language activist's positionality is compared to an outsider non-Indigenous academic.

My matrilineal family are the Newe Sosore/Sosone 'Eastern Shoshone' and Numunuu 'Comanche' peoples. My patrilineal family, who I was born amongst, are the Nuxbaga Nu'eta 'Mandan,' Hiraacá 'Hidatsa,' and Apsáalooke 'Crow.' If I expand the horizon on my lineage, my matrilineal side also includes Metís (Swampy Cree, French, and Pict/Scottish). My patrilineal

side also includes Assiniboine, Nakota, and Dakota. Sosore 'Eastern Shoshone' is part of the Uto-Aztecan language family. Sosore and Numunuu used to be amongst the same band, which is why their languages are still very similar today. Nu'eta and Hiraacá are both part of the Siouan language family but are not mutually intelligible even though they share root words. My primary patrilineal tribes have more of an organized clan structure, and my primary matrilineal tribes have more of an organized band structure. These family and tribal organizations are very important within our tribal communities today. Each person is born into a multitude of pre-existing relationships that a person may or may not be taught throughout their childhood. It is a privilege and blessing to have a family and mentors with this knowledge and who are willing to share it with the youth and adults. Yet not every person is taught such important knowledge, nor do some care to learn it. As my Gah-gukh 'matrilineal grandmother' would say, tongue-and-check, some don't want to know how closely related they are.

My own upbringing taught me that if I wanted to know more, I would need to stay close to my elders and learn the art and respect of gift giving. A gift shared with me by my patrilineal grandmothers is my first language Hiraacá. I still dream in Hiraacá. I can feel the emotional meanings and slowly I'm relearning to be conversational. I hardly openly spoke as a child, but I listened and soaked in all that I saw and heard. I preferred being the odd kid spending most of my time with my elders, who were my best friends. Today, I'm still that odd kid and elders are still my best friends and mentors. Through these close relationships in my youth and later in life, this habit of relating more with my elders creates an awkward social experience with my peers. However, I would not trade the knowledge I've gained from my elders for any shift in my social standing. Because what I've been able to learn is invaluable. It's medicine knowledge.

Beginning with the knowledge that I was named by my patrilineal grandmothers Red Peppermint (Francis Young Wolf Grady) and her daughter Shirley Grady. Ghi-dhi-stah Wah-khish loosely translates to, ‘the one who brings joy,’ specifically, the joy you feel at the beginning of a celebration dance,” which is why my name is shortened to just ‘Dancer.’ Below are some of my patrilineal family lines. These family ties still confuse me as I trace their lines in my mind. The blue lines are marriages. The pink lead to the children.



Figure 2: Royce K. Young Wolf paternal family lines.

I proudly carry my great-great grandmother’s Hiraacá name. She was the daughter of Maacudabash “Juneberries” and Enemy Dog. The mother of Maacudabash was Pumpkin Blossom, her father was Four Dance, an Apsáalooke man, his brother was White Man Runs Him. Enemy Dog, who is sometimes called Sioux Dog/Horse, was the son of Goose and his mother was Many Good/Plenty Good. Maacudabash was a young wife of Enemy Dog, who was already an honored warrior. She gave birth to Dancer while living in our people’s last traditional earthlodge villages, Xoshga Awadish, beyond the confluence of Awaté “Missouri” and the Yellowstone Rivers. Maacudabash and her children survived amongst the few hundred remaining members of the Crow Flies High Band who were forced onto the Fort Berthold

Reservation in 1894. Maacudabash later named her daughter Fannie, who was then married to Leo Young Wolf. Their daughter was Red Peppermint (Frances Young Wolf). Her husband was Holy Bird (Minot Ward Grady). Their daughter is Shirley Grady (my father's mother).

On my matrilineal side, I am a granddaughter of Oh-hah-moe Mah-goi-ah 'Old Man Yellow Hand,' Yellow Beads, John Truhero, Louis Edward Meeks, Alvena Leona Lahoe Meeks Tarness (daughter of Charles Lajoe Telementes and Leona Ward), and Lora Meeks-Harris (my mother's mother). My matrilineal ancestral history was the focus of master's degree thesis about the Shoshonean Language Reunions. My matrilineal family line reconnects me again to my Apsáalooke family through my grandpas John Truhero and Thomas Yellowtail. These stories are too many to include here, but their teachings have shaped me in incalculable ways.

What is important to understand is that my ancestors' survival, ceremonies, songs, prayers, and medicines have placed me on my language journey today. I am a living manifestation of their prayers and dreams. Above all else, these relationships keep me protected. They tether me to the land and inspire me to keep moving forward in a bright golden light to weather the storms and rise above the highs and lows of this journey. For many Indigenous people, our strength and guidance flows from very similar histories and storied ancestral lines. These have all been touched by external colonization and internal intergenerational trauma. Denying a descendent their right to learn their ancestral language(s) in a good way is an affront to all those who survived for us to thrive today. Empowered resilience can be found within the knowledge and understanding of a person's relationships to their ancestors, elders, family, speech communities, the lands, and almost every facet of their culture. Seeking the knowledge to understand these connections often happens simultaneously with culture and language learning,

but not always. Nor is this process always peaceful. The resiliency of Indigenous language activists beyond negative complexities is a premise of this dissertation.

Untangling Lines

These relations are complex and often entangled with historical and contemporary causes of language loss and endangerment. For example, within each of my tribal groups, the family lines are traced through the matrilineal sides. Meaning, you are born into your mother's family. However, within both of these groups, adoption, a traditional form of relationship making, is a large part of our cultures. A person can gift and pursue an adoption into a clan and society, in order to be welcomed in as a member. On my mother's Sosore side, I am descended from the Peneteka "Honey Eaters" band, which connects our Sosore family to our Numunuu ancestors. The Sosore and Numunuu are made up of dozens of bands. Some of these split and formed into smaller groups who were later classified into different tribes during the 1800s U.S. treaty period. Within my master's degree thesis (2012), *The Continuum of Language and Culture: Tribal Language Reunions*, I focused on tracing the lines of my Sosore and Numunuu families through the broader linguistic and sociocultural Uto-Aztecan and Numic language gatherings.

There was a point in time when our people had nearly lost all memory of why different tribes spoke nearly the same language. This was because of assimilation programs, such as boarding schools and relocation. Shoshone and Numunuu language speakers found each other and relearned why they spoke the same language. These gatherings are represented in the annual Shoshonean Language Reunions, a very broad and vibrant branch of my language journey. However, just as external pressures cause disruptions in language continuity, there are internal causes that can be even more powerful. For the reader, it may be difficult to untangle these kinship lines, but these lines inevitable shape the Indigenous experience.

The backbone these lines trace in me, can also be a tension in relationship making and sustaining. An example of this is when families separate. My mother and father continue to live out their lives like true traditional ancestral enemies. It's been difficult learning how to go back and forth between these. A midway point has always been with my Apsáalooke family for kinship medicine and ceremony. Large families have complicated pasts with making relations and diverging from them. For Indigenous people, making and *remaking* these connections has been integral to the work of language activists over the last century. Language and cultural work are intimate. It requires a level of responsibility to the knowledge keepers and the knowledge being learned, shared, and bundled for the next generations. Community-based Indigenous language acquisition groups are deeply rooted within the parameters of the larger families, social groups, political groups, and the local and distant communities as a whole. The work they do can be greatly impacted by the relationships the language activists have amongst their groups and the broader communities. These relationships legitimize or delegitimize the outcomes of the work being done.

Beginning this work, I've tried to locate myself amongst this history of mine, while reflecting on how it consciously and unconsciously impacts my life and LAR work. Thankfully for me, my relationship with my language, ceremony, land, and my elders have always been the strongest parts of my being. This is because I would stay close to my grandmothers and grandpas. It wasn't just because Gah-guhk worked at our tribal nursing home where I spent more than my share of days and nights amongst the oldest members of our tribe. I also loved when we would go visiting with her on her days off. I'd clean and help with the meals. I'd get everyone their coffee, plates, and run errands. I'd show them I could be quiet and listen. My elders would let me sit beside them, sip coffee, and learn what I could. I witnessed my elders having a way of

being, of behaving and tending to each other that I rarely see amongst my peers today. After over 30 years of this life, many of my elders I learned from are now gone, passed onto the next villages. Those who were my closest family and friends are no longer here. Very few remember me as a child because I chose to socialize with the old ones more than with my peers.

Now that I am apart from the elders of my youth, I feel more at home with the land, ceremony, and language. It is a heavy weight to know that I am no longer anyone's favorite daughter or granddaughter amongst those still living. Years of my academic work with linguistics and language revitalization methodologies did not prepare me for the grief and loss my elder language speakers or the social complexities of LAR work within my own communities. Recognizing that elders did the bulk of this relationship work I experienced growing up, raises questions about who is being mentored to be a new generation of relationship makers, as this is ceremony too? The task to create new interpersonal relationships mirroring the wellness and support shared between elder mentors and younger mentees is daunting.

The relationship making tasks that I've witnessed by my elders is that they always introduced me to our relatives. They remembered the long history of relationships and names, and they spoke on my behalf. They made the relationships for me, reinforced them, and took on the responsibility to teach and guide me. Yet, I'm still left questioning how these relationships were maintained, and why are such practices not openly being done within the language groups amongst peers? How can relationships be reinforced amongst peers to combat the complexities and dynamics of our communities and everyday lives in our language groups? Pursuing an understanding of Indigenous relationship making occurring in language revitalization positions each language activist to reflect on these same questions in tandem with their expertise on LAR methodologies.

❖ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ❖

Prologue

[Visual guide text]

Each human is born into a universe of pre-existing relationships (kinship, ancestral lineage, social and interpersonal, environmental, economic, political, etc.), in addition to the many relationships the person intentionally or inadvertently makes or loses throughout their life.

The journey of each person is filled with highs and lows, tracing our heartbeats through the multiplicity of relationship galaxies.

Colonization and assimilation have created toxic social environments riddled with lateral violence and oppression. These threaten to unmake healthy Indigenous relationships—severed, abandoned, lost...

There are guides to assist with our journeys.

Each instance of meaning making becomes a guide forward and to look back upon across space and time.

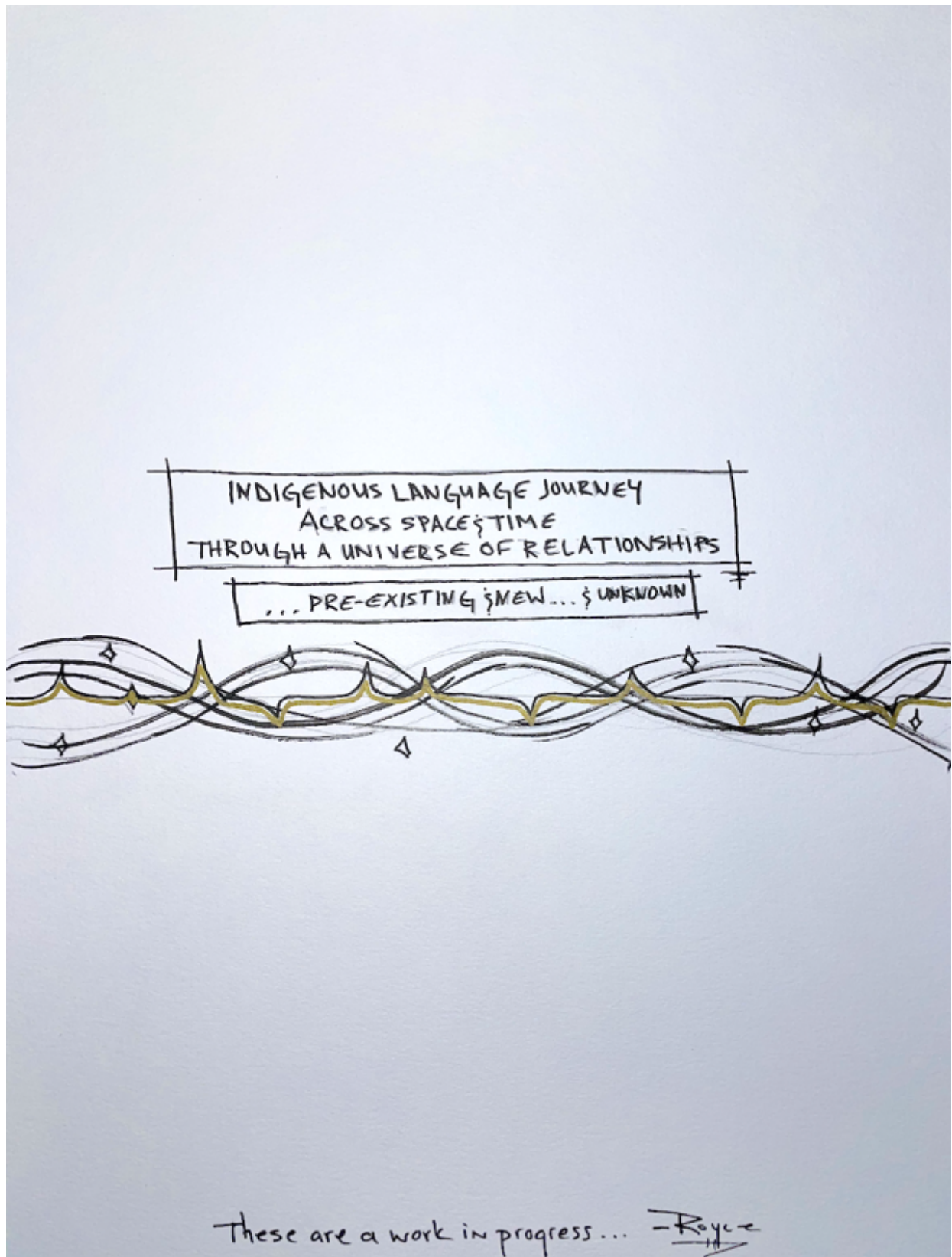


Figure 3: Indigenous Language Journey... Graphite and ink on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf 2021

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

Page 2

[Visual guide text]

Anatomy of a language journey.

Why Indigenous relationship making? Relationship making is creating networks of support; comrades to share in the highs & lows of your language journeys.

- ✦ Indigenous language journey highs & lows are not isolated phenomena.
- ✦ We can learn from each other's experiences with the highs & lows.
- ✦ We are stronger with positive productive relationships—networks of support.

Goals for pursuing an understanding of relationship making within Indigenous language acquisition & revitalization (LAR).

- 1) Engaging in truth-telling to identify the highs & lows.
- 2) Name the highs & lows.
- 3) Share lived experiences by Indigenous language activists who move forward in a good way through the highs & lows.
- 4) Reflect on experiences.
- 5) Reflect on solutions & relationship making.

Indigenous language journey & relationship making.

- ✦ Prioritizing LAR creates an expanded language journey.
- ✦ Social experiences along this journey range broadly—positive, negative, and a full spectrum in-between.
- ✦ Complex variables cause the highs & lows—interpersonal relationships & social environments are impactful variables.
- ✦ Positive productive relationship making with like-minded comrades is a ceremony of reciprocal gift giving, and as a ceremony, this work is part of a process to sustain, to maintain, and enrich your life as a whole which empowers LAR actions.

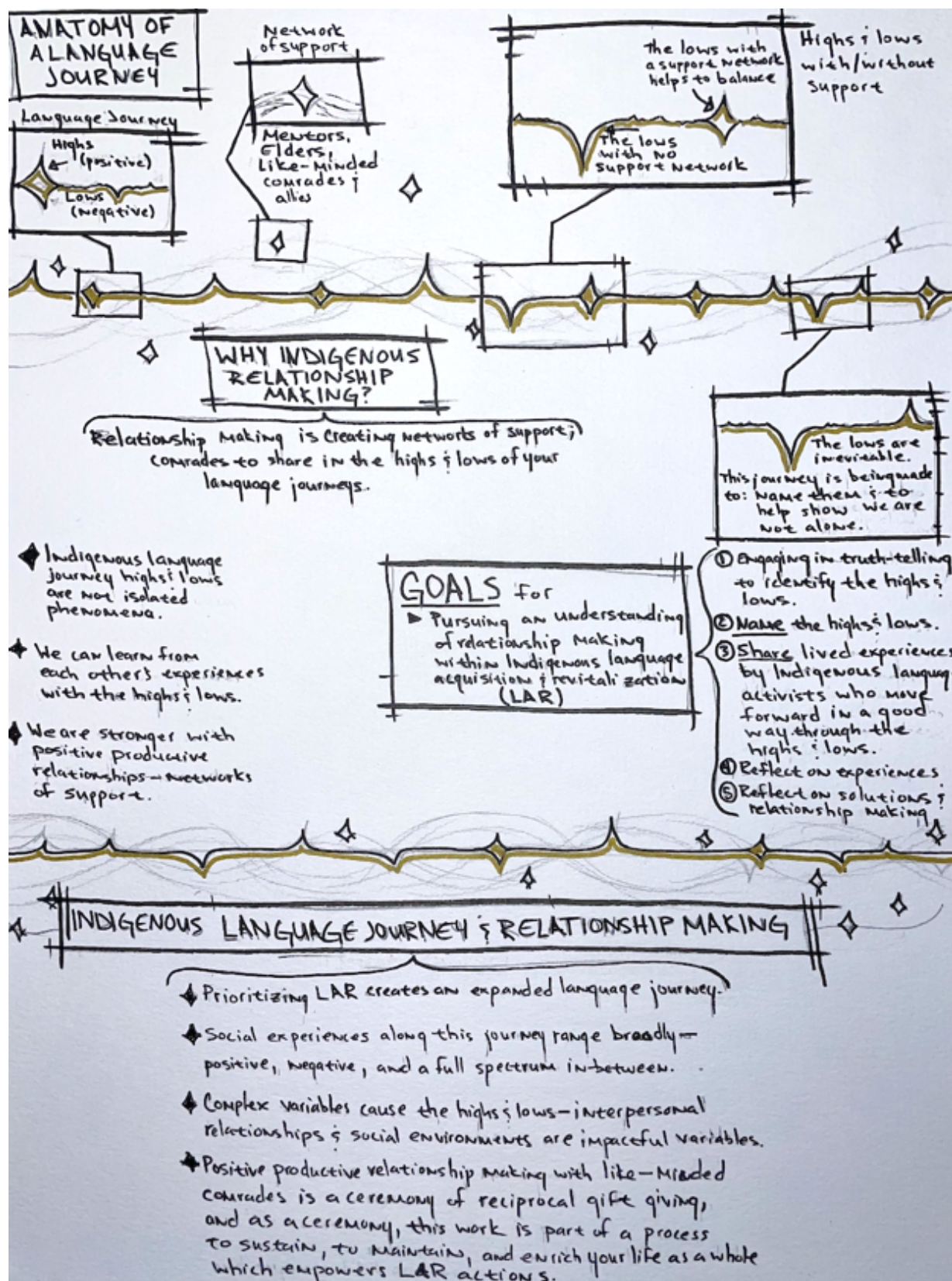


Figure 4: Anatomy of a Language Journey. Graphite and ink on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf 2021

❖ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ❖

Page 3

[Visual guide text]

We are born into a universe of pre-existing relationships.

On my coming of age fast, just as the sun was preparing to peek above the horizon, my grandmothers appeared. They told me there are things I needed to do. They remade their relationship to me, evoking ancestral memory midway between the land and stars. A path tethered across space and time, from creation and beyond.

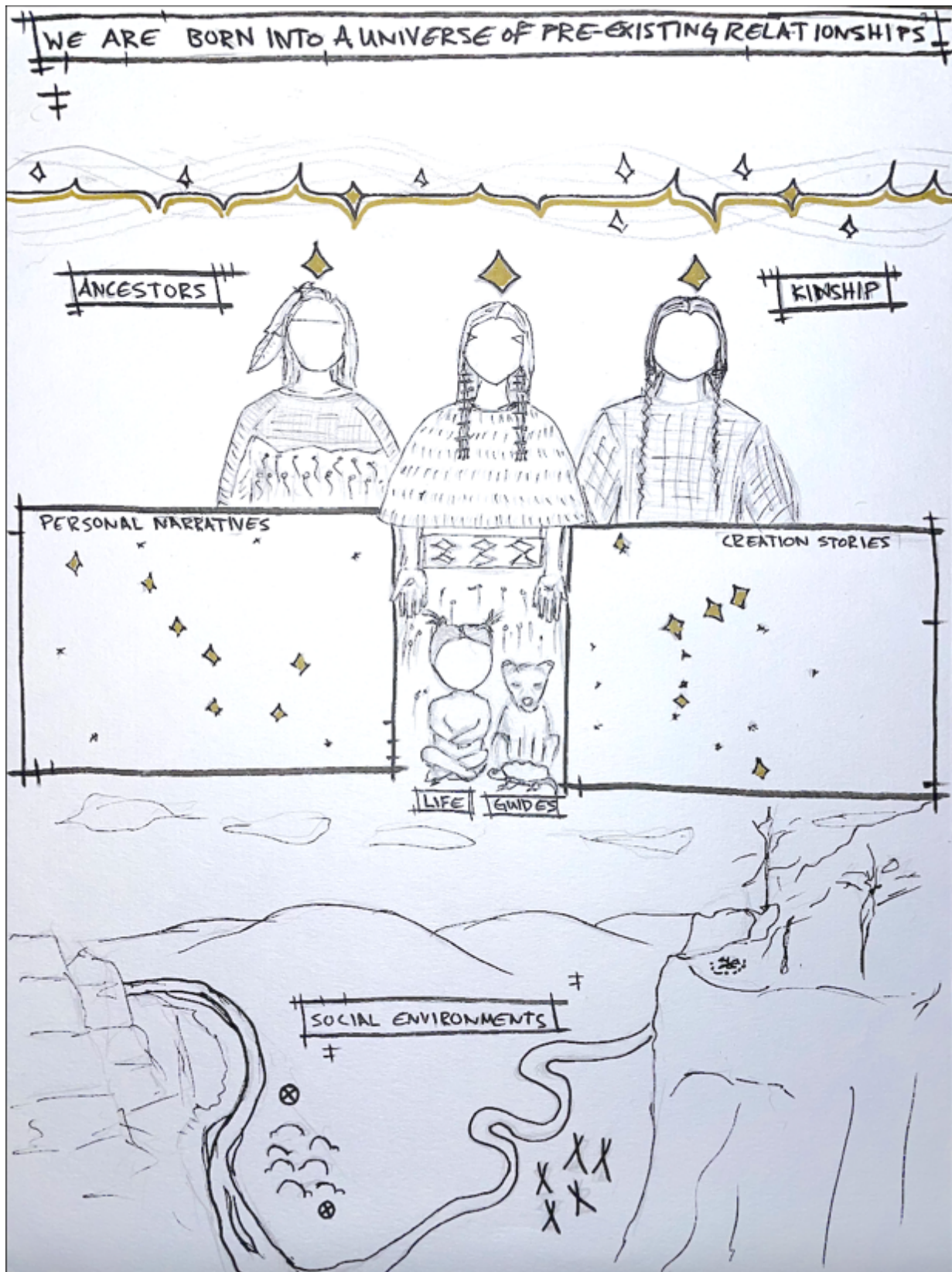


Figure 5: We are born into a universe of pre-existing relationships. Graphite and ink on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

❖ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ❖

Page 4

[Visual guide text]

Ghi-dhi-stah Wah-khish “Dancer.”

I’ve carried that experience for more than half my life. At times, it drives me, inspires me to trust, to stay, to live, to dream, to keep pushing forward. It feeds me, embraces me, and reminds me they are always there beside me.

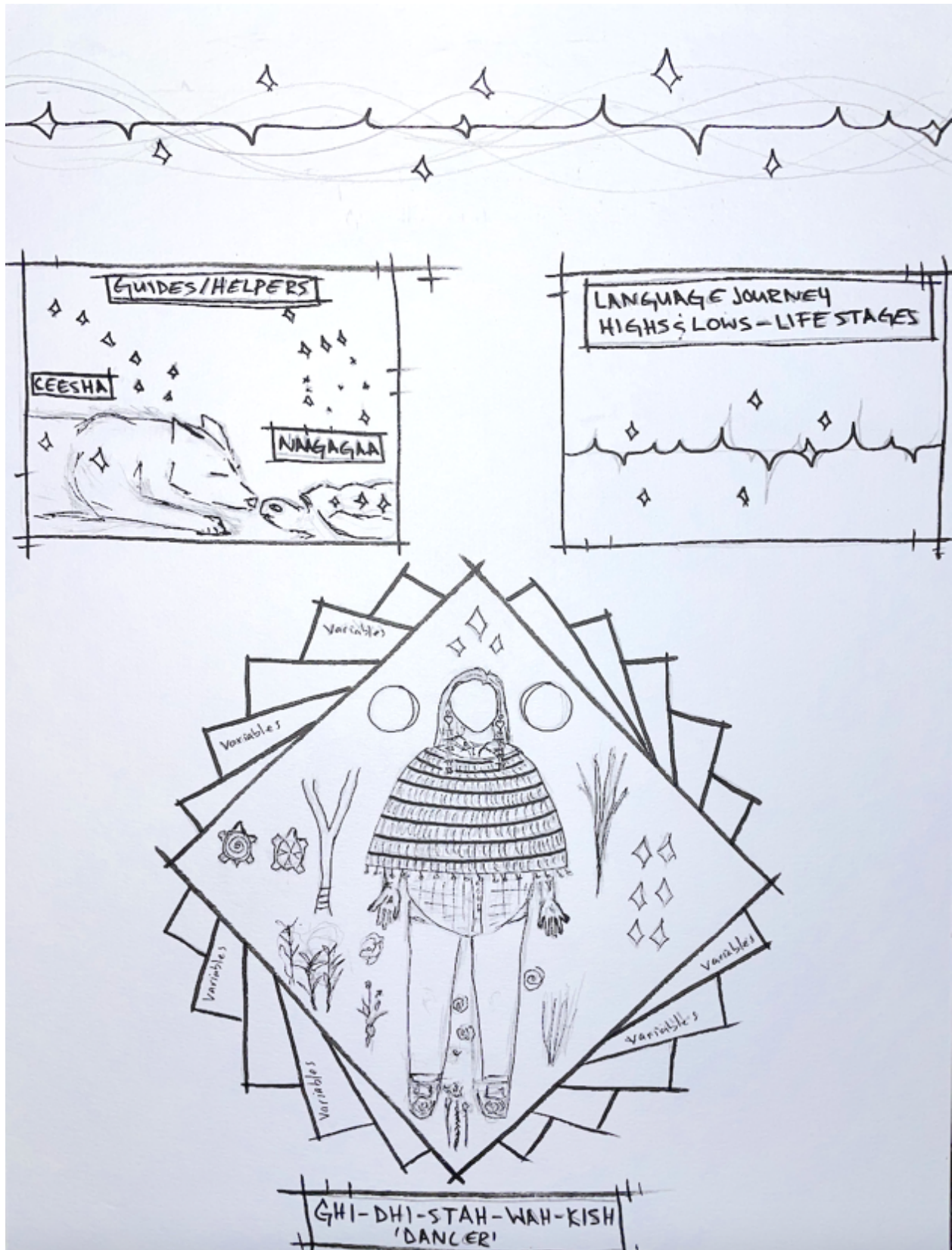


Figure 6: Ghi-dhi-stah Wah-kish 'Dancer.' Graphite and ink on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

✧ **Meaning Making Poetics** ✧

Ancestral knowledge is medicine. When people ask,
 why are you doing this?
 skuh, why are you tenacious?
 buh, you're still here?

To give an answer to those questions, I'm here because my ancestors weaved this path for me.
 They're that foot in the door. They're who you sense beside me. They're the spooks watching
 you when you're putting energy into keeping me from my language path.

 if you don't like it, go talk to them
 here, use this tobacco
 use this cedar
 use this water
 go fast out there,
 somewhere midway between the land and stars

 tell them the prayers they sent up,
 tell them the love they planted in the ground,
 tell them their survival,
 my survival,
 it doesn't have a right to exist.

 go ahead,
 tell them in english
 tell them in our languages
 whisper in closed meetings
 point lips

 i'll still be on this journey,
 still fed by their prayers.

Each person's reasons to learn and speak their ancestral languages and responsibilities to carry
 their cultures and ceremonies forward represent relationship making. Often, our harshest
 critics are our own people. Find the ones amongst them who shine bright, set apart by their
 love and kindness. Become fierce allies.

❖ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ❖

Page 5

[Visual guide text]

Even our guides have journeys.

Sharing the highs & lows can be painful, triggering, but through truth telling we make sense of the pieces. We can begin to heal, to change, to unlearn, & to remake our language journey & the relationships we have & invest in.

The laying of graphite and ink are strong representations that there are multiple truths.

Where to begin & begin again.

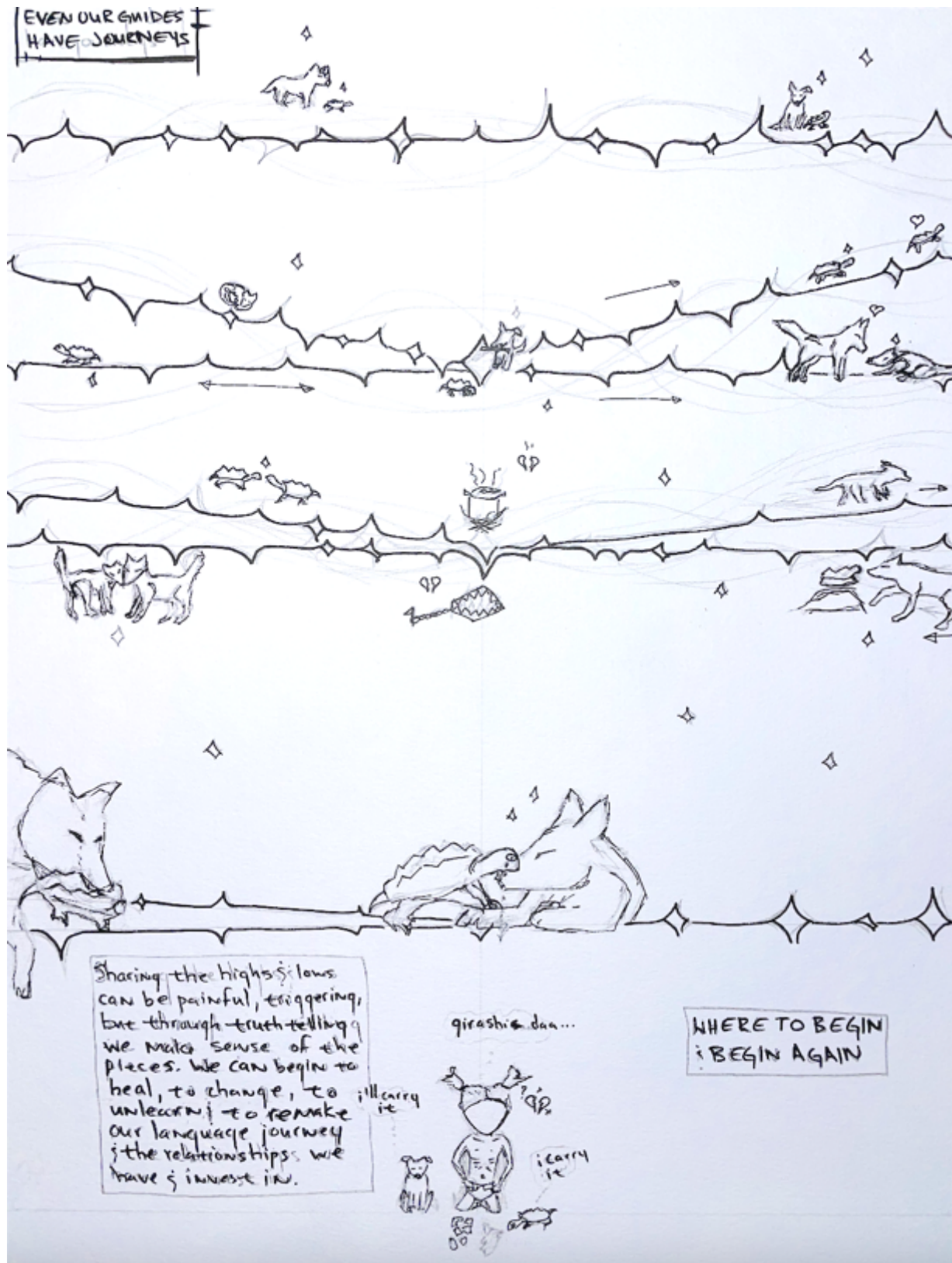


Figure 7: Even Our Guides Have Journeys. Graphite and ink on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

Introduction

The lived experiences of Indigenous language activists are examples crafted into meaningful guides used as tether points to traverse shifting landscapes of internal language endangerment issues across space and time.

Knowing of the traditional cultural ways and skills that our Indigenous ancestors and elders make and sustain relationships is becoming a lost art in some communities and language groups. I know this practice existed, I've seen it and benefited from it. Yet, there is a lack of documentation and teachings about these processes and methods. Even less is documented about adult peer-to-peer methods for positive productive reciprocal relationship making within Indigenous language groups. While many language nests and immersion schools for young children provide a foundational set of life stage knowledge to properly raise a cultural and language empowered child, much is unclear about how this process can be duplicated for adult language learners who are still pursuing a rebalancing of their lives through LAR work. Relationship ties and comradery are not always being reinforced within the language acquisitions methodologies. This is leading to an ongoing imbalanced relationship structure, where the naturally strongest relationships are between elder mentors and younger mentees, but these same types of strong connections are not consistently remade amongst peer-to-peer relationships. This leaves language groups open to being destabilized by various disruptions on the periphery of the intensive LAR work.

After 20 years of my personal involvement in LAR work and from my collaborations and conversations with other language activists there are a myriad of methods beyond the technical language acquisition tasks that sustains a person's ability to be committed to long-term LAR work. Many of these are dependent on greater investments in learning and teaching skills to create and maintain positive reciprocal relationships amongst their language groups which

enraptures their everyday lives. The notions that seeking to save ancestral languages requires a simultaneous movement to create a community of speakers who embody culturally informed wellness and healthy relationships is not new. Yet, the detailed processes of this for Indigenous adult language activists raises questions about how this movement is being experienced and achieved, if at all?

This dissertation represents autoethnographic writings in tandem with LAR research focused on themes of disjuncture, wellness, and holism. My participant observations represent my involvement in organizing the 2014 Bringing Our Languages Together gatherings and LAR workshop in Oklahoma. Throughout this research are in-depth discussions about language life stages which are meaningful life lessons used to define frameworks for adult language journeys to maintain positive productive relationships and LAR progression. My collaborative research involves my work with long-term Indigenous adult language activists and transcriptions of our last investigative conversations about their language journey backgrounds and meaningful experiences. These conversations were crafted to elucidate reflections on how they have actively maintained long-term careers in LAR work. Focused questions about the following topics were modified through our discussions: what is culturally informed relationship making and how is wellness involved in this?; what types of social relationships have been impactful to their journeys?; and what types of experiences have impacted their LAR efforts? The combination of these research methods and meaningful experiences over nearly a decade provide intimate reflections on shifts in internal language endangerment pressures across space and time, in conjunction with various social outcomes of language activists after years of LAR efforts.

This research did not begin with these initial questions, but has evolved into an investigation about how Indigenous language activists are reflecting upon their own wellbeing

and how their interpersonal relationships amongst their language groups impact this? Physical and emotional loneliness is a very real part of the lives of long-term Indigenous language activists. The loss of language speakers and the loss of time and resources are not always combated by language acquisition methodologies. Yet, looking to processes of maintaining a priority of personal wellbeing and strategically crafting healthy and thriving relationships amongst language group members can address more issues than just these losses.

I know far too many incredible Indigenous language activists who are good people, inspiring exemplar human beings and LAR leaders, but have faced a barrage of negative social experiences and lateral violence and oppression within their own language communities. Conversations with Indigenous language activists provide narratives and examples through a process of reflecting upon both positive and negative meaningful experiences to discuss concepts of long-term LAR efforts and wellness. Many different experiences along their language journeys have educated and inspired them to maintain reciprocal responsibilities throughout their LAR work. Such responsibilities are foundational in relationship making and maintaining. However, these responsibilities are not explicit parts of their LAR trainings or curriculums. Their stories are meant to provide inspiration, solace, and guidance beyond platitudes and situations that attempt to distract and pull a person from positive and productive LAR paths.

Shifting Theoretical Parameters

I've often questioned my own academic paths and how they are impactful to my language journeys. My knowledge of linguistic and anthropological studies, methods, language ideologies, rhetoric, and case studies about Indigenous language revitalization and acquisition have often lacked realistic and consistent application within my own language communities. There are experiences that counter academic models for successful techniques to stabilize endangered

languages. The lived experiences of language activists within Indigenous speech communities are entangled with micro-level and macro-level issues which impact the stability of the speech group members' social environments in unpredictable ways. My attempts at pursuing an understanding of Indigenous relationship making occurring in LAR practices is to investigate the interpersonal dynamics of long-term Indigenous language activists who possess knowledge to counter the entanglement of these issues. The lived experiences of Indigenous language activists are examples crafted into meaningful guides used as tether points to traverse shifting landscapes of internal language endangerment issues across space and time. This research is continuously ongoing. The writings in this dissertation are representative of the knowledge and perspectives gained up to this point in time.

The lives of humans and their educations through lived experiences have the tendency to change over time, as have the parameters of this research. My initial dissertation research intended to identify specific language acquisition methods that were beneficial to social relationship dynamics occurring within Indigenous adult language learning groups and speech communities. After years of being engaged in LAR work, I've witnessed and experienced language acquisition methods being disassociated with ongoing social dynamics, whether intentional or unintentional, which counter efforts for positive relationship making. Positive relationship making amongst speech group members is paramount in creating, maintaining, and sustaining LAR movements. The reality became clear that the ultimate goals aligned with "reviving an endangered language," no matter how important culture and traditional knowledge is to the speech group or community, did not have the power to maintain or sustain long-term community member participation and progression towards language acquisition goals.

I had begun my studies with the assumption that language acquisition methods were the solutions to the causes of Indigenous language loss and endangerment. Instead, I've come to learn that the practice and success of language acquisition methods are more often impacted by the social relationship dynamics within a speech community and/or language group. It does not matter how refined or successful language curriculum, linguistic texts, or methods of language acquisition and revitalization are, there will continue to be disparaging social issues in community-based language groups. Even though these LAR resources are technical integral building blocks, they do not resolve impeding complexities of social dynamics in language groups. Furthermore, I've witnessed that in some cases it does not matter the degree of education each person has, nor does it matter how vocal people are about the sacredness of the language and culture. These variables do not automatically mean a person is educated in creating or maintaining positive and productive working relationships or interpersonal social relationships. One language activist has said, "they (educational trainings) don't educate you about the human issues. They don't prepare you for this social stuff" (Anonymous Indigenous Language Activist 2021). There is a lack of understanding of how these interpersonal relationships and social experiences are occurring amongst speech group members, within and outside of the language learning sessions. This lack of understanding leaves language activists unprepared for a variety of macro- and micro-level issues and aggressions that have shown a tendency to hijack the stability of language learning environments and collective actions and outcomes.

Long-term successful language activists possess a wealth of knowledge gained through their lived experiences. Our conversations together over the years have encouraged me to pursue deeper reflections on these counteractive issues. The work and lives of Indigenous language activists embody a movement of *remaking* and *reimagining* the field of language acquisition and

revitalization. The conversation topics leading the discussions between myself and the language activists participating in this research have been crafted to elicit knowledge sets (life stages) about the ways they have experienced relationship making that has reinforced the stability of their speech groups and positive outcomes/successes. These lend to their abilities to stay present, progressive, and capable of change throughout unpredictable social and political environments.

The priority of this research is to highlight the narratives (lived experiences) of Indigenous language activists as an invitation to participate in a transcultural Indigenous dialogue/dialogism through the lens of Indigenous methodologies. This research is creating a “transcultural space where locally indigenized truths are tabled for analyses...where Indigenous situatedness is emphasized, including embodied notions of place and culture” (Hokowhitu 2010, p. 12). It also engages Indigenous traditions of intentional relationship making, gift giving, and knowledge sharing. “Nothing could be without being in relationship, without its context. Our systems of knowledge are built by and around and also form these relationships” (Wilson 2008, p. 77). This research is representative of decolonization methodologies. References to these methods are expressed through the italic “*re*” at the beginning of action words such as *rewriting* and *rerighting*. The embodiment of such methods are within the work and lives of many Indigenous language activists. Even though the exact term “decolonization” may not be used by each activist, the process this term represents which is the unmaking of language endangerment and a rebalancing of language lives through culturally informed methods is still engaged.

The purpose of pursuing an understanding of Indigenous relationship making occurring within Indigenous language revitalization groups is to reveal how and in what ways these bonds or lack-there-of are methods to combat macro- and micro-level issues which further complicate variables impacting internal (community-based) language endangerment. The Indigenous

language activist narratives are sources of knowledge in the pursuit to identify methods of creating, maintaining, and sustaining long-term efforts for LAR. Engaging a process of decolonization and relationship making as theoretical parameters for this research elevates Indigenous concepts of wellness and holism (Archibald 2008; Archibald et al. 2019; Johnston 2007), storywork and truth-telling (Archibald et al. 2019; Hokowhitu et al. 2010; Kroskrity 2012; McDougal 2016; Meek 2010; Palmer 2003; Perley 2011 Simpson 2011; Trask 1999; G.H. Smith 1997; L.T. Smith 1999), transcultural dialogism (Bakhtin 1981; Hokowhitu 2010), and intentional transformative praxis (G.H. Smith 1997). The following chapters define and espouse deeper interconnectivity coursing throughout a multiplicity of macro- and micro- level issues, their contexts, and the actions carried out by Indigenous language activists to understand, address, and combat these variables.

The use of autoethnographic and collaborative research methodologies situates my positionality within my own research boundaries, allowing me to navigate through these issues alongside the participating language activists. The combination of the theoretical parameters provides an intersectional lens to elicit meaning making from the narratives of the language activists and my own lived experiences. The stories, analysis, and theoretical discussions are represented through the use of traditional academic writings, written oral narratives, poetics, and meaningful visual teachings/guides (illustrations). Meaning making occurs in multiple forms, and memory is intrinsically connected to emotional experiences. The artistic renderings (illustrations and poetics) emote visceral forms of the meaning making and knowledge sharing experiences. These are processes of *reimagining* and *remaking* what constitutes as contributions to academic fields of study. This work is intended to go beyond just a contribution to sociocultural linguistic anthropology, second language acquisition, Indigenous literary criticism,

and critical Indigenous studies. Each of these fields continue to influence, inspire, direct, and complicate tensions amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples engaged in the practice of LAR. These academic fields educate about externally (colonial and settler state) based language endangerment causes, but rarely engage processes of intentional truth telling with actual practitioners which reveal veins of deeper social and intergenerational causes of contemporary internal language endangerment. Investigating the concept of wellness and how it exists, is understood, and pursued amongst Indigenous language activists is integral to understanding the shifting contemporary variables that contribute to a person's ability, capacity, and intentions to continue long-term participation in the LAR fields.

Dissertation Overview

Investigating how LAR methods are entangled with the broadly sweeping lives of language activists and their meaningful experiences has been a reciprocal relationship making ceremony. This work has been methodical to draw out deeply rooted understandings of Indigenous relationship making and how applications of culturally informed practices of wellness and holism are contextualized and pursued within LAR work. This work has also been messy and required multiple approaches to the research and organization of the findings. There are multiple organization layers chronicling this interdisciplinary and transcultural research journey., and focused research for four themes and the accompanying conversations with Indigenous language activists. **Part I** provides a literature review background of: LAR, language endangerment and loss; Indigenous methodological understandings of wellness, holism, and storywork; symbolic meaning making and interconnectivity; and an introduction to the Indigenous language activists. **Part II** theme focuses on the complexities of beginning a language journey, working to establish the first LAR programs and encountering community

based internal language endangerment issues. **Part III** expands on the previous theme through a focus on complexities of community-based social environments and navigating a range of positive and negative interpersonal relationships issues in tandem with LAR methods. **Part IV** brings together various key points from the previous chapters through conversations with founding mentors of the Māori LAR movement and provides lived-experiences of reciprocal Indigenous relationship making, gift giving, and transformative interconnectivity during the project planning of the 2014 Bringing Our Language Together gathering. **Part V** concludes with final reflections on the efficacy of LAR methodologies and Indigenous relationship making for long-term language journeys, overall research findings, and example processes for engaging in community-based LAR cognizant of Indigenous relationship wellness and holism. The remaining chapter is an **Afterword** reflection on over twenty years of my own LAR work, nearly a decade of dissertation research and collaborations, and repercussions from the most recent global COVID-19 pandemic. The following are detailed chapter overviews.

In **Part I: What We Know and Where We Intend to Go** includes four chapters to situate this research journey amongst a broader literature review of the definitions and discussion of Indigenous language endangerment, acquisition, revitalization, reclamation, and theoretical paradigms. Each chapter provides an additional critique and examination of contributing theoretical practices, discussion of wellness and LAR, and context based transformative Indigenous knowledge exchange. **Chapter one: What is Known About Language Endangerment** begins with a culturally informed meaning making visual guide to juxtapose the historical causes of language shift and loss as explained through my own culturally informed understandings of the causes of the loss of Indigenous wellness. This is followed by

detailed research explaining various understandings of what is known about Indigenous language endangerment.

Chapter Two: Beginning and Beginning Again expands on definitions of wellness and holism, storywork, and meaning making. This chapter focuses on a discussion about the applicability and impact of these theoretical approaches in the context of community-based adult LAR. Analysis of the human experience and multifaceted inspirations is paramount in centering LAR work within an embodiment of love, wellness, and holism to transform negative experiences into meaningful knowledge. This embodiment is further contrasted with macro- and micro-level variables influencing transformative knowledge exchange, intertextuality and transcultural meaning making.

Chapter Three: An Unlearning and Relearning of Indigenous Models of Wellness and Symbolic Capital engages critiques of wellness through models of Indigenous decolonization, wellness, and context based Indigenous research methods. Macro- and micro level variables are further analyzed through a critique of the parameters of this dissertation's collaborative research models in the context of experiences with academic influences on community-based concepts and values of symbolic capital.

Chapter Four: Gift Giving, Relationship Making, and Symbolic Interconnectivity provides a personal narrative of traditional gift giving to *reframe* this dissertations collaborative research design in a tradition of gifting and intentional transformative educational praxis. Critiques of various academic ideologies and realistic applications are reviewed through the context of academic preparedness in LAR and the intended purpose of this research to aid in providing missing knowledge. Gift Giving is used as an Indigenous epistemology and contextualized an informed collaborative research journey. The interview questions, description

of the structure of the conversations with Indigenous Activists and their LAR work are provided here.

The following sections of this dissertation are divided into four additional parts to progress through various themes about macro- and micro-level variables encountered along a language journey and contrasts with an awareness of relationship making, wellness and holism, and the importance of creating a positive productive support system of like-minded allies, mentors, and comrades. Each of the Indigenous language activist conversations are divided amongst these parts.

Part II: Learning to Begin a Journey in Indigenous Language Acquisition and Revitalization introduces a discussion about what do we know about LAR and the complexities of being a first generation to create LAR programs within their own communities. **Part III: Love, Loss, and all the In-betweens of LAR** introduces the theme of an unlearning and *relearning* of relationship journeys and wellness.

Part IV: Bringing Our Languages Together: Sharing Language Revitalization with Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language” revisits the actions of intergenerational transformative knowledge exchange as a form of gifting of seeds which represent interconnectivity amongst Indigenous language activists across space and time. Included here are detailed personal narratives and photos from my project planning for the three day gathering in Oklahoma hosting the Te Panekiretanga mentors and cohorts.

Part V: We Are Born Into a Universe of Pre-existing Relationships consists of two chapters which reflects on knowledge gained about the breadth of an Indigenous language activists language journey. **Chapter 18: Life Stages of Indigenous Language Journeys** examines discussions about life stages are contextualized to inform and guide understandings of

specific internal social dysfunctions linked to colonization and assimilation, issues of access, contextualizing kinship prestige, and context based solutions to unpack and recontextualize Indigenous knowledge in LAR. **Chapter 19: Indigenous Language Life Stages for Relationship Making and Wellness** provides the remaining conversation with an anonymous Indigenous language activists to contextualize realistic variables and social contexts within Indigenous communities with severely endangered ancestral languages. Interconnectivity and wellness are reflected upon through my autoethnographic narratives. A summarization of knowledge from the conversations with Indigenous language activists are *reframed* through an analysis and recommendation of Indigenous LAR life stage frameworks cognizant of context based solutions.

In closing, **Chapter 20: Afterword: An Ongoing Journey, Maacagiraac Miiguxda Agihdiawa hii Hoowehoo** integrates personal meaning making illustrations, songs, and poetics to elucidate the intimacy of the Indigenous experiences along LAR journeys. Numerous Indigenous language activists have created other autoethnographic works with intimate details of their experiences. Many have shared similar details in their conversations with me here. There are also many unspoken truths that I am not sharing here and I am humbled to be a keeper of such knowledge they've shared with me. I have done my best to carry their voices and experiences forward by sharing my own personal narratives of similar experiences. As a loved one has inspired me by their use of another's poetry, "I carry your heart with me(I carry it in my heart)" (E.E. Cummings 1952), I too carry the many stories shared with me within my heart and through my work.

This dissertation contains many stories, truth telling, and intimate details of Indigenous community-based social experiences that may be triggering. These truths, sensitive as they may be, are necessary to challenge and unsettle broader notions about ongoing language endangerment and loss being determined by the efficacy of language transmission.

PART I. INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT

CHAPTER 2: BEGINNING AND BEGINNING AGAIN

CHAPTER 3: AN UNLEARNING AND RELEARNING

CHAPTER 4: GIFT GIVING, RELATIONSHIP MAKING, SYMBOLIC
INTERCONNECTIVITY

Chapter One: What is Known About Language Endangerment
✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

The Warning

Language Shift, Language Loss, ancestral knowledge

The world our ancestors knew had hardships but they had knowledge medicine to heal our minds, hearts, bodies, spirits, and relationships.

Hardships separated bands, families, loved ones, yet ancestral knowledge could heal these & rebalance.

Ancestral knowledge helps to raise our people with wellness.

LAR can embody lifestages of wellness.

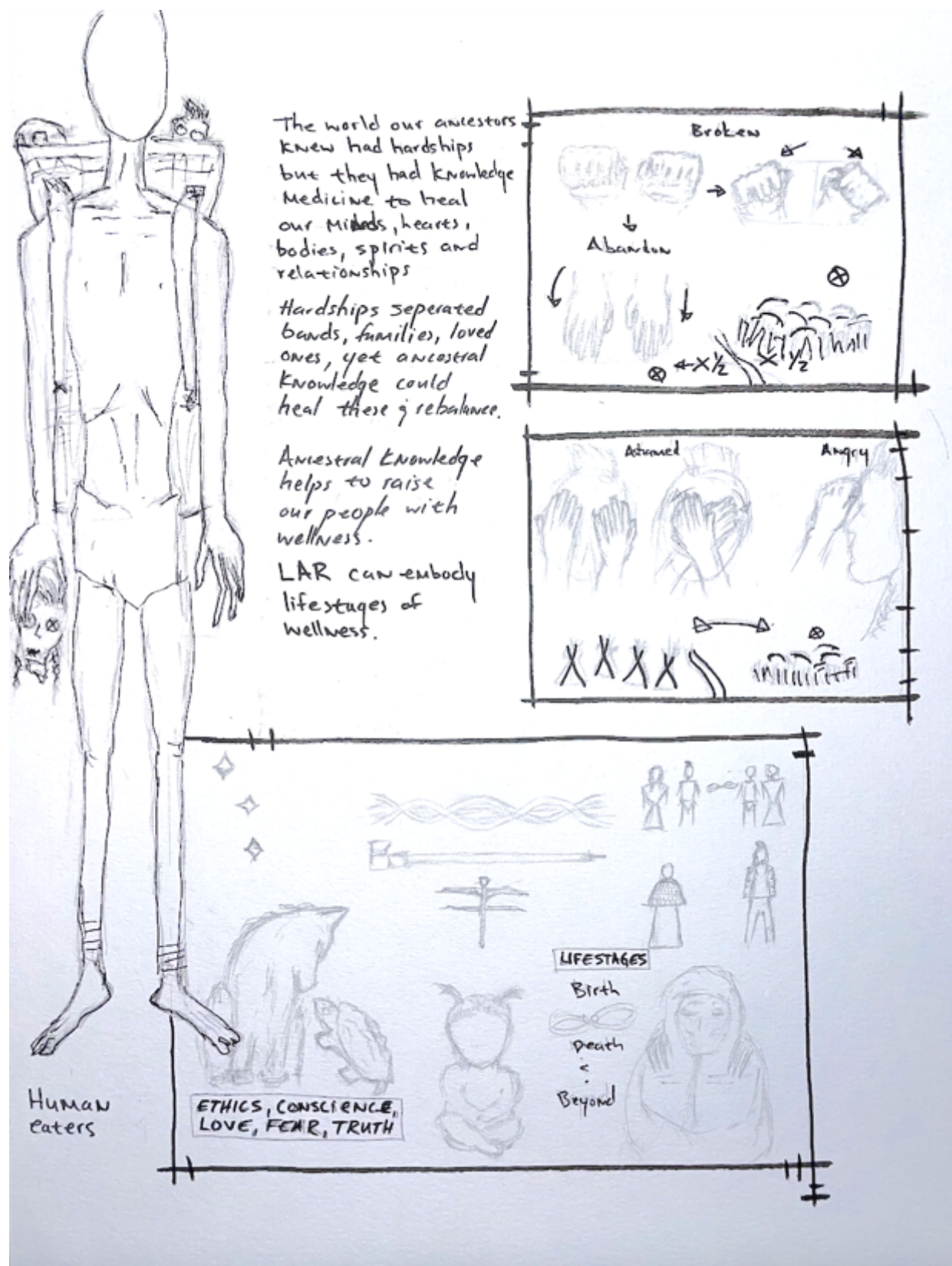


Figure 8: The Warning. Graphite and ink on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021

❖ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ❖

[Visual guide text]

Language shift has always occurred. Relationships have always shifted. Ancestral knowledge empowered ways to maintain & sustain life stages.

Relations shifted over time, making, breaking, remaking across Turtle Island.

Language loss is connected to a loss of ancestral life stages & knowledge of relationships.

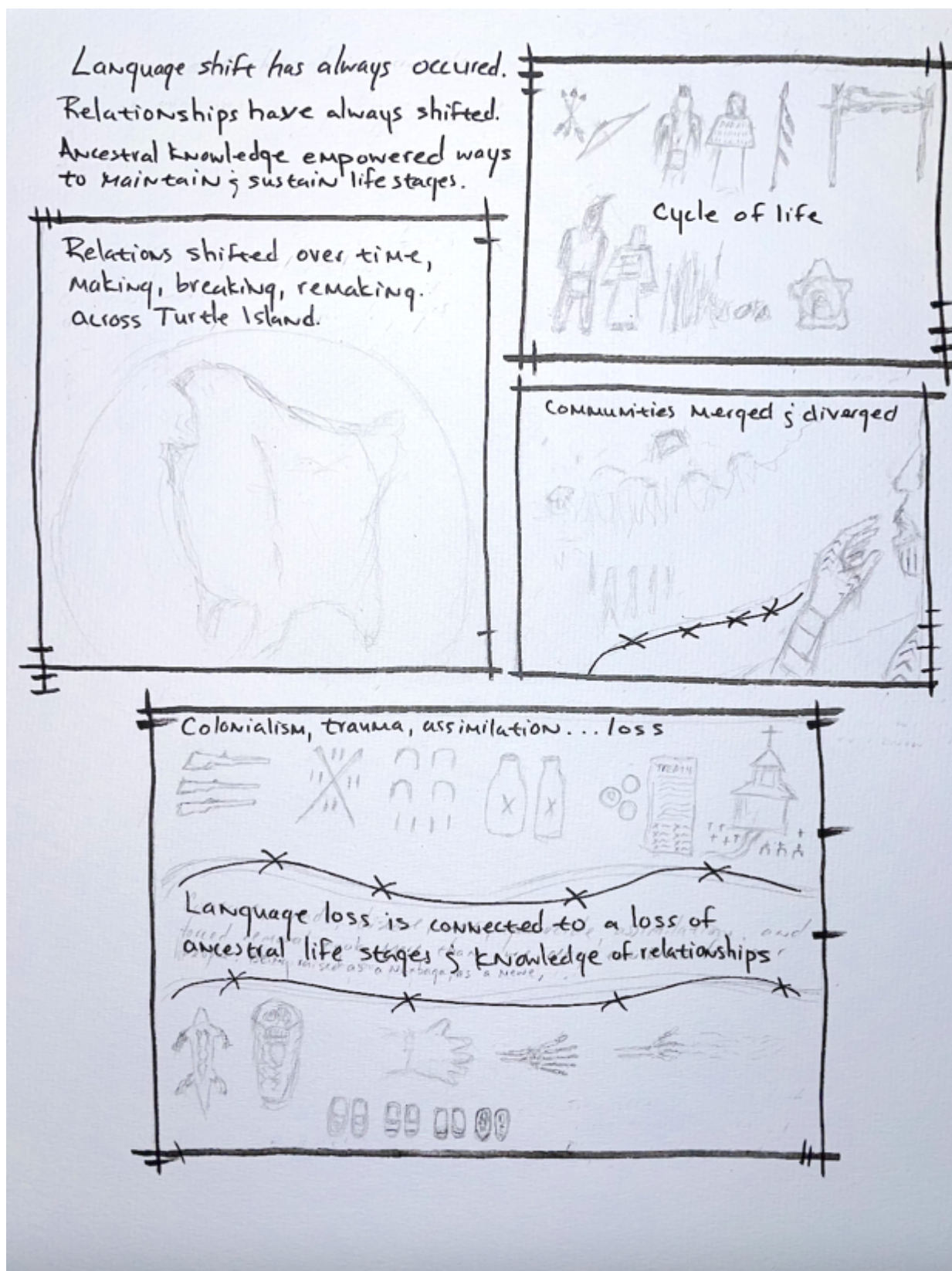


Figure 9: Ancestral Language Shift. Graphite and ink on paper. K. Young Wolf, 2021

✧ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ✧

[Visual guide text]

Contemporary language loss

We were not always this way...we've lost our way.

Contemporary ancestral language loss are symptoms, outcomes, of intergenerational trauma—
lateral violence.

Learned behaviors.

Learned way.

Learned sickness.

The human eaters devour those with bad ways.

And yet, our ancestors' prayers can still protect us, heal us, help us find our way.

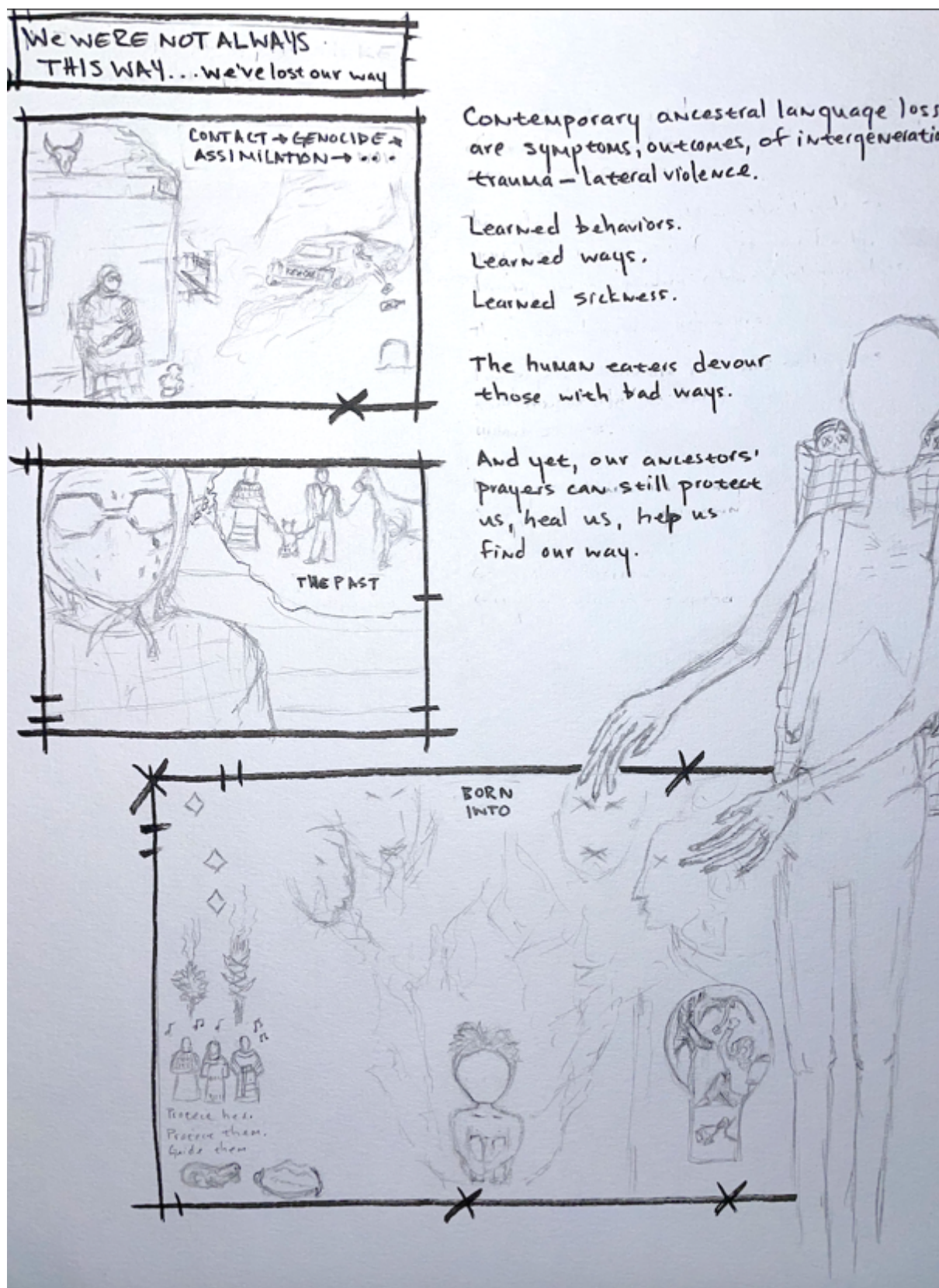


Figure 10 : Contemporary Language Loss. Graphite and ink on paper.
Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

✧ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ✧

[Visual guide text]

Healing takes many forms.

Unique relationships are formed with culture, language, & identity.

Prioritize language within the many forms of healing & empowerment.

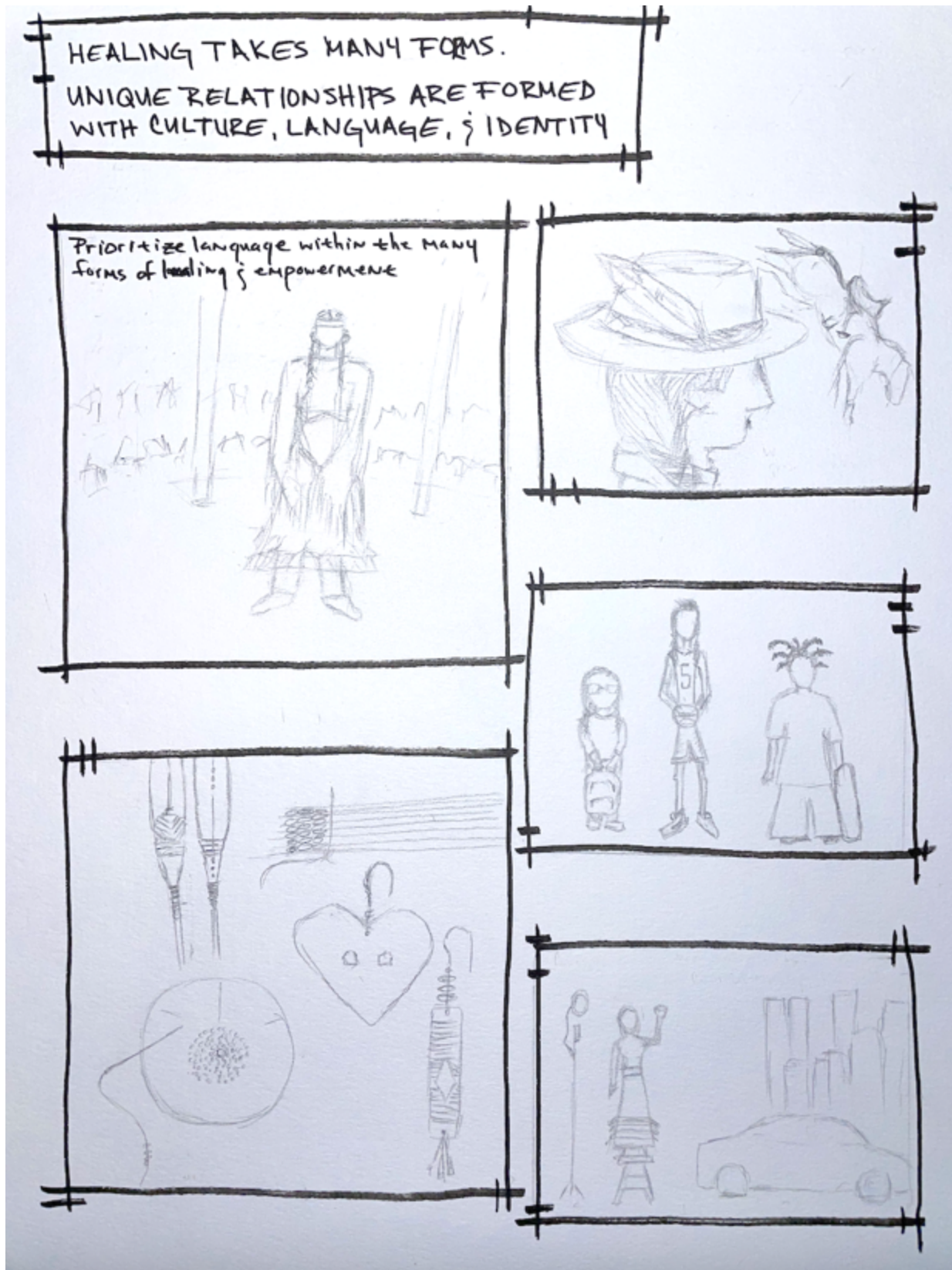


Figure 11: Healing takes many forms. Graphite and ink on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

What is Known About Indigenous Language Endangerment

Contemporary Indigenous language endangerment and loss are attributed to vastly unique and complex issues within Indigenous speech communities. Language shift (changes in a speech groups' language use over time) has always occurred, but rapid Indigenous language endangerment has largely been the result of colonization (Harrison 2007; Hinton and Hale 2001; Hinton et. 2018; Grenoble and Whaley 2006;). This chapter provides information about these complexities, LAR terminology definitions, a broad literature review of language endangerment, loss, acquisition, and revitalization contextualized in relation to the dissertation themes of internal community-based Indigenous experiences during their long-term language acquisition, activism, and revitalization. Language endangerment means that a language is at risk of no longer being actively spoken due to the lack of language transmission and/or is already or close to being "moribund" (children are no longer learning the language), while loss is when a language is no longer used for communicative practices (Belew and Simpson 2018; Campbell and Rehg 2018; Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Lee and Van Way 2018). The Indigenous language endangerment and loss focused on within this dissertation is that which is occurring in community-based settings amongst ancestral language speakers and descendants.

The locations of language endangerment are both within traditional Indigenous territories, historical removal and relocation territories, and contemporary communities within reservation/treaty/iwi boundaries and urban centers. This work focuses specifically on domains where language loss, acquisition, and revitalization are occurring amongst Indigenous communities but is not classifying specific language endangerment and loss demographics associated with each of the language activists. While the term "lost" is not always used by Indigenous peoples, some prefer "sleeping" (Little Doe Baird 2013; Baldwin and Costa 2018), I

believe that the language can become lost amongst the entanglement of issues which negatively impact people's intentions and/or abilities to prioritize acquisition and revitalization in their lives. I also feel strongly that the use of "sleeping" versus "lost" shifts intellectual paradigms and feelings of immediacy about LAR work. I choose not to use the term "sleeping" because of the context of this dissertation.

When I read and hear the term "sleeping" in reference to Indigenous languages no longer spoken because of impacts from external colonization, I'm comforted in some ways because we have examples of methods to awaken the language when there are networks of support (sister languages, documentation in archives, linguistic studies, and other resources). Such as the work of Jesse Little Doe Baird's (2013) language journey to awaken Wôpanâk 'Wampanoag' and the efforts of Daryl Baldwin and David J. Costa (2018) in the Myaamiaataweenki 'Miami' sleeping language revitalization. Instead, the language endangerment issues discussed in this dissertation are community-based internal issues and caustic actions which are forcing ancestral languages into a comatose. These toxic lateral actions, coupled with availability of a variety of resources, dissuade people from participating in consistent long-term community-based LAR work. These experiences are more so caustic to the maintenance of the humans than the ancestral languages.

While I don't use the term "dying" to represent language attrition and loss, this research is greatly concerned with the language life and mortality of Indigenous speakers, activists, and learners who are faced with negative issues depleting their life energy. Language activists face complex choices in mitigating the status and loss of their severely endangered ancestral languages and instable environments (social, political, economic, resources, etc.). These obstacles are creating priorities for Indigenous language activists between efforts to rapidly

document and preserve ancestral languages and efforts to be language teachers, trainers, language resource material creators, and administrators. There is no absolute separation between these types of work as many language activists carry workloads and responsibilities that are fluid between all of these. Yet, when internal circumstances are debilitating long-term goals for community shared responsibilities for fluency, I question how contemporary collaborative language documentation projects might be viewed as decolonized version of salvage linguistic ethnography increasingly focused on preserving what we can of the language before the passing of the last language speakers. Teams of non-community member linguists and academic researchers are utilized to aid in these efforts but there are few of these team members who commit to being community members, active language speakers, and consistently present within community-based LAR efforts. This work raises questions about an overwhelming amount of tasks pulling at realistic time and abilities of small groups of Indigenous language activists and their non-Indigenous collaborators.

Such efforts have been discussed by Indigenous language activist members of endangered languages in this dissertation as painstaking efforts to create organized bundles of ancestral language resources in time capsules for the future generations, as a means to mitigate complex time-consuming and energy zapping issues in attracting and maintaining long-term employment and commitment from community members for LAR work. The complexities of Indigenous language endangerment issues and loss have been chronicled for over 100 years in texts and media about linguistics, ethnographies, autoethnographies, case studies, second language acquisition methodologies, revitalization methodologies, and Indigenous language rights, policies, and educational standards. While many of these examples are condensed within various intergenerational scholarly works (listed below) that touch upon the causes of language

endangerment, theories, rhetoric, and technical methods for documentation, preservation, acquisition, and collaboration, there are less in-depth discussions of the lived experiences of Indigenous language activists navigating the duplicity of their language journeys through these complexities. Writings by Bernard Perley (2011), Hana O'Regan (2001, 2012, 2016), Barbara Meek (2010), and Anton Treuer (2020) provide insights into specific and unique Indigenous language and community endangerment issues and their personal LAR journeys. This dissertation seeks to contribute to such wealth's of knowledge. Documentation of conversations with Indigenous language activists engages reflections on meaningful experiences and methods to navigate beyond internal language endangerment issues and causes to form frameworks for educational steps (life stages) in creating positive productive interpersonal relationships to assist in maintaining and sustaining language journeys. Indigenous language endangerment and loss are therefore contextualized through a comparative analysis and documentation of Indigenous language activists' encounters with internal community-based causes of endangerment and loss. Yet, by focusing on the lived experiences of Indigenous language activists along their long-term LAR journeys shifts dominating theoretical discussions of endangerment to instead conversations about lived experiences and practices of methodical meaningful interpersonal actions to combat a plethora of contemporary issues.

(Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach, 1974; American Indian Languages: Cultural and Social Contexts, 1997; Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory, 1998; The Languages of Native North America, 1999; The Greenbook of Language Revitalization, 2001; Saving Languages, The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalization, 2006; When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Language Erosion of Human Knowledge 2007; Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader, 2009; Language and Social Cognition:

Expression of the Social Mind, 2009; *Language Documentation: Practice and values*, 2010; *Languages of the World: An Introduction*, 2012; *Bringing Our Languages Home* 2013; *The Cambridge Oxford Handbook of Endangered Languages*, 2018).

Shifting Landscapes of Endangerment and Loss

Because of the shifting landscape of language loss, Indigenous peoples are still learning about the scope of causes, impacts, and outcomes of language endangerment. This is due to ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples through colonial settler states and the ramifications manifesting from historical colonial trauma. Colonial trauma are internalized emotional, mental, physical, economic, and environment effects of genocide, boarding/residential schools, governmental policies, racism, environmental and economic destruction and land theft (Alfred 1999; Johnston 1988, 2007; Kovach 2009; Meek 2010; Perley 2011; Simpson 2011; Treuer 2020; Trask 1999). The forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples and enculturation has also resulted in intergenerational trauma carried out through various forms of lateral violence. Lateral violence and oppression are negative social actions occurring within Indigenous communities. These actions are carried out by Indigenous people against their own people. Many of those involved have gone through a process of traumatic colonization and intergenerational assimilation experiences causing learned behaviors of negativity, toxic and dysfunctional interpersonal and social relationships, loss of traditional values, and perversion or manipulation of cultural and language practices and knowledge prestige, governance, economics, and the environment (Trask 1999; Meek 2010; Perley 2011; L.T. Smith 1999).

These issues are analyzed through a framework of macro- and micro-level issues. Macro issues include external forces, while micro issues are internal forces (Grenoble and Whaley 2006; O'Regan 2001, 2016). Through this framework, historical colonial trauma is associated

with macro-level issues, while lateral violence and oppression are associated with micro-level issues. These issues breed interrelated variables which impact and influence the lives and abilities of first language speakers (native speakers/fluent speakers) and second language speakers (non-first language speakers) to participate in LAR. First language speakers, in this context, are people who have been consistently exposed to the language at an early age, “immersed in a naturalistic” environment of language transmission (Norris et al. 2017). There may be gaps of time where the speaker did not converse in the language, but they still possess a communicative level of fluency and comprehension in their first dominant language. The dominant language in this context is the ancestral Indigenous language (mother tongue). Second language speakers are those who have learned or are learning a language after they are already speaking in a non-ancestral dominant language. They are second language speakers no matter if they are learning more than one additional language (Norris et al. 2017). In the context of this research, first language speakers and second language speakers are both actively engaged in long-term consistent LAR work which often begins with language acquisition.

Language acquisition is the learning of a language through various forms of language education curriculums which incorporates intentional efforts fostering language comprehension and usage (Norris et al. 2017). Progression towards language comprehension is dependent on a combination of environmental factors, individual learning capacity, input (time spent learning), structure of language content (curriculum) and degree of meaning-oriented communicative interaction, and basic access to language content and/or speakers (Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Harrison 2007; Hinton 2013; Hinton et al. 2018; Norris et al. 2017). Language revitalization are the intentional actions to combat a variety of variables impacting language stability, maintenance, and enrichment; these become a “counter-balancing” of forces causing language

endangerment, shift, and loss (Hinton 2013; Hinton et al. 2018). This work is repetitive and cyclical. It engages a process of assessing and reflecting upon the efficacy of language acquisition methods and language endangerment, vitality, and benchmark goals and progress in efforts to understand how these variables and issues are interrelated (Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Hinton et al. 2018). Language revitalization can flow through every facet of an Indigenous person's life, skills, and actions.

Language revitalization directly addresses issues which involve the assessment of language endangerment. These methods include Fishman's (1991) Graded Intergeneration Disruption Scale (GIDS) and revised definitions and causes of language shift posited by an Expanded GIDS (EGIDS) scale by Lewis and Simons (2010). Added to these are UNESCO's *Language Vitality and Endangerment Methodological Guideline* (2011). A combination of these methods is used to determine the status of an endangered language which takes into account the "state of intergenerational transmission in the presence of language shift (or revitalization)" (Ethnologue 2021). The EIDS scale assigns levels and labels for each language status, but these are not based explicitly on the number of speakers remaining: "0-4" are non-endangered languages; "5-9" are endangered; "10" is "extinct" (Ethnologue 2021). The "degree of vitality is a reflection of historical factors and the social and cultural positions of the language" (Silver and Miller 1997, p. 9). Vitality is measured through a series of criteria or factors (UNESCO 2011):

1. Intergenerational language transmission
2. Absolute number of speakers
3. Proportion of speakers within the total population
4. Shifts in domains of language use
5. Response to new domains and media
6. Availability of materials for language education and literacy
7. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies including official status and use
8. Community members' attitudes toward their own language
9. Amount and quality of documentation

These macro- and micro-level issues are experienced in a multiplicity of ways, which in turn, influences the methods and actions employed by Indigenous individuals and speech groups for LAR. Models of LAR include total immersion programs for all ages (language nests are schools for young children, but teachers and administrators are not always fluent), bilingual or partial-immersion programs, community-based programs in multiple domains, master-apprentice programs, intensive adult language programs, short term and single day language camps/workshops (Grenoble and Whaley 2006; Hinton 2002; Hinton and Hale 2001). These models utilize various levels of western language acquisition methods and scaled traditional styles of culturally representative methods of teaching and speech transmission. They also integrate various levels of actual traditional cultural knowledge alongside language learning. However, such knowledge is not always present within language acquisition methods. The pursuit for language acquisition requires a closer reflection on the following question: beyond a decline in communicative use, linguistic diversity, and language attrition, what is at risk of being lost due to language endangerment?

Contextualizing Language Loss Across Space and Time

Contemporary research estimates that there have been upwards of 56 million deaths after European contact through the 1600s just in the “Americas” (Koch, et al 2019). This loss of life has been researched by Koch et al. (2019) to represent an environmental relationship and physical impacts to the Earth System through core samples showing a drastic shift in the CO₂ levels during this time period. The relevance of this knowledge is to show the interconnectivity of Indigenous relationships to the very environments shared by Indigenous peoples. This relationship has always been more than a physical one. “Indigenous languages are the keys that are required to unlock the storehouse of human knowledge that is still carried by our ancient and

original peoples. That is, the only way to gain access into the depths of the vast archives of Indigenous Knowledge is through our original languages” (Grounds 2016, 2). Revitalization of traditional knowledge held within language takes many forms and exists in many domains.

The risks of language endangerment are the loss of visceral presence within these domains. “Language disappearance is an erosion or extinction of ideas, of ways of knowing, and ways of talking about the world and human experience” (Harrison 2007, 7). Ceremonial, society, horticulture, cognitive systems, medicines, oral narratives, songs, art, literature, oratory, and hunting are just some of the experiences and actions embedded within traditional cultural knowledge. When combined with language knowledge, these practices are elevated and empowered. Indigenous ancestors were more than fierce warriors in the face of colonial contact, their actions were an embodiment of fierce creators, makers, and conduits of tradition and belief systems. Language revitalization is a call to create, *remake*, *reclaim*, and *reimagine* the present and future beyond the macro- and micro-causes of language loss. Understanding the ways in which an Indigenous language is being threatened, also reveals the scope of interrelated variables being threatened along with this ancestral language vitality.

Statistics, surveys, and demographic reports tell us that Indigenous people are 6% of the world’s population (7.9 billion as of 2021), they are the speakers of more than 4,000 of the world’s languages (approximately 6,700 languages are still spoken today) (UN 2019). Estimates include that more than half the world’s languages will be extinct by 2100 (UN 2019). Efforts for language revitalization and rights to language education are interconnected with movements for collective rights to lands, territories, and resources.

There is growing recognition that advancing indigenous peoples’ collective rights to lands, territories and resources not only contributes to their well-being but also to the greater good, by tackling problems such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity. Indigenous lands make up around 20 per cent of the earth’s territory,

containing 80 per cent of the world's remaining biodiversity – a clear sign that indigenous peoples are the most effective stewards of the environment (UN 2018).

There is no knowing how many languages were lost due to colonial contact. Even today, linguists debate how many Indigenous languages actually exist. This is due in part to an unclear criterion defining a language versus dialect, and older dialects being classified as separate languages (Pereltsvaig 2012, 11). Indigenous language activists are positioned between looking to the past for knowledge (such as archival research) and contemporary efforts to combat language attrition and threats to Indigenous collective rights.

Language loss and endangerment can only be combatted through the actual learning of the language, with simultaneous teachings of traditional ancestral knowledge. Such methods would employ practices of bundling the words with aspects of ancestral and contemporary cultural knowledge and teachings to have the potential to combat more than language loss. These efforts address the loss and endangerment of unique Indigenous ways being. Many language activists hold such responsibilities close to their hearts, but capacity building for such tasks is a massive feat. Simply learning to speak an Indigenous endangered ancestral language to the level of conversational proficiency and beyond, is the work of a lifetime. The Indigenous language activists highlighted within this dissertation, have a long-term relationship with LAR within their speech communities, and each demonstrate higher levels of intention, awareness, inspiration, drive, grit, and heart. Their sense of responsibility and culturally and educationally informed actions have pivoted them into exemplar models to learn from in regard to the lived experiences and life stages of an Indigenous language activist. Their stories and experiences are meant to serve as guides to inform, educate, and inspire a greater

understanding of the contemporary Indigenous experience and movement beyond
language endangerment and loss.

Chapter Two: Beginning and Beginning Again

“Each situation is unique...An important aspect of language revitalization, therefore, is identifying these issues, recognizing how they interrelate, and assessing how they will affect and be affected by an attempt to alter patterns of language use. This is not a simple process...interplay of variables influencing language use in a community are inevitably inexact. They will, therefore, need reassessment at all stages of implementing a language revitalization program” (Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley 2006, 21).

Love all the train wrecks
in savage rearview mirrors.
Love any hush of sadness,
any dark breath made from
the bullying glee of accomplices
who have sold their half-hearted
kisses for treaties, for crystal meth,
for love & resurrection, whatever,
whatever it takes to survive.
Love the contrivance of bells
heralding any small healing.
Love the distant roar
of the skin you're in.
Love the distant roar
of the sin you've been.

-Adrian C. Louis

(“Love the Distant Roar”, in *Savage Sunsets* 2012)

The Indigenous experiences of language endangerment, loss, and revitalization are an intimate semblance of memory, action, and survivance. The tangible human life informed by Indigenous culture and language has shifted throughout time, and Indigenous people have always been experts at weaving new beginnings with the threads of ancestral presence. At this pivotal point in the Indigenous experience, language activists are makers of new beginnings, weavers of futuristic paths for the life of language and culture. No Indigenous language activist is free of the past of their language exitance and the speakers and non-speakers who have painted the landscape of language endangerment, loss, and survivance to which our generations have been born into. Nor are any language activists within this dissertation representative of a life untainted

by personal vibrancies, growth, *reeducation*, and voluminous experience. For that reason, we must be the guiding voices informing and reflecting on contemporary LAR needs, stumbles, achievements, failures, and *re-envisioning*.

Poignant to this dissertation at hand is how each language activist, at one point or another, have actively made repetitious choices to begin and begin again in their language acquisition and revitalization work. Amongst the timeline of intense work, reprieve, and overwhelming enjoyment and love, there are immense responsibilities and experiences navigated in their efforts to stay. To stay in the spaces. To stay present. To stay committed and open to the experience, the challenges, successes, and failures. To allow ourselves to forgive our missteps, our abandonments, and accomplices to the internal actions causing language endangerment and loss. This work is ceremony. As language activists, we are trained in repetition, in review and assessment, implementation, and beginning again. However, beyond curriculum development and application and LAR methodologies, this being a human endeavor and experience, language activists must be cognizant of their own shifting wellbeing throughout these processes amongst different groups in various spaces and at different points in time. This chapter continues with a review of various foundational influences in LAR work. Various understandings of transformative knowledge exchange, meaning making, transcultural intertextuality inspirations, and storywork analyzed as ways to seek an understanding of wellness and relationship making for holistic approaches to LAR.

Reflecting on understandings of “wellbeing” is conducted through an analysis of the various ways Indigenous people conceptualize and understand “wellness and holism.” These are engaged through the theoretical approach of “storywork,” as defined by Jo-ann Archibald (2008) in *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. “An Indigenous

philosophical concept of holism refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical body and behavior/action realms to form a whole healthy person. The development of holism extends to and is mutually influenced by one's family, community, band, and nation" (11). Important and impactful social experiences shared by Indigenous language activists resonate with how concepts and actions of wellness are integral keys to long-term language acquisition, participation, and progress towards goals to combat and heal language loss. Revitalization of an Indigenous language is dependent on the simultaneous revitalization of a healthy lives rooted in an Indigenous speech community. Yet, the toxic colonial environment these roots grow through give way to contemporary manifestations of language endangerment and loss fueled by internal assimilation, practices of lateral violence, and intergenerational trauma by speech community members. These contemporary issues demand a closer look at how Indigenous language activists are experiencing these manifestations in their speech group and community environments. As well as, in what ways are they cognizant of and pursuing and practicing wellness and holism within their language acquisition and revitalization lives.

Within this scope of wellness and holism, conversations with Indigenous language activists about their lived experiences are discussed and reflected upon to identify and determine key concepts and parameters explaining how they have achieved a longevity and success in their language work/language lives. Their narratives speak to the language acquisition methods they utilize and the relationships they have with their language(s) and speech communities, as well as their understanding of and reflections on wellness as it is defined within the contexts of their own cultures and belief systems. Some language activists contributing to this research have requested to be identified, while others have requested that their experiences be made anonymous. I've

made every effort to protect their identities associated with sensitive topic matters. My own experiences I've worked to remove the name of my specific language and communities I've had sensitive experiences in. I've been very forward to share immensely meaningful experiences of my own because LAR work by Indigenous people will always be influenced by our daily lives, pasts, and the social relationships we encounter. Very rarely do I read grant applications and reports, project plans, or LAR methodologies which quantify the Indigenous human experience of wellness and holism as a variable in long-term language maintenance. This lack of informed documentation and education is a disservice to language activists and future language journeys faced with navigating human experiences that often lack clarity and accessible guidance and mentorship to deal with, resolve, or disengage from. The experiences shared by the participating language activists reinforce the necessity to call upon a greater awareness within this field for language learning environments that are inclusive of culturally informed wellness and holism as a foundational consistent practice.

Shifting Our Minds to Wellness

Creating language learning environments within parameters of wellness are often left out of language revitalization and acquisition methods, literature, and "how to guides" for adult language practitioners. "There is no shortage of statements from Indigenous people claiming a link between language revitalization and health and well-being; what tends to be lacking is what counts as 'proof'" (Walsh 2018, 6). This lack of "proof" is the result of the lack of study and truth-telling that has contributed to creating and reinforcing systems of education and practice which lack tools for language activists to navigate and address impactful dynamic social issues prevalent within their fields of work. While the lack of "wellness" exists in a plethora of forms when connected to language loss (physical, environmental, nutritional, economic, political,

educational, cultural, family, social, knowledge systems, etc.), this research seeks to focus on the documentation of impactful interpersonal relationship experiences occurring alongside the practice of language acquisition. Without awareness of and implementation of interpersonal and social wellness within language acquisition methods and language revitalization programs, what types of speech communities and speech families are truly being created?

Four years ago, I had nearly completely different ideas about the needs and goals for developing a language revitalization program. Even though social wellness has always been on the periphery of my goals and work, it has not been a guiding focus. Like many language activists, my unique experiences and understandings of language endangerment and loss has been a driving force of my goals and motivations to pursue involvement in this field. Yet, engaging this work within our own Indigenous communities brings close encounters with dynamics of micro-level issues causing language endangerment that many of us are ill prepared to address, deflect, and resolve. Clearly understanding wellness and holism amongst social environments is a way to begin to fashion vessels and boundaries to address these complex encounters, particularly negative ones. At the heart of my work and this research is the question that continuously demands of language activists and those involved in all areas of language acquisition and revitalization to ask themselves, *what are we actually revitalizing and for what future?*

Negotiating Transformative Indigenous Knowledge Exchange Across Space and Time

My intention to locate this research in a process of Indigenous knowledge exchange, storytelling, and meaning making is meant to broaden the processes of transformative and restorative relationship making. Encountering positive and negative experiences along a person's language journey can shift a person's momentum towards or away their language goals and

wellness. There is also a complexity of reactions when encountering unsettling truths, such as the faltering of the mentor, scholar, and individual characters. The same unsettling truths are encounters in language work when lateral oppression is experienced. Being aware of how impactful experiences are fluid and inspirations are drawn from both within and outside of Indigenous spaces, the action of transformative Indigenous knowledge can become a method to mitigate these encounters and negotiate meaningful knowledge. Indigenous knowledge exchange has been described by Kathleen E. Absolon (Minogiizhigokwe) (2011), in her book *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know*. Whereas “Indigenous cultural histories are rich and have been passed from one generation to the next since time immemorial. Our lived experiences are records of these histories...These histories were/are relevant and meaningful to the lives, culture and survival of each Indigenous Nation. Intertwined in histories were methodologies from which purpose and meaning were actualized” (26). Through engaging both Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices, the cross-pollination between broader decolonization methodologies fuels a discourse of meaningful transcultural knowledge exchange and restorative efficacy.

Brendan Hokowhitu (2011), in *Indigenous Studies: Research, Identity and Resistance*, clarifies that Indigenous teachings and studies puts forth the notion of, “‘transcultural Indigenous dialogue’...this is the production of transcultural space where locally indigenized truths are tabled for analyses that go beyond ‘discovery’ or ‘conclusion’ to an imaginative realm that recognizes the multiplicity of Indigenous subjectivities” (12). The requirement of this space is *difference*. The existence of diverging experiences, contexts, and opinions which are used to prime conversations and analysis based on *truths*. This dissertation is not intended to homogenize Indigenous languages or cultures, nor the Indigenous experience. It is a recognition of the unique multiplicities that exist in each Indigenous language speech group and community,

but this work investigates how the basic human experiences of wellness and holism are shared amongst the different groups. This action is hinged on the “locally indigenized truths” revealed through the narratives of Indigenous language activists, in the context of a broader world of influences and experiences inevitably intertwined with our language lives. It is important at this time to reiterate the complexities of the Indigenous experience, being a human experience, and one of shared truths and veiled meanings.

Unveiling Inspirations

The conundrum associated with these “truths” is that as humans, our experiences, opinions, and perspectives shift over time. They shift within, through, and beyond contextualized Indigenous spaces. They shift with our emotions, our love for each day and lack of love. The meaningfulness a person finds in lived experiences and/or reflective knowledge gained from the experiences are fluid and changes depending on the contexts of accomplices, the actions, and domains. Simply explained, there is no rule to where humans derive inspiration and meaningfulness which fuels motivations and explicates deeper understandings of our intentions. Our actions, boundaries, and frameworks to filter the impact of these experiences, to *remake*, *reright*, and Indigenize inspirations are integral skills to hone methods for transformative Indigenous knowledge exchange. Throughout this dissertation, a variety of inspirations are discussed by myself and the language activists who *remake* and *recontextualize* these meanings.

Each language activist I have collaborated with throughout my work represents a dynamic multifaceted human Indigenous experience touched by historical colonization and ongoing settler state duplicitous actions. Each represent intergenerational knowledge exchanges from mentors who have aided in the development of skills to mitigate and transform these experiences. Yet, each also represents a shifting of influences across space and time which

collide from many different sources in their immediate environments and media. We find the seeping of colonial encounters and assimilation in many facets of our Indigenous lives, just as we find the vibrancy of simplistic beauty coloring our lives. I'm inspired by my ancestors, their medicine words and ways of being, but I'm also shaped by experiences, knowledge, and inspirations extending beyond those spaces through my passionate creativity, art, music, writing, and the very nature of the environments I traverse. LAR work is not confined to Indigenous communities or spaces, nor are the teachings or experiences which shape our work. As Indigenous people we are consistently juxtaposed between spaces of knowledge which require diverse ways to digest and transform that knowledge. Learning to engage non-Indigenous bodies of knowledge is as complex as engaging Indigenous bodies of knowledge.

Many older generations of Indigenous word warriors (Vizenor) have set examples for how to count coup on non-Indigenous academic bodies of knowledge, reshaping the authority and agency of empowerment held by such non-Indigenous peoples. Yet, looking internally, how can we engage in the same process amongst our own misguided bodies of knowledge and individual knowledge makers which has far fewer examples to draw from. Just as many of us at one point in time have been inspired by writings by Sherman Alexie and his lived experience, we have had to pause and reflect on the truths of his life choices and actions. How do we count coup on the fallen, is that something we even want to do? How do we call out the misguided actions of individuals and groups within our own communities who are negatively influencing experiences and knowledge of LAR work?

There is no simple answer. There is no single method. Instead, this process of transformative Indigenous knowledge exchange is the unveiling of understandings that simultaneous positive and negative dualities can still produce inspirational meaning making.

These are the types of shared experiences by the language activists in this dissertation, as well as my own autoethnographic writings. Furthermore, defining how complex these relationships have been and continue to be within our language lives aids in a restorative process to reveal the faults in situational knowledge and the strengths in *remaking* and *reimagining* such knowledge.

Engaging a process of reflection on these experiences and the complex nature of the knowledge exchanges can be characterized as transformative Indigenous meaning making. Many Indigenous language activists draw inspiration and knowledge from non-Indigenous works and translate them into meaningful inspirations. Sometimes these works have negative connotation in the context of their creation, but transformative Indigenous meaning making can cleanse some of the negativities associated with such knowledge.

This is happening in the literal sense through the Indigenous language and culturally informed translations of various non-indigenous materials. Such as Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen's Kanien'kéha 'Mohawk' "Tsi'ten'sherahòn:tsi, Blackbird" translation of the Beatles "Blackbird" song and Renata Flores' Quechua translation of Michael Jackson's song "The Way You Make Me Feel." Hēmi Kelly's *Te Ruānuku* is the te reo Māori translation of Paulo Coelho's book *The Alchemist*. Hēmi's commitment to culturally informed translations elicit agency to recontextualize love and dreams from one language into Indigenous forms of knowledge. "It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting/Ko te whakatinanatanga pea o tētehi moemoeā te take engahau ai te ao'...allowing the soul and words of @paulocoelho to travel to places he never dreamed of, as he put it himself, into the minds, hearts and souls of our very own" (Kelly November 11, 2020 Instagram Post). Each of the original non-Indigenous artists/writers have forms of negative connotations associated with their broader life experiences and actions, yet the meaningfulness of this body of work is *remade* and *reimagined* through a

transformative Indigenous meaning making process. Similarly, in my recent work, I've often quoted to myself a line/mantra from some rising young minds and musical artists that I'm conflicted about because of images of cultural appropriation from their youth. "Where there is love, we must live on. Where there is not, we must provide it" (Greta Van Fleet). Girasi 'love' is a powerful inspiration and I'm inspired by their work for the love and inspiration is brings into the world for reminder of the frailty and power of humans. Actions informed by love is a profound inspiration for many. Specifically in the context of this dissertation work at hand regarding internal community-based negativities, if Indigenous people have the agency and skills to negotiate the value of non-Indigenous works with negative past connotations, we certainly can find a way to negotiate the valuable meaning making from negative experiences and/or encounters with negative people along our own language journeys. We can find a way live the changes we want to see, or similar concepts from interpretations of inspirational words shared by Mahatma Gandhi.

The meaningfulness of the above mantras, to be the one who provides the love and a model of change, is descriptive of the people I seek out and surround myself with. These are my personal actions for wellness. These are mantras for my own life. It's also a description of many of the Indigenous language activists and mentors I collaborate with who represent a stalwart foundation based in love and fierce kindness. Through their work, they bring that love, intention, and example into the spaces they traverse. Within the bones of this research are seeds sown from influences and experiences as vast as our known worlds and unknown forces. It is love that makes them grow, but the environments they traverse are not always filled with love, therefore we must embody it. Be the example and provide love and meaning making in its absence.

Transformative Indigenous knowledge exchange is one that is cognizant of impact of actions, how actions shape us and influence those within and outside of our Indigenous experiences.

Transformative Love and Meaning Making in Academia

Bringing these concepts back into academia are engaged through my actions to draw upon work by non-Indigenous scholars. Academia is a space that I've often experienced as having a lack of love, but I've been growing up most of my life in academia and I'm very selective of the works I engage because many are damaging to my psychological and emotional wellness. In relation to the fields of anthropology and Native literary criticism, I draw upon both Indigenous and non-Indigenous works to craft frameworks of analysis. To reflect on lived experiences and their meaningfulness in an Indigenous knowledge exchange, I've looked to concepts of transformative efficacy. A combination of transformative processes and efficacy posited by James B. Waldrum (2013) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977). Transformative processes for Indigenous healing are conceptualized through Waldrum's definitions of "transformative," defined as a journey towards a defined goal (LAR and wellness in this regard), and "efficacy," defined as being incremental changes (life stages) towards this goal. Engaging this process at times requires being in a safe space that is beyond the immediate experience. Meaning, it is necessary to participate in a dialogue that is not situated only within our own spaces, amongst our own speech community, and at a single point in time.

Expanding upon these notions by non-Indigenous scholars to reflect upon concepts of time, space, and efficacy is the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Bourdieu describes how "time derives its efficacy from the state of the structure of relations within which it comes into play; which does not imply that the model of that structure can leave it out of account" (7). These models are informed by their context. Reflections of

experiences of Indigenous language activists are context based, but the truth telling is occurring at a position beyond an experience. The structure of the meaning making within this dissertation is through conversations about lived experiences between Indigenous peoples. The meaningfulness found within conversations with Indigenous language activists are intended to be used as tools to address variables associated with wellness and life stages within the field of LAR by Indigenous practitioners. These works are also meant to educate non-Indigenous accomplices to have a greater awareness of the spaces they are impacting through their scholarship, agency, and actions.

Conversations with Indigenous language activists are part of a lived experience driven rhetoric based in a practice of comparative reflexivity. I draw heavily on the scholarly autoethnographic works in the field of Native literary criticism whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars look to the past, present, and future for comparative analysis and a means to understand their own relationship with outsider non-Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous traditional knowledge (King 2003; Martin 2012; McDougall 2016; Noodin 2014; Womack 1999). Craig Womack's analysis of "traditional knowledge" in his book *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, has called upon scholars to assess how they conceptualize such knowledge and the reality of change over space and time. Furthermore, to also analyzed how this change impacts their own use of the knowledge and their process of meaning making. The notion of "traditional" becomes "anything that is useful to Indian people in retaining their values and worldviews, no matter how much it deviates from what people did one or two hundred years ago...Only cultures that are able to adapt to change remain living creatures; otherwise they become no longer relevant and are abandoned" (Womack 1999, 42). Traditional knowledge is about agency. This is a form of agency to assess situations, make culturally informed decisions,

and create transformative meaning making. This dissertation calls attention to the reality of change, and the persistent need of Indigenous language activists to employ fluid and reflexive modes of meaning making within their fields of work. The use of reflexive transcultural dialogism (Bakhtin 1981), being the expression of varied and contradictory points of view, creates a space to pursue intentional change for transformative efficacy, rather than being repetitiously reactionary when encountering unpredictable micro- and macro-level issues.

While the process of “looking back upon” at different points in time is an element of comparative discourse analysis and reflexivity (Baker and Ellece 2011), within the context of Indigenous personal narratives and storytelling, the discussions put forward by Leanne Simpson (2011), in *Dancing On Our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishinaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, engages and reinterprets theories of “intertextuality” and “interdiscursivity.” The first being the purposeful integration of multiple diverse discourses within a text or narrative, the second being a more natural occurrence of blending of discourses. Simpson alludes to *storywork* being a form of discourse analysis and intertextuality in which, “[s]torytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives” (34). Indigenous communities share an ongoing experience with colonization which we are still learning the depths of impacts this history and contemporary experiences continue to have on our people, communities, relationship making and meaning making.

This research also participates in a process of “Indigenous epistemology” posited by Shawn Wilson (2008), in *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. “Indigenous epistemology is all about ideas developing through the formation of relationships. An idea cannot be taken out of this relational context and still maintain its shape” (8). Through my

conversations with the Indigenous language activists here, I am continuing a process of relationship making through our mutual mentorship and collaborative research. Pursuing an understanding of relationship making through a process of sharing and reflecting upon lived experiences in this field presents opportunities for storywork, meaning making, and/or a decolonized process of discourse analysis, centered in a transcultural dialogism of traditional and contemporary viewpoints of Indigenous wellness and holism. I employ these methods to reflect on disjuncture (Meek 2010), the colliding of inspirations, motives, intentions, and actions within LAR work and the life stages of Indigenous language activists.

The Storied Life of Disjuncture

Our language lives are vast. Defining and investigating wellness occurring within the lives and experiences of Indigenous language activists creates a challenge of where to even begin? Focusing on specific language acquisition methods as a beginning point to define wellness is also problematic because the lived experiences supersede even the most successful methods. Meaning, that the methods become irrelevant when faced with certain high stress and intense interpersonal and social relationships. For example, no matter how fluent or culturally knowledgeable a person is, motivated and passionate to learn and/or teach the language, I have still witnessed people choosing not to participate in language acquisition if the social environment is negatively impacting their idea of and needs for “wellness.” Additionally, social divisions within language communities and learning groups have the ability to shift priorities away from even the most successful language teaching methods and knowledgeable language speakers. Language and cultural knowledge within speech communities represent power and a status quo. These roles can easily be manipulated to create a disjuncture (Meek 2010) between traditional knowledge exchange practices and contemporary practices altered by assimilation.

These demonstrate social actions driven favoritism, bias, and knowledge hoarding. The issue of “disjuncture,” is explained by Barbara A. Meek (2010) in her book *We Are Our Language: An Ethnography of Language Revitalization in a Northern Athabaskan Community*. She describes how “everyday points of discontinuity and contradiction—between social or linguistic groups, within discourses, practices, or between them, even between indexical orders—that interrupt the flow of action, communication, or thought” (x). These are all variables and realities that contribute to Indigenous speech community members having short-lived participation in language acquisition efforts. These experiences fail to provide a maintenance of wellness, and influences language endangerment and loss.

In contrast to this, long-term Indigenous language activists embody a position of contradiction and disjuncture, because they actively continue to participate in language acquisition activities even if the environment switches between toxic and positive, assimilated and decolonized, and solitary and social. Through the longevity of their careers, various experiences define how they maintain wellness which encourages them to continue successfully navigating these spaces and experiences. They demonstrate ways that they have pursued language acquisition through vibrant careers as language students and teachers? The longevity of the Indigenous language activists’ careers provides examples of greater levels of consistent investment and practice over a longer length of time. Additionally, these individuals have a more in-depth knowledge of their language communities and have experienced a greater variety of relationship dynamics and impacts to their wellness within this field. Their lived experiences are not from the result of a brief pursuit of language acquisition and sporadic work within their own language communities.

Contextualizing Reflexive Meaning Making and Wellness

While the experiences of the Indigenous language activists in this dissertation are representative of different points in time throughout their language lives, the oral narratives documented here are from more recent conversations during the spring of 2021. This is also an incredibly unique time in the world and “wellness” is a sensitive topic to discuss. Many of the Indigenous language activists, like the rest of the world, have just passed the one-year mark of going through the global COVID-19 pandemic. While I’ve collaborated with all but one of the language activists here for the better part of the last decade, I’ve sought out in-depth conversations during the months of March and April 2021. This has allowed me to gain the most up-to-date reflections on their language lives, experiences, and ideas of wellness and relationship making that supports their continued LAR work. This past year has also pushed me to reflect upon my own experiences and work in this field. My conversations with Indigenous language activists have expanded my understandings and feelings towards this type of work and has revealed just how important reflections and actions for wellness are necessary to truly confront the internal causes of language endangerment. This work is a process of beginning and beginning again.

Two years before these 2021 conversations, I was salvaging what was left of my own efforts towards LAR after a dramatic slow-motion crash and burn out, and I was unready to analyze at what point the changes within the relationships amongst my language groups were intentional or involuntary. What parts of wellness was missing or misunderstood? More recently, I came across some old notes and a printout from a master apprentice workshop presentation by Jacob Manatowa-Bailey, Sauk language practitioner, in 2013. The slide is titled, “It’s not Field of Dreams.” The first bullet point is, “Just because you build it doesn’t mean they will come.” This statement was not relevant to my journey at that point in time. Not because I wasn’t paying

attention, but because I had not yet experienced the importance of this context-based knowledge or lack thereof. Even at the start of 2018, I very much believed that if you build it, they will come. This is because I had the notion that participating in the efforts to build a space for the access and funding to learn the language in our own Indigenous speech community would naturally encourage the creation of positive supportive interpersonal relationships amongst the learners and teachers.

Instead, I found that just having a shared love of the language and culture does not define, create, guarantee, nor maintain, healthy respectful environments based in wellness. This meaningful knowledge is shared by many of the Indigenous language activists in this dissertation. For a year, I went through a variety of social relationship experiences that I'm still trying to understand and come to terms with. Bernard Perley (2011), Maliseet anthropologist, artist, and author of *Defying Maliseet Language Death: Emergent Vitalities of Language, Culture, and Identity in Eastern Canada*, stated that, "it is always difficult to understand the significance of an event from within the event itself" (2). These lived experiences are multilayered and are ongoing. Deeper insight into this "Field of Dreams" conundrum is the reality that if you build it, in what ways do you direct who shows up? Do you control who makes this space their home? What type of environment is created from their presence and your interactions together? In an Indigenous sense, were you raised with the same customs, traditions, and understandings of respect and wellness? Sometimes these outcomes and experiences have very little to do with the actual practice of learning a language but are none-the-less important and impactful upon language acquisition and revitalization efforts, as well as a person's ability to create, maintain, and sustain their efforts.

My understanding of wellness being created through community-based language revitalization programs in all of my language communities has been shaken, *remade*, and/or changed at some point in time. What part of wellness needs to be in place to prioritize humanity, love, culturally informed protocols, and inherent rights to access one's ancestral/heritage language and knowledge? At the same time, my own thoughts about my academic expertise have been fraught with varying degrees of imposter syndrome and disillusion because my academic training has not prepared me with the knowledge of how to navigate community-based adult language acquisition in environments that have the presence of disjuncture and social lateral violence and oppression (Absolon 2011, O'Regan 2001, Noodin 2014, Perley, 2011, Simpson 2011, L.T. Smith 1999). These experiences have impacted this dissertation research, my personal and professional goals, and to say the least, it has changed and *remade* them in meaningful ways.

Through mentorship and conversations with other Indigenous language activists, I have come to learn that my experiences in LAR are not unique. There is a prevalence of shared negative experiences amongst even the most successful and positive Indigenous language activists. Participating in short-term language classes has a different environment than long-term community-based language classes and programs. Although there is no quick and easy way to become conversationally fluent, pop-up weekend language learning events, language nights, and the occasional week-long language workshops provide jolts of inspiration and motivation. These activities, however, only provide minimal hours of language learning and usage, and do not lead to conversational fluency (Hinton 2002, Hinton et al. 2018, Manatowa-Bailey 2013 and 2021). Instead, these shorter-lived experiences raise awareness about the status of a language and can bring together speakers and community members who are filled with energy and speak about

change, but often resume a lax approach and inconsistent participation to carry out the actions needed for the change (Perley 2011).

Perley (2011), in his book *Defying Maliseet Language Death*, reflected upon these same types of experiences within one of his own language community meetings, in 1993. This meeting was targeted at gaining support for an immersion program and educating about the viability and endangerment of the Maliseet language. Since this meeting, the “specter of Maliseet language death” has “haunted (and continues to haunt)” his personal and professional life. He stated that,

“the literature presented as evidence of imminent Maliseet language death diagnosed language death and language viability as a direct relationship between the number of speakers in the linguistic community and the survivability of the language in question...the meeting organizer made the important contribution of transforming the abstraction of language death into an immediate and emotional community problem” (2011, 2-3).

Yet, even with this knowledge, Perley discusses a lack engagement and investment by individuals to act upon this knowledge and instead contributed to what he calls “language suicide.”

Language suicide is the internal practice of the language community making the decisions to be complicit, inactive, and counterproductive to teaching and learning the language, even though they clearly understand the threats of language endangerment (Perley 2011).

Language suicide is a manifestation of an internalized colonial belief system engrained through assimilation. Absolon (2011) stated that, the “legacy of colonizing knowledge has created a disconnection of people from their traditional teachings, people, family, community, spiritual leaders, medicine people, land and so on” (27). The degree to which the minds of generations of boarding/residential school survivors and the families they’ve raised have been infected with this legacy is difficult to determine. Wellness, defined by specific Indigenous cultures can be lost in assimilation. Addressing these issues of language suicide through the scope of wellness, even if

wellness is not yet clearly defined through a specific Indigenous culture, at least provides a very real argument against lateral violence and toxic environments being allowed to exist within and around language learning sessions or amongst language speech groups and communities. Being cognizant of how wellness and the wellbeing of individuals are supported by group dynamics is only a starting point. Conversations with the Indigenous language activists are documented here to provide examples of meaningful language acquisition experiences that engage wellness and combats issues of language suicide.

Storywork and Transcultural Intertextuality

Determining what is meaningful from my experiences 4 years ago can be different than what is meaningful now or in another four years. Transformative meaning making can take place at any moment in time and through many methods. Exploring decolonizing methodologies of meaning making in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies* reveals the necessity of 'rewriting' and 'rerighting'; meaning that Indigenous peoples are not simply retelling a story or historical account in storywork, they are *reinterpreting* and *reassociating* elements of the story to make sense of their lives and experiences through an Indigenous lens and knowledge base. The practice of meaning making within this research is used to identify different types of social relationship experiences which can contribute to understanding and developing language acquisition methods invested in practices of wellness.

L.T. Smith and Jo-Ann Archibald both emphasize the importance of decolonizing methodologies which situate the action of meaning making and storywork within the context of the community, instead of from the outside looking in. "Indigenous storywork is action, it is process, it is the seeking of meaning in community...(it) traverses new theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical realms where Indigenous stories, experiences, and

understandings are the core of the meaning-making process” (Archibald et al. 2019, 11).

Furthermore, participation in storywork by the storyteller, listener, and reader embody a process described by Archibald as “synergistic story power” which has “emotional, healing, and spiritual aspects...(this power brings) the story ‘to life’” (2008, 100). When one engages in this process of meaning making through storywork, they are also participating in relationship making. Gus Palmer Jr. (2003), in *Telling Stories the Kiowa Way*, reaffirms that these types of storywork processes “forge and maintain alliances, and they reinforce the social bonding between the people involved in them” (xxii). The conversations I have had with the language activists about their lived experiences are purposefully continuing this practice of relationship making and meaning making. Their documentation and sharing through this dissertation are continuing in a transformative process of relationship and meaning making for the readers, who are encouraged to participate in the process of comparative “synergistic story power.”

Storywork encourages the practice of comparative analysis between shared lived experiences and culturally intangible knowledge derived from specific texts, histories, morals, cultural teachings, sacred stories, and Indigenous epistemologies that transcend from our metaphysical minds into our actions. While culturally specific heteroglossia variables (multi-voiced knowledge within a specific narrative), an analysis coined by Mikhail Bakhtin, are engaged within this research, they are not presented here to “classify” or “prescribe” a status label to a specific Indigenous culture or language of the language activists. Instead, the practice of meaning making within the oral narratives of the language activists endorses a form of intertextuality. Comparative analysis expands upon their narratives alongside other Indigenous written and artistic works that emote culturally specific ways of meaning making. Such practice supports a premise of Indigenous epistemology “specifically questioning in what ways local

Indigenous contexts relate to each other” (Hokowhitu 2011, 9). The culturally specific works by Gus Palmer Jr. (Kiowa), Bernard C. Perley (Maliseet), Leanne Simpson (Nishanaabe), Hana O’Regan (Kāi Tahu Māori), and many other Indigenous scholars provide vibrant locally based examples of culturally specific meaning making through their own personal narratives and research. Their texts and artistic works, in combination with the lived experience of language activists provide bridges across space and time showing how language activists are engaged in a journey of transcultural intertextuality storywork and transformative meaning making.

The focus of the lived experience of individual language activists as a primary source within this research is through a humanistic approach. I fully understand that there is no separating an Indigenous person’s culturally specific identity from their experience. This is carried throughout every moment of an Indigenous person’s life if they have been educated in such a way to value and be shaped by cultural knowledge. Yet, as humans, there are basic experiences and needs that transcend the magnitude of a culturally specific context. Wellness in this sense is a basic human need, or at least should be within the purview of a person’s needs and goals. Any existence that argues otherwise is a path to the dark side (pun intended). The philosophical underpinnings and rooted knowledge can be customized to fit culturally specific contexts, but the basic driving force of wellness is a form of positive health. I encourage readers to look to the specific language activists and cultural knowledge keepers to access an array of culturally unique multi-voiced knowledge systems. The magnitude of these Indigenous varieties can’t possibly be fully investigated or analyzed within a single dissertation. Nor is it my place or choice to assert an authoritative ethnographic voice (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Rosaldo 1986) defining what is meaningful within the cultural knowledge of other Indigenous language activists. In-depth storywork and wellness research by Indigenous people within their own

cultures is an immense and necessary task, one that must be pursued from within by a member of that cultural community.

An example of such work is by Brandy Nālani McDonald's (2016), represented in her book *Finding Meaning: Kaona and Contemporary Hawaiian Literature*. Her text delves deep into heteroglossia and survivance that can only be possibly through an actualization of in situ knowledge and practice. Survivance, as defined by Gerald Vizenor, is a process of using narratives/stories to interject and *reclaim* an active presence, a "transmotion" of active presence through storytelling. McDonald draws upon multiple layers of history, cultural knowledge, and narratives to espouse a culturally embedded form of knowledge and meaning making centered within "kaona connectivity."

"Understanding the importance of linking ancestral hi/stories with our contemporary world, Kanaka authors continue the practice of kaona as a form of aesthetic sovereignty and use what I call 'kaona connectivity' to teach their readers these mo'olelo and mo'okū'auhau, demonstrate their relevance to our lives, provide literal models of behavior, and challenge readers to integrate and apply ancestral knowledge...Kaona is a practice of veiling and laying meaning as well as of finding meaning. As such, it is dependent on an audience, one that has cultural knowledge and experience, one that can receive this meaning, unveiling and sorting through each layer. Therefore, hearing and reading the mo'olelo and mo'okū'auhau of our kupuna and finding and receiving the kaona within them puts us, as mo'opuna (descendants), in the position of audience, requiring us to reflect deeply on the ways they knew the world. Because their knowledge has been carried to us through kaona, and by virtue of the symbolic, allusive, or figurative meanings inscribed, we are challenged to draw from our Hawaiian cultural knowledge and experience of being Hawaiian to decipher these meanings" (5-6).

McDonald's fiercely elegant descriptions of her own cultural knowledge in action engages layers of multivoiced intertextuality and utilizes kaona as a lens to pursue meaning making that is flexible and open to a transformative process across space and time. In this context, the lived experiences of Indigenous language activists are representative of "cultural layers." Through these conversations, "wellness" becomes a transformative transcultural "form of aesthetic

sovereignty” and is used as a “wellness connectivity” to teach readers/language activists meaningful healthy social relationship examples as models of sustainable community-based language acquisition methods. However, for kaona connectivity to be actualized a person has to develop a mind educated in that cultural context. While I do not share the specific culture as McDonald, our interconnectivity and meaning making is situated in the broader Indigenous knowledge context and the relationship we have and seek to have.

Seeking an Understanding Relationship *Re*Making

The action of storytelling in the context of this research positions the personal narrative as a process of truth telling. I’m invoking the term “truth telling,” which is used within truth and reconciliation movements, to reinforce that the narratives of this kind, stories of lived experiences of language activists and that of my own, are of a sensitive matter. These can hurt when discussed, but they also have the potential to heal us when reflected upon. Stories are medicine, and this dissertation is grounded in the fact that language is also medicine (Archibald 2008, Johnston 1988 and 2007, Palmer 2003, Simpson 2011). However, the issues that have caused language loss and “language suicide” are complex and multifaceted. The roots of many social and economic issues faced within Indigenous communities are manifestations of systematic colonial genocide, assimilation, and trauma from boarding/residential schools, intergenerational trauma, and lateral violence. There cannot be a continued assumption that each Indigenous person clearly understands how these roots of historical and contemporary trauma influence their own existence and ability to create, maintain, and sustain healthy beneficial interpersonal relationship. Where can reflection and assessment begin in order to gauge the full impacts of these issues within language speech groups?

The late scholar and resolute language activist, knowledge keeper, and teacher, Basil H. Johnston, discussed these complexities throughout his books. In his 1998 autobiography, *Indian Days*, he documents and reflects upon how being a residential school survivor impacted his life and the types of social relationships he participated in. Johnston's experiences are further analyzed in Sam McKegney's (2007) book, *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School*, which shows individual narratives being representative of a wider community of experiences. Yet, we cannot assume that every boarding/residential school survivor automatically has similar experiences or carry scars of such trauma. Henrietta Mann (1997) in her book *Cheyenne-Arapaho Education, 1871-1982*, acknowledges that many suffered through these educational systems, but she enjoyed her time at the school and it inspired her to pursue her greater work in life. There are many other issues that Mann has spoken out against in her career, language loss is part of that. With the complexity of causes of language endangerment and individual journeys that are connected to vast varieties of experiences and impactful issues, learning a process of honesty through truth telling and reflection is a process to untangle these issues.

The conundrum faced by individual language activists is that you have to be engaged in an internal process of honest truth telling to learn about each other and variables that may impact and cause stress on your social relationships within your language groups, while also mastering methods of language acquisition, and learning and teaching the language which are often already high stress situations. Again, do people have the capacity to participate in this level of self-reflection, group reflection, and honest truth telling? The truth and reconciliation process modeled the presence of mental and emotional support resources within these truth telling sessions. Reflection and

assessment by the project leaders had to include their own capacity to create safe spaces and support systems for this type of engaged activity amongst their speech group members. The importance of this process is to pursue fulfillment and strengthening in the relationships of the speech group members. The love people have for their language and culture brings them together, but it can become less of a priority when encountering high stress situations that adversely affect one's wellbeing. Even with the scope of possible requirements for truth telling, this need for "honest" discussions has been repeated numerous times by the language activist participants.

Johnston discussed the needs he had to *relearn* how to make relationships with his family and community again after his time in the residential school. His truth telling and healing needed to happen in order for him to truly progress forward with his own life and the priorities he had for language advocacy, documentation, and teaching acquisition methods. His relationship with his language and the knowledge from speakers, pushed him to engage in the process of truth telling:

“it was the regard of my people who still cling to their language that lent strength to the conviction that made me feel worthwhile, rendered so by the worth of my heritage. It is language that has enabled me to gain some understanding of my people's institutions, beliefs, values, perceptions, outlooks, attitudes, their literature and history (McKegney 2007, xiv).

Johnston and McKegney point out that there is an endangerment of culturally informed relationship knowledge being maintained within our own language communities.

These narratives of social relationship experiences of language activists are examples of how this lack of knowledge exacerbates tensions in what is already a high stress environment of language learning and teaching. McKegney (2007) states that Johnston participates in a process which reaffirms that, “survival narratives document the

perseverance of certain raw materials of cultures against the relentless undertow of genocide; they reinvigorate what survived, recreate what didn't, and re-imagine the place of the creative Indigenous individual in relation to her or his community (or, better, communities)" (8). I again repeat, *what are we actually revitalizing and for what future?* Do we know what culturally informed relationship making is? Are we engaged in relationship making that addresses issues of colonial assimilation and lateral violence? Are our language groups experiencing a lack of participation or long-term commitment from community members because of the relationship dynamics? Is this task of recognizing a "relentless undertow of genocide" too much alongside the tasks of language acquisition?

Contextualizing the Indigenous Language Activist Experience

I am cautious about pursuing an understanding of how these variables manifest and become impactful in language groups, and then assigning a degree of responsibility to address these issues, because language activists often feel a pressure of being a "jack of all trades." There is a weight upon our shoulders to address every social, economic, environmental, and political issue alongside addressing and taking action upon language endangerment within our own communities. This leads to burnout and is not healthy, nor sustainable. Full stop.

Language activists and their actions can be part of the solution, but language acquisition and revitalization are not the entire solution to centuries of colonization and assimilation. Instead, this work is about deliberately stepping towards being aware of our own positionality and range of impact through an awareness of various processes to identify and assess problematic and impactful variables/issues. Then addressing these

before they manifest in detrimental ways within language groups. Each language group needs to negotiate and navigate the steps to doing this through their own traditional knowledge, cultural belief systems, and program methods. This research is about documenting various experiences of language activists to provide examples of ways to identify and address such experiences for the purpose of making “paths others can follow” (Noodin 2014, xii) towards culturally informed relationships, and how these might be created, maintained, and sustained. The knowledge and medicine that can be derived from Indigenous languages is boundless, but if the environment is toxic, this knowledge and medicine can become compromised, diluted, and misinterpreted. Through this awareness of the wellness that exists or lack-there-of, we’re either building bridges or reinforcing walls along this language acquisition journey.

The relationships with one’s language and culture are intimately connected to kinship, history, and personal experiences. It is also impacted by how teachings are bundled with grammar and cultural information. A language teacher’s own understanding of the intricate relationships within language and cultural knowledge may contribute to the types of connections language learners have with their understanding and use of the language. If the relationship between learners and teachers is not based in wellness, there may not be trust that encourages a rounded education endorsing both language and cultural transmission within their language groups. In Johnston’s (2007) *Anishinaubae Thesaurus* he demonstrates the complexities of the language and cultural teachings through a lens of transcultural intertextuality.

Our language, Anishinaubae or, as it is commonly known, Ojibway (Chippewa in the United States), is a beautiful language, soft and musical, full of meaning. Perhaps the Kiowa author M. Scott Momaday best expressed his tribe’s regard for language when he said, ‘Words were medicine; they were magic and invisible. They came from nothing into sound and meaning. They were beyond price; they could neither be bought or sold.’ To the Anishinaubae and other tribes, words and

language were analogous to medicine, and sacred; they could heal or injure, comfort or offend, enlighten or mislead” (Johnston 2007, 133).

There is responsibility with this knowledge. Language can be more than a communicative tool.

Wellness, in this sense, requires a relationship that encourages the transmission of more than language grammar.

Within the same breadth, Johnston shares his lived experiences and addresses the variables of personal language status, use, and social relationship complexities as a critique and caution for other speakers and learners.

“Instead of venerating our language as our ancestors did, those of us who still cling to it have taken our language for granted, speaking it carelessly, loosely, negligently, without regard for its beauty, rhythm and cadence, and by doing, have taken the grace and elegance from it. Where many fall short is in the knowledge of the more fundamental, essential meanings of words and their derivations. They readily understand *mashki-aki* and *w'daebawae* as meaning ‘medicine’ and ‘he/she is telling the truth,’ but few know that *mashki-aki* also means the strength of the earth operating as a healing agent, or that *w'daebawae* also means that a speaker casts his knowledge and his voice only as far as his perception and his fluency with language will enable him” (Johnston 2007, 134).

As such, language activists have a responsibility to choose what type of language acquisition methods they want and will support. *Recreating* and *remaking* meaningful relationships that are targeted at maintaining an engaged wellness to support sustainable language acquisition environments may be beyond the capacity of an individual but developing support systems amongst the group may make some of the goals feasible over time. However, learning the language as a simple communicative tool may be all that is wanted. Additionally, there may not exist the need for such healing as described by Johnston. Not every Indigenous person feels they have trauma or that they need healing. A simple reflection on the speech group dynamics, progress and outcomes, and social wellbeing can provide some answers to these issues.

Seeking an Understanding of a Process of *Remaking*

My intentions with my own truth telling and creating a space to provide the truths of Indigenous language activists in this dissertation are to provide examples of conversations that other language activists can have amongst each other as a process of reflection by those participating in this field. This dissertation is a contribution to Indigenous language revitalization literature as an example of an engaged intentional pursuit of holistic language revitalization. It is also a process of truth telling about the failures. As difficult as they may be, there are lessons in these as well. Such narratives, both positive and negative, are meant to be read, felt, shared, and repeatedly reflected upon over time to gain deeper insight and transformative meaning making.

My own relationship and understanding of revitalization have been *remade* through this process. Reflecting back on some of these lived experiences and their ongoing impacts on my own language acquisition efforts, it is obvious that my previous understanding of language revitalization was skewed. Manatowa-Bailey (2021) stated that,

There's language learning and then there's revitalization. We got them all mixed together, but they're not necessarily the same thing...I think we have a good sense of how language is acquired. How language can be learned...for the development of proficiency in a technical sense...But revitalization, which is kind of this idea that language and culture and history and community and family and ceremony, it's all of these things, that are all bundled together. And we don't have a very good sense as a field, how one might impact the other. When we're talking about them, people aren't separating them out."

I had once thought that language revitalization was synonymous with the action of language learning for fluency. The two are interconnected and feed each other but there is a definite need for a deeper awareness and understanding of how language activists employ such methods to obtain different goals. If one's understanding of language revitalization is such, it is easy to think that you are participating in language acquisition, directly combating language loss and endangerment, because you are addressing variables that are caustic to language fluency and communicative vitality. Any action that is not direct language use and learning, may be

characterized as revitalization enrichment. This is how you can spend a decade actively engaged in language revitalization and still not be conversationally fluent. Commitment of time has not been focused specifically on language learning goals, outcomes, and benchmarks. In contrast, a person can spend a decade acquiring conversational fluency but lack a greater connectivity with a fuller spectrum of affairs and cultural happenings within their community. Pursuing an understanding of language acquisition and revitalization methods and reflecting on the actual impacts and influences to the speech group members, their personal goals and language group goals, engages a process of *remaking* and transformative Indigenous knowledge exchange.

Intriguingly, when we reflect upon Johnstone's language activism, he reaffirms that it is not enough to just know the technical structures, grammar and such of an Indigenous language, the meaning-making occurs in the sharing of knowledge bundled within the polysynthetic words, and that the ways in which these are connected to cultural knowledge are well known and taught simultaneously. Anton Treuer (2020) in *The Language Warrior's Manifesto: How to Keep Our Languages Alive No Matter the Odds*, states that,

When I advocate for indigenous language revitalization, I often encounter a quiet form of passive resistance. Many think the language is nice or pretty—like the song of a bird in the forest. There's a sense that the forest and especially humans don't depend on that sound for anything; it doesn't fill bellies or help people lead longer, healthier, happier lives. But nothing could be further from the truth. Physical, mental, and spiritual health are deeply intertwined. There is no way to improve our health without taking a full, holistic approach. We can't stop the bludgeon of forced assimilation. Instead, we need to decolonize and re-indigenize everything we do. This is where real healing will come from. And again, the language is a powerful tool in the arsenal for such an undertaking (24).

Pursuing an understanding of LAR that embodies wellness is a necessary process of decolonization of this field. The Indigenous language activist narratives share their own undertakings of these issues. Their understandings of the unique connections they and their speech groups and communities have with the concepts and practices of holism are necessary to

empower intentional methods of language acquisition and revitalization aligned with practices of decolonization *remaking* and *reindigenizing*.

Furthermore, understanding that promoting language awareness, reinforcing identities connected to ancestral culture and language, and *reclaiming* Indigenous spaces through *renaming* are some of the methods of *reindigenizing* and emotional holism, but these are not direct methods of language acquisition. One could argue, these are an integral part of the heart of language revitalization, and what is language acquisition without an expansive and inclusive heart? Yet, no matter how large and powerful our hearts are, there are basic physical capacities to realistically complete, and complete well, an expansive load of tasks. This is not sustainable. Only through the act of learning and speaking language in full sentences can you achieve progress towards fluency. This task takes an immense amount of intention and time. Priorities must be assessed.

If language fluency is the goal, then language acquisition methods are the core, and language revitalization efforts are on the periphery. If a healthy speech community is the ultimate goal, then LAR methods could be *reimagined* as not on the periphery, but threads woven into the core, reinforcing, tethering, and pulling the individual towards a more fulfilling journey for wellness and language acquisition. Stopping and reflecting on the types of educational journeys being advocated for and implemented through LAR methods is a necessary task of individuals and speech groups. Engaging conversations about wellness, holism, relationship making, and truth telling is a process towards creating or modifying program goals and methods. What is the education of an individual, of the speech group? Does a *relearning* or *unlearning* need to take place in order to progress towards wellness and holism of the language activist and their speech group? Utilizing forms of transformative knowledge exchange, meaning

making, transcultural intertextuality inspirations, and storywork are ways to seek a
reindigenizing understanding of wellness and relationship making for holistic approaches to
LAR.

Chapter Three: An Unlearning and *Re*learning of Indigenous Models of Wellness and Symbolic Capital

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

Through the language acquisition and revitalization work I have been part of, my own relationship with my educational background and experiences have been *remade*.

[Visual guide text]

Unlearning an Education

Tribal courts place enrolled children with the enrolled parent. It wasn't about wellness. Maguu "grandmother" was educated in silence. The house parties raged. We played with string, huddled together in the truck in the winter outside the bar.

I was returned to my Gah-ghuk "mother's mother" changed. Educated by silence, I no longer spoke. I had forgotten how to laugh.

Grandpa taught me laughter. Grandma outran the tribal cops when they came for us. She was educated in resistance. Language loss was the least of our worries.

R: Grandpa, I'm going to get a really good job so I can take care of you and Grams.
G: You do that Chipmunk.

Grandpa passed and Gah-ghuk put away her joy to mourn. School became a new home, an escape.

They fired Mr. Knows His Gun for teaching our us tribal stories in bible class.

R: Grandpa, are you still here? I don't know about this education stuff.

G: Are you good at basketball?

...

G: Well, you can be great at school. Get your education. Get a good job.

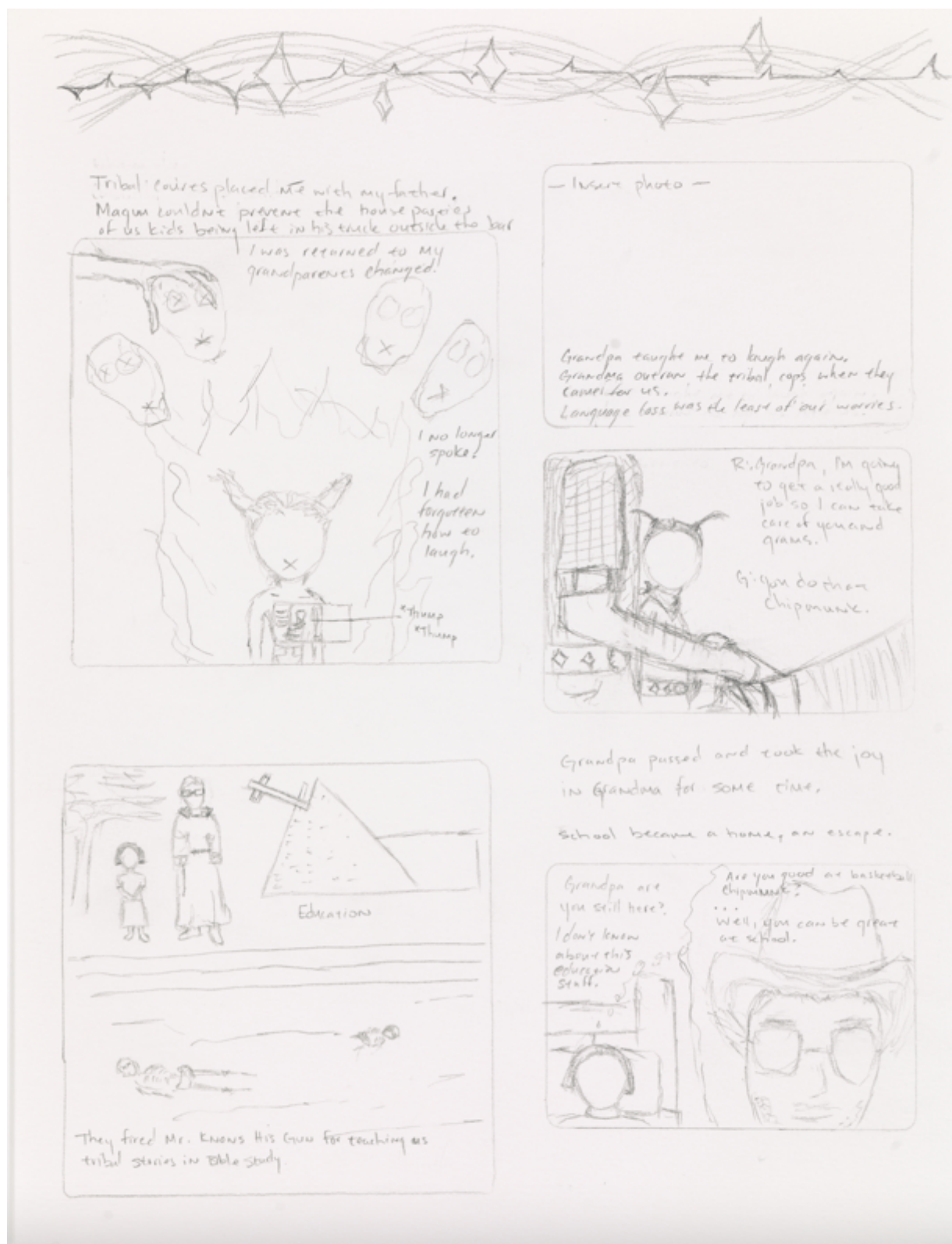


Figure 12: Unlearning an Education. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

❖ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ❖

[Visual guide text]

Relearning Conversation

Hall of voices:

You're not smart enough for college.

You're just an Indian.

Apple!

You just think you're better than us.

R: Grandpa? Are you still here?

R: Grandpa, is Grams with you?

G: Yeah Chipmunk, she's in the garden.

R: Grandpa, I hardly get English. You know they cut Hooked on Phonics the year I started at St. Labre. And I'm still dyslexic. How am I supposed to do linguistics?

...

R: Grandpa?

G: Get on with it, Chipmunk.

R: Well, why do you all keep saying, "get your education, come back and help your people." And then they treat us bad when we come home? What's the point of working so long and then they act stank?

G: It's not about them, Chipmunk. They're hurt. They're searching for something to fill that hole in themselves. To fill what's missing.

R: ??

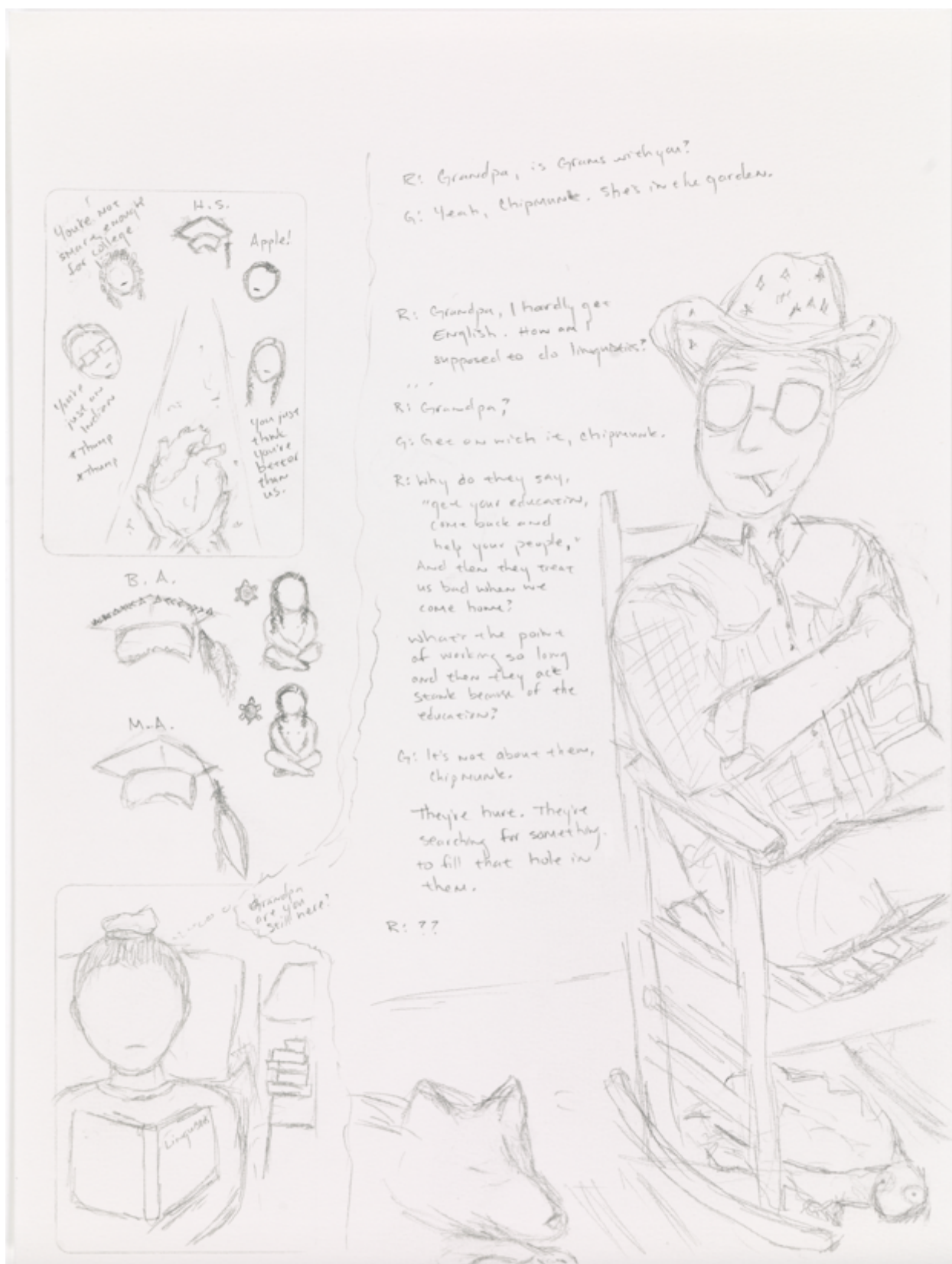


Figure 13: Relearning Conversations. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Remaking Education

G: When we're born, the umbilical cord is sewn inside a pouch to help focus our path.
It's good your boys have their pouches.
Yours, well, it was eaten by the dog... or maybe it was that snapping turtle...
Anyway, a piece of you is missing, and your spirit is searching for something to fill that space with.

Naagagaa: So. Hungry.
Keep. Safe.

Ceesha: Seriously?

G: That's the same with those people. But many search for it in the wrong places and they fill that hole with hate, poison...
Then they make their kids and family that way.
...

G: It's better you're on this path now. Don't wander through life half a person.
Fill that empty space with knowledge.
This schooling, make it what you need it to be.

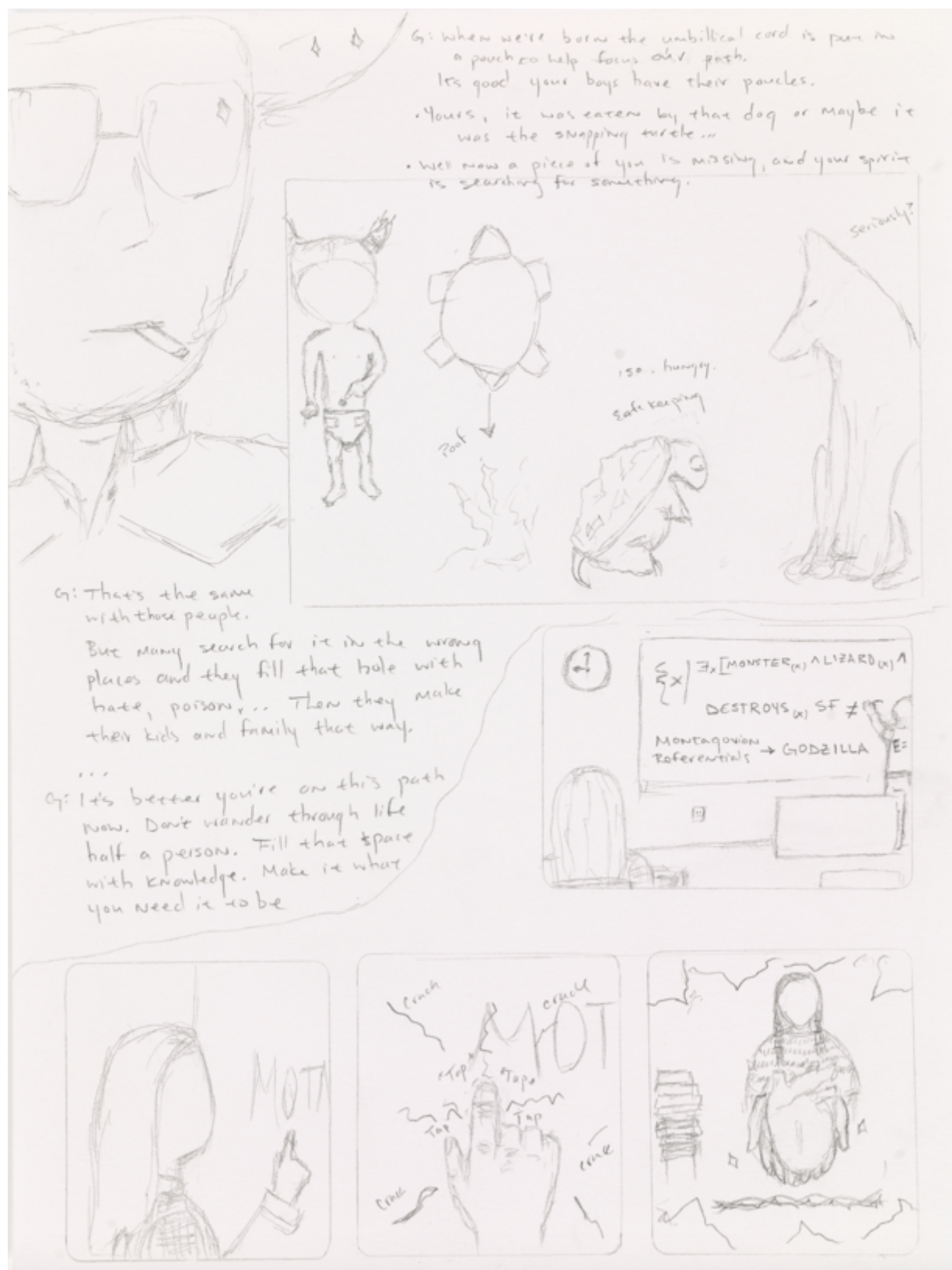


Figure 14: Remaking Education. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

An Unlearning and *Relearning* of Indigenous Models of Wellness and Symbolic Capital

“We should be careful about what we bring into academia and equally careful about what we take from it” (Jacob Manatowa-Bailey).

Finding a balance between language acquisition and individual and group holism is not a simple task. Firstly, does the individual and speech group have the capacity to or even want to engage holism and wellness? If so, what is already known about wellness and holism? What needs to be unlearned and *relearned*? With my own knowledge about this field *remade*, it is imperative to use the lens of transcultural interconnectivity to further derive new meanings from Indigenous educational models of creative healing, restorative balance, Indigenous research methodologies, and Native self-actualization (Archibald 2010; L.T. Smith 1999; Stone Brown 2014). *Relearning* from these models about the scope of priorities, humanistic needs, and personal *rebalancing*, the work of Indigenous language activists within this field must be multidimensional and fulfilling, beyond just a communicative fluency. New conceptualizations of this field are occurring within a movement of performative and critical Indigeneity. This is the very act of *recreating* through transformative agency to unsettle social, political, and cultural boundaries (Graham and Penny 2014; Perley 2014). Situated within these contexts, the narratives of Indigenous language activists are more than counternarratives revealing complexities and contradictions within this field of study (Denzin et al. 2008), they are guides to *recreating* mutually affirming social relationships between speech group members (Perley 2014).

Archibald and Dewar (2010) demonstrate how cultural and creative activities promote healing of historical trauma. “A notable component of successful healing programs was their diversity—interventions were blended and combined to create holistic programs that met the physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual needs of participants” (Archibald and Dewar 2010, 2).

Archibald and Dewar developed a visual guide (Figure 15) to help explain how holistic healing through creative arts is a model and process of restoring balance for Indigenous peoples who have been impacted by historical colonial trauma. Additionally, they have created another visual guide showing the interconnectedness and flow of creative arts as a tool for healing methodologies (Figure 16). The interconnectivity of creative arts can also be utilized through the action of creative language acquisition. Crafting curriculum that engages a process of creative exercises to learn, teach, and use the language engages a process of holism. Utilizing positive creative arts as a method for motivation supports a broader movement of humanistic approaches which emphasizes positive behaviors, artistic creativity being one of the most prevalent (Kenrick et al. 2010).



Figure 15: Holistic Healing = Restoring Balance Model (Archibald and Dewar 2010, 7)

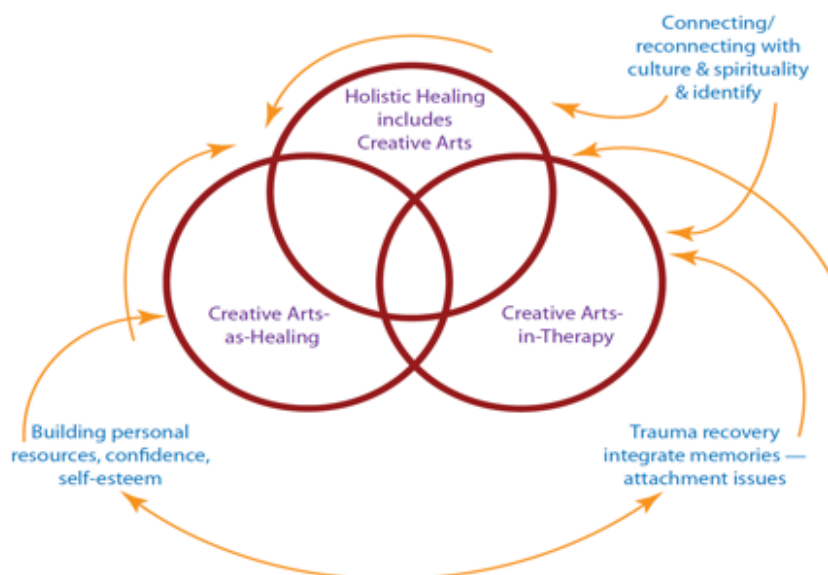


Figure 16: “Creative Arts and Healing: Three Interconnected Models.” (Archibald and Dewar 2010, 7)

In each of these models, language and culture learning is part of a greater pursuit of healing, holism, and restoring balance. Connections through communication is key. Language has always been a means of communication, but if the person using the ancestral language to communicate carries and projects manifestations of trauma through their ancestral language use, obviously, such energy will be embedded within the language and can weave into the student and group who may continue the cycle.

Decolonization Transformative Models

Decolonization, in this context, embodies a pursuit of *restorative* balance of a speaker (individual), a family, community, nation, and the natural world (not specifically in that order), as Archibald and Dewar have shown. L.T. Smith (1999) presents an additional model (Figure 17) representative of the flow of enduring relationships and interconnectivity between stages of reflection and action. “The four directions named here – decolonization, healing, transformation and mobilization – represent processes...which connect, inform and clarify the tensions between the local, the regional and the global. They are processes which can be incorporated into

practices and methodologies” (116). The core of this model is self-determination, this represents agency to direct one’s own present and future.

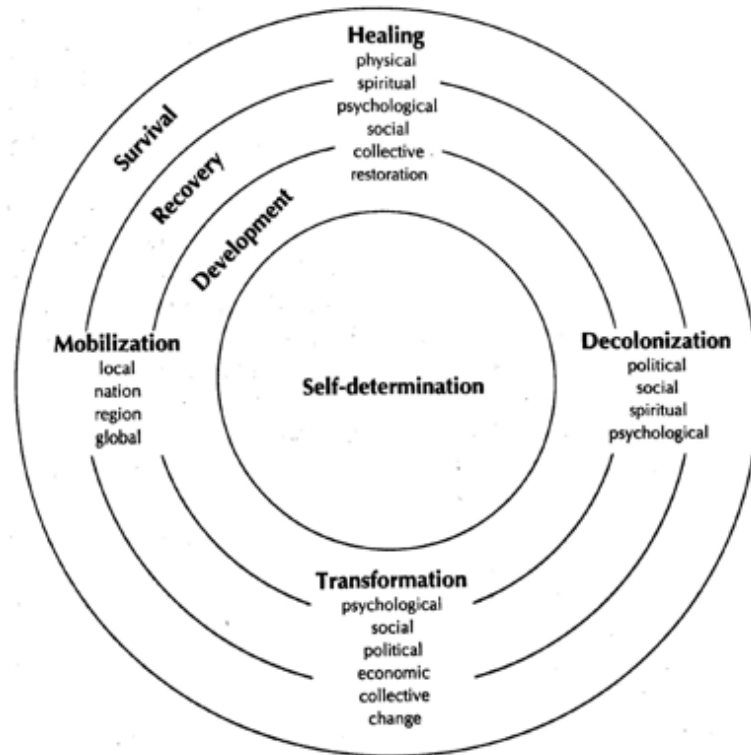


Figure 17: “The Indigenous Research Agenda.” (L.T. Smith 1999, 117).

The repetitions of reflection are represented in L.T. Smith’s model as “tides,” these are the lines on the outside of the self-determination core. “The tides represent movement, change, process, life, inward and outward flows of ideas, reflections, and actions” (L.T. Smith 1999, 116). All of these variables can be engaged through a process of intentional and informed healing, decolonization, mobilization, and transformation. These are the same concepts represented through the narratives of Indigenous language activists. The language initiatives being led by some of the participating language activists already have project plans, strategic goals, and curriculum developed to employ traditional knowledge in-line with a process similar to these models. Such initiatives are dependent on intentions and priorities.

Adding to these is the “Native self-actualization” model. This is a traditional knowledge model of self-actualization and healing based on the Siksiká “Blackfoot” Nation’s “sacred way of life.” Sidney Ann Stone Brown (2014), has pursued the *rerighting* of her tribal people’s traditional knowledge through her tribal research. Her book *Transformation Beyond Greed: Native Self-Actualization* has worked to *rewrite*, *reright*, and *reindiginize* the more popularly known Western model by A. H. Maslow (1943) “pyramid of human needs” or “hierarchy of needs.” These concepts of actualization, a process of reaching one’s full potential, which Maslow developed in part from knowledge shared with him while living amongst the Siksiká in the 1930s. Stone Brown describes the process of “Native self-actualization” through an “Inverted Lodge” model (Figure 18), in contrast to Maslow’s “hierarchy of human needs pyramid” model (Figure 19).

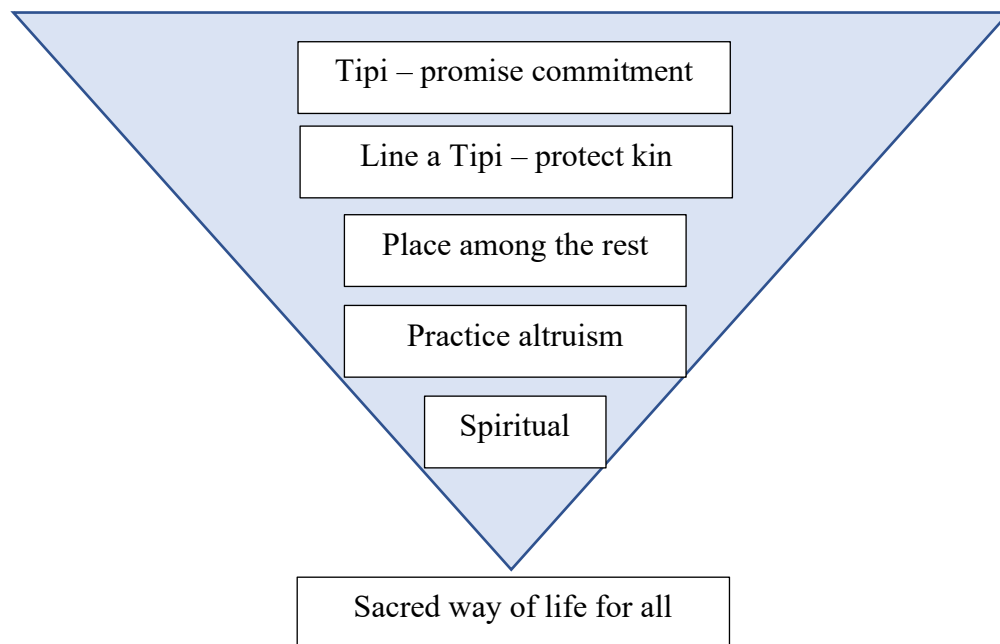


Figure 18: “Inverted Lodge Siksiká” model. (Stone Brown, 2016)

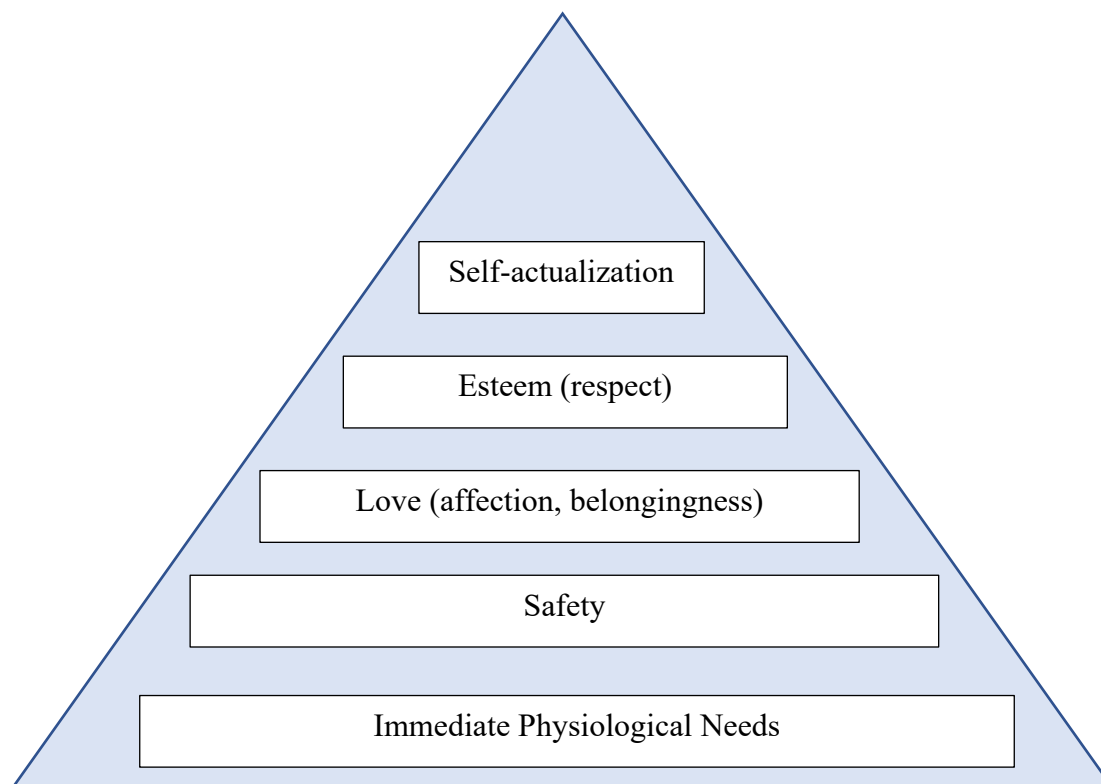


Figure 19: “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.” (Kennrick et al. 2010).

The Blackfoot language and culture educational model employs this philosophy through their curriculum development and application. “Our language is about connections and relationships. This is the life and spirit of our language. If we could teach our children this, they would gravitate toward it because it is nurturing. The Blackfoot language is our universe and our university. If we could teach our children their language, it would open their lives and they will create their destinies over and over again” (Dr. Betty Bastien quoted in Blackfoot Language and Culture Twelve-year Program 2010). This language program promotes an emphasis on interaction and meaningfulness, through four components: language competence (knowledge and ability to use the language through interpretation and production of meaningful texts and communication); application (functions and contexts that students are able to perform in the language); community membership (understandings, views and values of Blackfoot culture); and strategies (assessment to aid in improving proficient and effective communication and learning)

(Blackfoot Language and Culture 2010). There are multiple models created by the Blackfoot language and culture program to address a variety of curriculum, cultural competency, and connectivity outcomes. There will most likely always be the need for numerous dynamic models to represent the changing variables and impacts for each individual and speech group working within this field.

Indigenous Research Models in Context

The practice of learning from multiple models is what this dissertation research is promoting by highlighting multiple contextually unique and dynamic narratives of Indigenous language activists. Yet just as each model does not capture all of the variables that may be meaningful or impactful to a person's motivations and intentions, neither do the narratives of the language activist. These are the gaps that each individual must fill within their own intentions, priorities, goals, and narratives. Each individual must ask themselves if their personal goals align with their priorities and intentions, or vice-versa. Developing custom models of inquiry based on personal and cultural parameters is part of a process to transform Indigenous decolonization methods and customizing context based Indigenous research models.

L.T. Smith's (1999) *Indigenous Research Model* was created through her traditional knowledge and interpretation of the four directions, which she has assigned as "decolonization, healing, transformation and mobilization." These represent "processes that connect, inform and clarify the tensions between the local, the regional and the global" (116). Engaging transcultural intertextuality methods makes the utilization of Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" model still relevant in the LAR context. This model can still be used as a tool of analysis to investigate the tensions between human motivational priorities and traditional knowledge and language acquisition priorities of the speech group or individual. However, as my elders have cautioned

me, why would a person want to be only half of a being? What parts of them are missing? What needs to be unlearned and *relearned*?

Through honest reflections, language activists are promoting the *reeducation* of Indigenous people to be cognizant of the deeper roots of cultural meanings and traditional knowledge aligned with wellness and holism. With each seed of knowledge there is responsibility. Within my culture, you gift a person when told a story in order to remember and show appreciation of their meaningful action of sharing. Indigenous person participating in an Indigenous knowledge exchange and ancestral language learning by default has to take up a greater responsibility to *remake* their own wellbeing in order to carry the language forward in positive meaningful ways.

In the contemporary lives of Indigenous people, traditional knowledge can be juxtaposed between variables of a person's needs, motivations, and intentions (Allen 2012). The process of reflecting on the interconnectivity of these variables raises questions of current speech group member capacity, training needs, and abilities for capacity building to address needs beyond language acquisition. There are also very real connotations about like-mindedness and shared values and understandings of the variable in question. Realistically, many people fall back into an expression that, "they just want to learn the language." True as it may be, should it be? What about a person's education, learned behaviors or experiences, have them prioritizing incomplete knowledge sets of ancestral Indigenous language education? Basil H. Johnstone (2007) has emphasized that it is not enough to just know the technical structures, grammar and such of an Indigenous language. The meaning making occurs in the act of sharing of knowledge bundled within the polysynthetic words connected to cultural knowledge. Pursuing an understanding of language acquisition and revitalization cognizant of these *reindigenized* models that embody

wellness is a necessary process of decolonization of this field. However, this also pushes the realization and acknowledgement of the limitations of individuals to combat the scope of impactful variables influencing the outcomes of LAR goals.

Identifying the differing levels of variables, either on the micro- and macro-levels, is a skill needed in this process of restorative balance. Treuer (2020) highlights an issue of passive resistance that occurs at both the micro- and macro-levels. Part of his educational focus within his daily interactions amongst his speech group is combating micro-level issues. Throughout his long career within this field, he has learned to strategically use his platform and positionality of being a language warrior to combat issues of miseducation that also exists at the macro level. Through the sharing of his own work and publications, as well as his own student mentorship, Treuer (2020) reinforces the importance of transcultural interconnectivity and relationship making. His personal narrative engages a process of truth telling, expressing, “I know my story and I believe it can impact yours. I also share it because in my connections to the journeys and wisdom of others who are deeply engaged in this work, I have found cause for hope and tools to do the work” (4). Such a simple notion, “hope,” can be complicated in so many ways by macro- and micro-variables. Learning from experienced practitioners who share Indigenous perspectives and experiences, is a longstanding tradition. The intergenerational exchange of knowledge and hope is an integral part of a dynamic transformative Indigenous meaning making.

Dynamic Meaning Making

Dynamic transformative Indigenous meaning making is particularly important because contemporary traditional values are complex and inconsistent even amongst a single speech community. Actions inspired by these values are described as performed indigeneity (Graham and Penny 2014). These can be constantly in flux, particularly with the onset of social media.

Definitions of “traditional” identity and practices to one person or family may not be shared by others. An example of macro- and micro-Māori variables in the context of identity wellness is described by Hana O’Regan (2001) in *Ko Tahu, Ko Au: Kā Tahu Tribal Identity*.

In order for an identity to be a meaningful one, it must be positive...However we choose to define Māori identity and the tribal identities that nestle within it, we must not lose sight of the function of a collective identity to service the needs of those who claim it. It must be relevant and appropriate. Therefore, if one subset feels that the macro-Māori identity does not best represent them, then that group must be allowed to define its own boundaries. If they are restricted from doing so by imposed, standardized rules and customs, then that group is likely to develop a culturally negative self-esteem. It is very important for a collective’s identity to work positively for them (168-170).

Wellness in this context can be interpreted as part of issues of agency and the freedom of self-determination and self-actualization for the chosen representation of one’s “identity.” Self-actualization and critical Indigeneity promotes agency. Just as natural language shift was uncontrollable, so too is a natural change in identity. O’Regan posits the question, the “issue, therefore, is how these identities manifest themselves within Māori society as a whole” (171). These social dynamics amongst smaller communities have the power to overtake meaningful initiatives. Through the utilization of O’Regan’s own work as a mentor, she models a process of transcultural knowledge sharing, providing guidance through her publications and collaborations.

Where honesty and hope exists, so too will bridges for support and collaboration always exist. The practice and tradition of transformative Indigenous knowledge exchange through sharing amongst Indigenous language and education activists have been in the works for the better part of the last century. Meaningful communication and mentorship across colonial imagined borders are a rich and beautiful history that this dissertation is drawing upon and contributing to. This is an accepted responsibility and practice of reciprocity that is part of the relationship making and meaning making I have embarked upon through this collaborative

research with Indigenous language activists. The work to make and *remake* these relationships, presented through the narratives of Indigenous language activists, are integral to this process of interconnectivity. These very actions are contributing to the creation of my own model of wellness and healing. The pursuit to understand the ways in which these relationships are impactful to the lives of long-term Indigenous language activists is to reemphasize that the processes of LAR need to prioritize a positive human experience. This priority in conjunction with the knowledge learned from the previously discussed models is integral to the parameters for the collaborative research in this dissertation.

Decolonizing Parameters for Collaborative Research

Throughout this research, it has been impossible to not be in a continuous cycle of change. With each new variable and experience, personally felt and/or an experience shared with me, my research methods and lines of inquiry have expanded and demanded fluidity. My motivation to complete this academic investigation has been complicated but my own perspective and understandings rooted in my traditional knowledge. My ultimate goals and responsibilities are to the Indigenous language activists. These motivations are because of our collective experiences with academic research and often being the target of research projects led by outsider academics which has at times been toxic. My research cannot have the same outcome or journeyed experience for the participants. These realities have caused me to reassess my own education and intentions with autoethnography and collaborative research by reflecting on the following: being intensely aware of the ways in which I cultivate the participation of Indigenous language activists; how I represent their narratives and my own in contrast the theoretical undertones within the fields of LAR; and the methods employed to pursue meaning making. With this honest awareness and *remaking* of my own education, these conversations with

Indigenous language activists have been led by open-ended questions which are more pragmatic than conducting a case study. Additionally, none of the language activists participating in these conversations are from any of my own speech communities. This is because of my own unique predicament as an Indigenous language activist.

This is Not a Case Study

Throughout this research process, I've grappled with embracing the practice of ethnographic research amongst my own speech communities. Such research could represent multiple voices, in addition to my own, as seen in the push within the field of anthropology to conduct research that prioritizes a "polyphonic ethnography" method, posited by James Clifford. Les W. Field (2008) in *Abalone Tales: Collaborative Explorations of Sovereignty and Identity in Native California*, stated that, "ethnographies in which multiple voices are heard and multiple perspectives are expressed...polyphony would create opportunities for those with whom anthropologist work to not only provide data but also to analyze information" (5-6). This, however, is still a method and lens situated in the authoritative voice of the ethnographer. At this point in time, within my own language communities, I'm still on a journey to get to the point where I feel I have the right to stand and speak side-by-side with my elders who are speaking from a position of cultural and language authority. I won't jump ahead and skip steps within my own cultural protocols to hold a position of cultural and language authority simply because I'm an "academic researcher." I was raised better than that. Instead, I use my educational background to assist, guide, facilitate, and direct an application of technical expertise, while I still defer to my respected elders for cultural and language expertise.

Again, at this point in time, my own language communities are still feeling negative effects of outsider academics, of anthropologists and linguists pushing their Western academic

authoritative voices and opinions upon us. It is no surprise that my own educational background causes stress on the relationships I have within my own language communities. I'm not given any breaks for my missteps or shortcomings. My educational background and technical expertise are not always welcomed by some community members. Additionally, these social dynamics have been exasperated when there is a shift from volunteer positions to paid positions. I feel these even more so than an outsider academic for the basic fact that when my research is done, I don't return to the university or urban center, I return home to my language communities. If I misstep or speak too much from my educational position, my own community members are very vocal about this and they have long memories. The lax treatment that an outsider receives is not extended to me, but I wouldn't want such treatment because I'm Nuxbaga, I'm Newe (one of the people). Yet, as a Sosore and Nu'eta-Hiraacá mother, it is my right to participate in a *reimagining* and *reclaiming* of the future for my children. As a mother, the wellness of social relationships in the language acquisition spaces is a very personal issue to my family and my right to engage in a critical analysis of.

Symbolic Capital

Still, today there exists numerous divisions amongst the speakers and learners because of family feuds, miscommunication, economic strife, and relationship fallouts, to mention a few. It is difficult to identify the source of the issues when the roots are so deeply imbedded in the fabrics of the inner lives of the members within Indigenous communities. Adding a layer of "academic" inquiry within these same communities engages these issues as well as the histories of academic and outsider relationships and experiences. The tradition of academics and outsiders superimposing "authoritative voices" upon these community issues exasperate and/or create divisions in language acquisition spaces. For example, the notion of an "authentic" dialect and

speech patterns thrust upon community members by outside anthropologists and linguists have aggressively entangled their own academic prowess and pursuit of research accolades with that of a community member's own cultural and language authenticity and identity. The degree of language endangerment within my language communities has created situations of knowledge hoarding and manipulations of cultural and language power or prestige. These have manifested in what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) posited as "symbolic capital." Power dynamics and abuses are experiences frequently felt within many Indigenous communities. When linguists and anthropologists praise certain speakers as being "authentic" or speakers of an "older" or "more original" dialect, while neglecting other speakers, tensions and resentments arise within the community. These assertions can ostracize and handicap community language learners as well as conversational and fluent speakers.

This practice can stifle growth and create ripples that impact language communities and their relationships for generations. K. David Harrison (2007) in *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*, writes that, "all linguists share a fascination with words, and we are trained to seek out and describe intricate patterns within human languages...The lack of meaning does not hinder linguists in our investigation of mental structures: we have come to focus mainly on the structures themselves, not their cultural meanings" (205). Outsider linguists and anthropologists cannot continue to assert an "authoritative voice" regarding "authentic" language use or dialects being spoken by members of the language communities. This practice continues to cause toxic identity complexes.

Furthermore, Harrison (2007) adds that, "[l]inguists' preoccupation with these abstract structures (collectively termed 'grammar') has led to a microscopic approach that treats

languages like laboratory specimens, utterly divorced from their natural environments, the people who speak them, and the content of those peoples' thoughts" (206). This is not an unknown outcome of such work. Outsider academics are very aware of various impacts their work and presence can cause within Indigenous communities experiencing severe language endangerment, destabilized community traditions, and social unrest. Disassociating linguistic analysis from the causes of language shift and creating academic content inaccessible and irrelevant to the speech communities is an extractive theoretical practice that I can't support in this dissertation work. Alessandro Duranti (1997) in *Linguistic Anthropology* reflects on the field that this,

"is indeed what has happened to theoretical linguistics as developed by Chomsky and his students. In forty years of intense research by a group of innovative and highly productive scholars, very little if anything has been said about how to relate the abstract knowledge of the idealized members of 'pure' communities to the concrete acts of linguistic performance by people who live in real communities" (75).

In response to these academic experiences, there are a growing number of Indigenous linguists and researchers, in addition to the language activists here, who effectively negotiate and navigate how best to engage and apply aspects of linguistic methods of analysis and documentation through collaborative research. Contrasting with this macro-level work, are efforts needed to combat internalized notions of symbolic capital.

Assimilated Symbolic Capital

Many Indigenous community members do not have rounded insights into how these academic fields, coupled with colonization and internalization of assimilation practices, impact language loss and endangerment. It can take great effort to not be reactionary when faced with lateral violence and toxic environments. Reflecting on various types of assimilated symbolic

capital practices provides a way to engage macro- and micro-level symbolic capital. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) in *Outline of A Theory and Practice* asserts that,

“the relationship between language and experience never appears more clearly than in crisis situations in which the everyday order is challenged...heretical discourse which draw their legitimacy and authority from the very groups over which they exert their power and which they literally produce by expressing them: they derive their power from their capacity to objectify unformulated experiences...” (170-171).

The dynamics of heretical discourse provide a comparative framing of culture and language being used as symbolic capital—an internalized method of colonial oppression and assimilation. Unfortunately, the most hurtful experiences damaging language acquisition relationships can be carried out by our very own speech community and speech group members. Dynamic inconsistencies of shared values and like mindedness are often clearly demonstrated in language and culture spaces.

The complexities of these situations are confusing, exhausting, and misleading. I once was amongst a group of students who were told by an elder conversational language speaker, who does teach the language and culture to some students and family, to “go learn the language from the archives, because I won’t teach it to you.” Language resources in this sense were being hoarded through a miseducation of shared responsibility for community-based knowledge exchange. Being told by a speaker that they are actively choosing to not teach willing learners their own people’s language, has continued to haunt my personal and professional work. This experience was not a phenomenon, it was a repetitive display of assimilated symbolic capital. After this incident I was reminded of the support and clarity my respected elders have given me, even though I could not clearly speak to this in the moment of the experience. Even the mother of this individual was the one who comforted me by reaffirming my inherent right to learn the language. She spoke up and said that she and my grandmothers together prayed for my

protection and guidance, and that I would one day return home to them. My beloved elders who prayed for me as a child have since passed away. Their teachings, prayers, and knowledge continue to shape me, comfort me, and teach me. Yet, those who have been miseducated through their own choices are also exerting their own agency to disrupt the relationships and social environments of others. Whether a person is carrying forward trauma or if they're simply a mean tater tot, each person is faced with the choices to engage in such negative energy. Some situations are avoidable, some can't be ignored.

I've shared the intimate details of these experiences with some of the Indigenous language activists throughout the years. The relationships we have are based in trust, love, and respect. Looking to these mentors who are outside of my speech community but share in the type of work within this field is a method to assist in making sense of such experiences. One language activist stated that, "I've definitely had both positive and negative experiences. I've had really important impactful negative relationships...Sometimes it's because somebody has "power." They exercise power over funding or human dynamics, or whatever it is" (Anonymous 2021). Culture and language knowledge manipulated through this form of symbolic capital by our own language community members is not a form of traditional knowledge exchange. In some cultures, such as my own, there are parameters and requirements to pursue and gift for the rights or position to gain specific types of knowledge. This practice is not a form of negative symbolic capital.

Because I am a community member, I know the intimate variables involved in this situation, which are rooted in manifestations of outside linguistic academic influence and the person's own practice of symbolic capital. I've chosen to transform this painful experience into meaningful knowledge to help me identify what types of social relationships I choose to

contribute power and energy to. I repeat, *what are we actually revitalizing and for what future?*

The actions of my own positive relationship making through a practice of gift giving and responsible reciprocity is part of the scope of this research with the Indigenous language activists. The conversations we've had will continue to feed my journey. I have hope it will continue to feed others. Just as the very work of the language activists are an embodiment of love and hope, this work is often a ceremony of gift giving.

Chapter Four: Gift Giving, Relationship Making, and Symbolic Interconnectivity

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Transcultural Interconnectivity

We have spiritual magnets embedded near our hearts and the crest of our heads, the places where the Creator breathes life into us and shapes us. This guides us to each other.

[Star Cluster: Matariki “Pleiades”]

Nuxbago: The Sisters—Strength and knowledge against a great adversary

Māori: Matariki, a shortened version of Ngā mata o te ariki o Tāwhirimātea “God of wind and weather” (Matamua 2021)-Wellbeing and health, New Year

--

Ko au nei rā te whakatinanatanga o aku
tīpuna e moe mai rā i Paerau.

For I am the living embodiment of my ancestors,
sleeping yonder at Paerau
(*E noho ana*, Kāretu 2021)

--

Hoakkantem punkukante,
Ta taa pawene pawaiyete
Hainneh!

Clearly in the early dawn
A warrior, a horseman, stands high above us.
Behold!
(*Hoakkantem Nahupia* “Warrior’s Song” Crum et al. 2001, 69)

--

The Rose & Feathers

Family origins, feathers are wisdom gained throughout the journey of life.

The Koru

Perpetual movement, the change in life and return to origins.

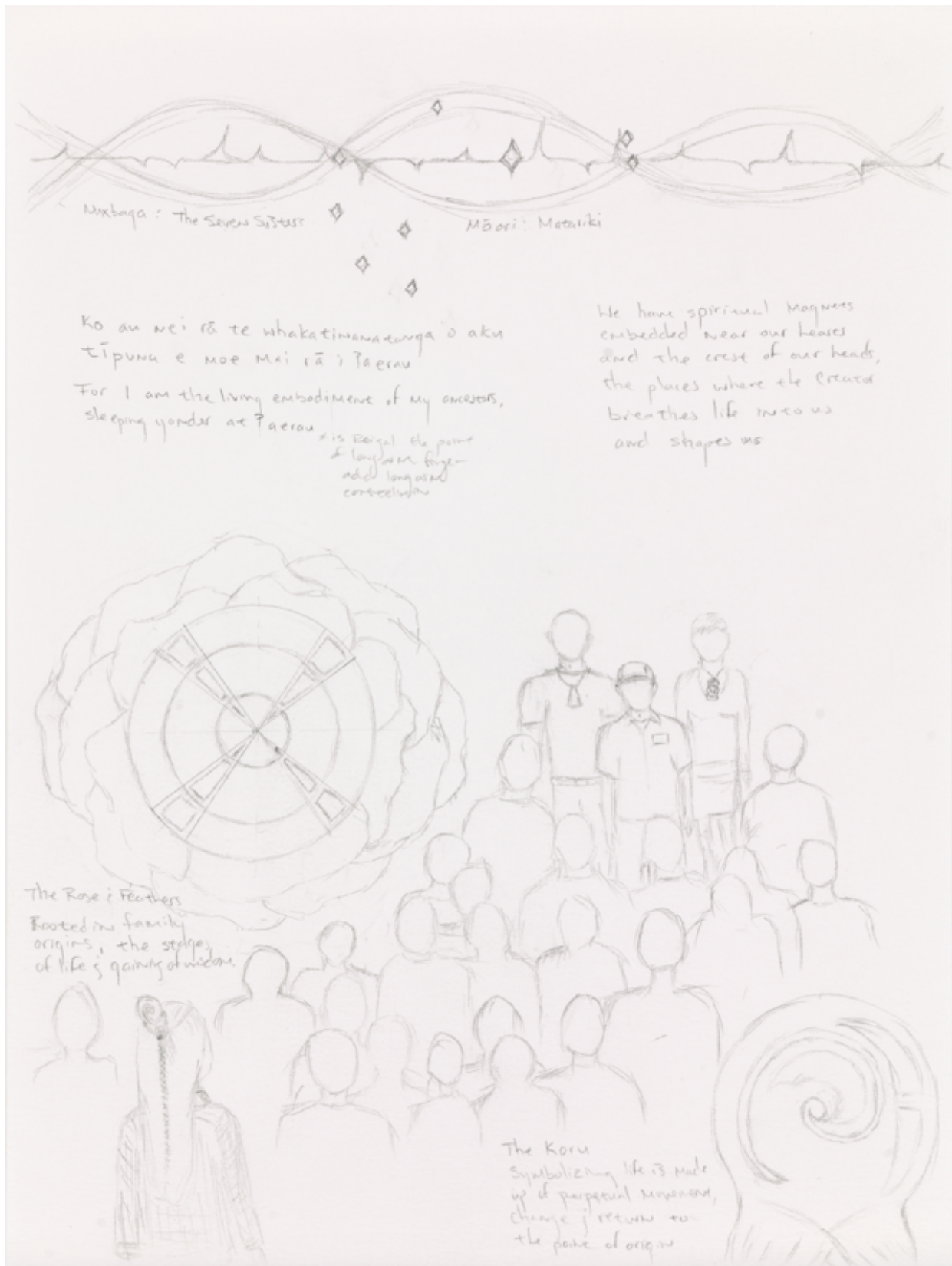


Figure 20: Transcultural Interconnectivity. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

✧ **Meaning Making: Poetics** ✧

“This language survives because of second language learners” (Kāretu 2021)

E Noho Ana

Composed by Tīmoti Kāretu in 1981 at the request of students who wanted a ngeri composed especially for them. The students performed it at the New Zealand Polynesian Festival of 1981 (Kāretu 2021). Recording link: <http://www.waiata.maori.nz/song/e-noho-ana>

E noho ana i te ranga māheuheu
 Ka titiro whakarunga ki ngā whetū o te rangi
 Āritarita noa , āritarita noa
 Engari tē riro mai ki te kapu o taku ringa e
 Ko te rite ki ngā taonga a ōku tīpuna
 E kōrerotia nei i te ao, i te pō, i te ao, i te pō
 Āe rānei te mau i ahau
 Āe rānei te ngaro
 ki te pō, oti atu
 Whakapakari nei au, te rangatahi, ki te pupuri

Me te maumahara anō hoki ki tā Apirana i kī ai
 'Me mātua whare whakairo ka kīia te marae he marae,
 Me mātua kōrero Māori te tangata e kīia ai he Māori'
 Anei taku whakahoki ki a koe, e koro e,
 Ahakoa ko te ātārangi noa iho o te whenua kei ahau
 Ahakoa te reo kāore i ahau
 Kei te oho taku mauri, kei te oho taku wairua
 Kei te rongo tonu au i te wehi, kei te mau tonu taku mana,
 Me pēhea kē atu hoki?
 Ko au nei rā te whakatinanatanga o aku
 tīpuna e moe mai rā i Paerau.

Anei rā taku Māoritanga e mau nei i aku kanohi
 E mau nei i taku tinana, arā, ko taku kiri parauri
 Kia whakataukī ake ahau
 'E kore e hekeheke, he kākano rangatira'
 Tihē mauri ora!

Here, in a state of confusion, I sit
 And look heavenwards at the stars
 I reach out for them
 But am unable to hold them in the palm of my hand
 And so it is with the treasures of my ancestors

Being discussed day and night, day and night
Will I be able to retain them or will they be lost
in the world of night for all time?
I, the younger generation, am making a valiant
effort

Yet, bearing in mind what Apirana said
'For a marae to be a marae, the meeting house must be carved,
For a person to be Māori, he must be Māori speaking.'
Here, e koro, is my reply to those remarks,
Even though I possess but the shadow of the land
Even though I do not speak the language
My whole being is alert and my spirit is alive
I can still feel awe and respect, and I still
have my pride,
How could it be otherwise?
For I am the living embodiment of my ancestors,
sleeping yonder at Paerau

Here is my Māoritanga, showing in my face,
And in my body, in the colour of my skin,
So that I am able to state,
'I will never be lost, for I am the seed
of chiefs'
Let there be life!

Locating a Collaborative Research Design within a Tradition of Gift Giving and Intentional Transformative Educational Praxis

“I write curriculum that traces paths others can follow. I use the old words to release the past, and I make new words to explode the present in a way that will splash indelibly on the future. And every day I give thanks to those around me, elders, students, rocks and trees, the ones who balance and inspire me. These are the things that should be said before beginning, the bits of spirit that should be shared before asking others to listen” (Margaret Noodin 2014, xii).

In an effort to uncomplicate an explanation of the process of Indigenous gift giving and storytelling as a form of gifting, the following personal narratives express a process of a *reindigenized* self-actualization. Gift giving is representative of deeper sacred traditions, but they are also everyday actions that don’t always require an intense set of protocols and cultural procedures. The *sacredness* of gift giving are the intentions, symbolic meanings, and honesty. The practice of storytelling weaves these methods and knowledge seeds in magical ways. To be a storyteller is also to understand the reciprocal nature of this knowledge exchange. Stories have power, just as words have power. They can heal and hurt. The following personal narrative about gift giving is also a way clear the air from the emotional heaviness of the preceding chapters. These experiences in gift giving are reminders of the simplicity and beauty of Indigenous relationship making. Through this practice, Indigenous people are held close to their ancestral origins, languages, and cultures, while also expanding their path to include mentors from outside of their community. It is through this understanding of gift giving that I share my own personal narratives and those of the Indigenous language activists here.

Personal Narrative Symbolic Gift Giving

From my own cultural knowledge, I know that stories are a universal method of interconnectivity. I also know that the knowledge a person has at the point of being told a story determines the type of meanings they are able to infer at that point in time. Storytelling that is representative of transcultural interconnectivity created through a practice of symbolic gift

giving is foundational in this research. It is a process of education, the learning of knowledge and an acknowledgement of responsibilities. It's also a form of positive empowerment. It can heal, and often includes stories of humor and love alongside deeper teachings. This practice creates a space that reaffirms a foundation of origins while encouraging a movement towards change. The premise of this research is in the act of storytelling. Each narrative is an act of gift giving. The following narrative are here to introduce this process in action, outcomes, and how the knowledge gained is a vessel for change.

The cultural knowledge I know is because it has been shared with me, either through my elders, ceremonies, or through our cultural, artistic, and historical teachings. I'm honored to be a recipient of so many seeds of knowledge, songs, stories, and kindness. These experiences at different points in time continue to keep my mind and heart empowered. No amounts of hardships, highs and lows, or social dysfunctions can change the kindness and gift giving shared with me. I remember the Hiraacá language gifted to me as an infant and young child. In the few years I had with my great grandmother Francis Young Wolf, she helped place my feet on this path, holding my tiny hand and planting words deep into my heart and mind. I spoke Hiraacá as a small child. I still dream in Hiraacá and my three grandmothers are there standing with me. Hiraacá and Sosore are in different ways still sleeping languages inside me. There were no fluent Sosore speakers left in my family, but the cultural and ceremonial knowledge shared with me has filled every other area of my life. I am a living example of how a person can have a wealth of cultural and ceremonial knowledge but is still working towards fluency in multiple ancestral languages.

With my waking mind and a damaged right ear, catching the words and speaking them correctly with my rusted tongue will continue to be a lifelong feat of mine. I've grown to know

that for me, the songs and stories are easier to learn, sing, and take care of than a melody of conversational phrases that I still stumble to annunciate the glottal and fricatives correctly. Not quite nails on a chalkboard but the continued giggles from my mentors keep this journey ever eventful. I wish this journey was just about the language and culture and ceremony and love and family and songs and wellness, but the highs and lows are often the result of internal squabbles, disagreements, economics, dialects, orthography, and social fallouts. Finding consistency through these shifting environments is taxing on the mind, spirit, and the time we have left with the fluent speakers. So, I do my best to navigate through these issues. When I can't fully speak the language precisely enough to converse well, I quietly listen and pay attention to the lips and tongues of the speakers. They blush and I learn a little more. Hiraacá and Sosore-Numunuu words are eloquent and glide effortlessly through half open mouths, crooked smiles, and quick tongues. I read, write, record, preserve, research, teach, create, facilitate, project plan, cook, organize, garden, and assist in every way I can with the language acquisition and revitalization efforts. In my home, I speak the language to my children, and I raise them in our cultural and ceremonial ways. When I stumble within my own language groups, I gift my mentors and have a conversation about some memories or events, and then we move into a discussion about what issues are going on.

In these shifting social environments with deeply rooted issues, I also seek guidance and mentorship from respected people I trust outside of my own language communities. Through these relationships we each have cultivated, together with my mentor/friend/family/elder, we participate in the same type of knowledge sharing process. I gift each person, either with food or a symbolic material item when face-to-face. If it is a long-distance mentorship, I gift with prayer, a story, an open heart and mind. With others, our relationship is such that we openly converse

and aid each other with our knowledge and examples of experiences. Our gifts are reciprocal and ongoing through this relationship. Many conversations have been a beacon of hope, guidance, and clarity to address issues within my own language groups and my own language journey.

Gift giving through storytelling is relationship making. It draws upon traditional forms of educational transmission. Just as stories are layered, the meaning making occurs in a circular ritual of relational meaning making and transmission (Douglas 1970). Symbolic gift giving, as explained in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World through Stories* (Doefer et al. 2013) is “a gesture of relationship between people, animals, spirits, and other entities in the universe...offerings (gifts) are acts of responsibility. Making one includes acknowledging value, promising respect, and affirming the presence of another being...a mutually beneficial partnership” (2). This dissertation research is very much an extension of a traditional form of knowledge sharing to help a person step back from the experience and analyze it from a transcultural Indigenous knowledge lens.

Uncomplicating Traditional Knowledge Sharing and Gifting

There are instances where some people are guided to each other by an unseen force, and knowledge sharing occurs that forever impacts your journey in meaningful ways that are still becoming known years after the initial conversations and gifting. Story gifts have a way of intertwining with our very fibers. The storyteller, Thomas King (2003) explains, “I tell the stories not to play on your sympathies but to suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live” (9). There is something about having an education through Indigenous traditions and stories that can’t quite be verbalized, it has to be experienced. Such story gifts mark you, they tether to your bones, and they pull you in unknown directions to

other gift givers and makers. Indigenous people have a tradition and history of finding each other in the world, that is why I've always heard, "Indian country is a small world." We have spiritual magnets embedded near our hearts and the crest of our heads, the places where the Creator breathes life into us and our ancestors shape us. These magnets pull us together across space and time.

In 2008, I visited the University of Oklahoma (OU). I don't remember why I was there on that particular day because I wasn't a student there. I was instead applying to the University of Colorado to be part of the political science master's degree program. My goals at that time were to pursue a career with Indigenous and Native American rights at the federal and international levels. Within the next year I was accepted into that graduate program but that's a different story. On this particular day at OU, I went into a building to get my visitor parking pass and there was a sign announcing an event in the auditorium for the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, who happened to be Patricia Grace, a Māori author from Aotearoa (New Zealand).

The event had just started. I found a front row seat at the end of the row next to a tall older gentleman, who smiled and welcomed me to sit beside him. Joy Harjo was introducing the author. When Patricia began talking at the podium, the man next to me nudged me with his elbow and whispered, "that's my wife!" I smiled wide and we both listened intently. After the presentation was done, we introduced ourselves. His name was Karehi Dick Grace. A Māori educator and author. I was working for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Education Department at the time after graduating with my bachelor's degree and was interested in how other Indigenous communities were pursuing culturally specific and decolonized educational plans.

The conversation between him and I was beautifully inspiring and eye opening. He introduced me to his wife, and to a few other members in their group. As Patricia met with more

of the audience, we continued our discussion about tribal education programs, my own education in a Catholic Indian boarding school, and my work to create language and culture curriculum. He asked for my mailing address and said when he returned home, he had some materials to send me. I said, “all the way from New Zealand?” He responded, “yes. I have some things that may help you. You keep at this work. It’s important.”

At that time, I didn’t know much about Grace’s life or his work for Māori education. Within a month I received a package from Aotearoa. Hand-written materials and copies of documents from his educational policy work. The knowledge and kindness he gifted me continues to feed and revive me and contributes to the way I’ve been educated as a gift giver. Conversations are powerful, words are medicine. My Gah-ghuk ‘maternal grandmother’ would say, “kindness doesn’t cost a penny.” She would talk about living through the great depression. Her family was already poor, so there wasn’t much change financially. “You could be the poorest person and be rich with knowledge and kindness.” As kind as she could be, she was also a strict, no nonsense, crack the whip kind of Shoshone. She was her father’s daughter, tough as nails, and set in her ways. Knowledge sharing and gifting comes in all forms, but this same vein of kindness, wellness, and holism is needed to sustain relationships. Through the sharing of my own personal narrative, I am engaged in the same process of truth telling, the same process that I have called upon from the participating language activists. Like Treuer, I know my own story the best, and I also know it has been impactful and can offer seeds of knowledge and possibly even hope. The same is true for the personal narratives of the language activists within this dissertation. Through these areas of educational awareness, in combination with my own positionality, I am engaged in a form of decolonizing methodologies, transformative Indigenous Knowledge exchange, and transcultural intertextuality and interdiscursivity.

Exploring Critiques of Intellectual Ideologies and Realistic Application

Situating this collaborative research outside of my own speech communities is also necessary to pursue research that allows for a freedom to fully explore the dynamics of contemporary language endangerment and loss and a pursuit of understanding Indigenous relationship making that embodies wellness. A parameter for this collaborative research is to maintain the original lived experience narratives of the Indigenous language activists. Field (2008) discussed how the lens of the outsider and their agenda muddies and misinterprets the realities and meaningfulness of the actual lived experiences of the ethnographic participants. Field also posits that collaborative research transcends the more traditional anthropological constructionism-versus-essentialism debate. Traditional anthropological, linguistic, and ethnographic methods and actions have been and are still ongoing, in my own communities, forms of colonial structured intellectual and physical dispossession. Their narratives have and still exert colonial power through practices of reinterpreting meaningfulness in a lens disassociated with Indigenous traditional knowledge. Individual scholars in these academic fields, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, have created works which reflect upon and critique the impacts carried out by their broader academic fields and have chosen to *remake*, *reimagine*, and *recapture* Indigenous intellectual traditions (Coulthard 2014; Kroskrity 2012; Martin 2012; Noodin 2014; Perley 2014; Trask 1999; Warrior 1994).

The creation of and *renaming* of ideological methodologies to counter colonial intellectual dispossession is vastly varied and supersedes even the field of critical Indigenous studies. The power of narrative and storytelling is universal and seems only to be dependent on a learned cultural set of values and intention to modify traditional academic ethnographic practices of an objective observer. Kathleen Stewart (1996) in *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural*

Poetics in an “Other” America, explains her own unlearning and *relearning* of self-reflexivity, self-positioning, and dialogic exchange. She grapples with her own knowledge and research methods as an academic and non-community member. Through her ethnographic research experiences, she came to the realization that being an intellectual, cultural, and community “outsider,” was hindering her ability to communicate and understand the narratives and conversations. The “missing pieces and unknown meanings taught me to listen not just more intently, but differently—over time it became necessary to tell stories in a local *way with words* so that people would still visit me and stop to talk” (8). Throughout her work and works of other “outsider” academics, there is the use of the term “imagine”; imagine a place, a time, a space, an encounter, a life, etc. The premise of the dissertation at hand is not to elicit academic reinterpretations of the narratives, truth telling, and meaning makings through a “re-imagining” in outsider academic ideologies. While I engage these fields of study, they are not my home, nor the homes of my ancestral languages. The world of my ancestral languages are with the speakers, the descendants, and the voices from the past that comfort and teach for the future.

The act of *reimagining* and *reindigenizing* the academic field is already occurring. These are important topics that can be explored more in-depth through the literary works by Haunani-Kay Trask, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, N. Scott Momaday, Gerald Vizenor, Bernard Perley, Taiaiake Alfred, Glen Coulthard, Daniel Heath Justice, and Audra Simpson. These authors represent only a small number of the vibrant Indigenous scholars engaged in the *remaking* of the academic institutions. Although the broad scope of work by the Indigenous language activists participating in this research do have long careers engaging, dismantling, and *remaking* academia, I’ve intentionally kept this topic out of the conversation questions in order to focus on the specific LAR experiences. The Indigenous language activists here are the embodiment of “walking the

talk,” and their minds and actions are filled with traditional knowledge and lessons from lived experiences within their own cultural and academic contexts. To utilize our valuable time to engage the breadth of academic theories would be counterproductive. When such topics were broached within our conversations, those issues nearly almost always detracted from the focus of the actual topics for the conversations. The sensitivity of the topics of the conversations made it easier to critique the academic fields and the ramifications of outsider colonized minds “helicoptering” into their speech communities, speech groups, and disrupting their work and progression.

A Conversation with Lokosh about Academic Preparedness in LAR

My conversation with Lokosh (Dr. Joshua Hinson), a Chickasaw scholar and artist in Native American language revitalization, instead touched upon the lack of current academic educational training that teaches any methods to combat the actual micro-level issues being experienced by Indigenous language activists. (“R” represents my voice. “JH” represents Joshua’s voice.)

R: I remember you wrote this Facebook post a while back, something like: “if I would have known what language work is” or “what is language work? Everybody you know passes away.”

These are experiences that you don’t really think about actually going through. Yes, we’re working with endangered languages, that’s what we’re doing, but we’re not being emotionally prepared for these difficult experiences. The extreme being the loss. Whether it’s the loss of a relationship, of work, of progress, and the loss of a mentor, a speaker.

JH: They do not equip you in graduate school, whether you're doing sort of anthropological work, linguistic anthropology versus linguistics, or sociocultural or whatever. They certainly don't do a good job of creating positive environments for Indigenous students, and they don't equip anybody regardless of where we come from to do this sort of work.

R: Yeah.

JH: You know what I mean. And I think this is something that really needs to be addressed in the academy specifically with Indigenous scholars and embedded non-Indigenous scholars who do serious language work.

Not helicopter people, but you know, serious people.

R: Yes, the work within a community, living in a language community, the experience is drastically different than for the ones who are at an academy, in a language class at a school. What do you do when it's like, "the language class went bad, and now we can't do certain things."

R & JH: **Laughter**

R: When there are bad or difficult experiences within the community and the speech group, where do you go next? What is being lost when those relationships do not last or grow?

JH: I think any language has to be fundamentally a positivistic exercise. You continue to do the work in spite of all the terribleness because it was the work that was presented to you. This is the work you're supposed to do your whole life.

All of us that do this work, there's stuff that comes along for the ride that you don't think about consciously. You just don't.

You know, even my emotional stuff, how I used to express myself about why I wanted to be learning the language, it was weird because Chickasaw men don't do that. *They don't do that.*

And my striving to attain these linguistic goals and cultural goals and to be a better Indian, and all this kind of business, it doesn't always make sense to them (the native speakers). It's like asking a fish what he thinks about being in water.

R & JH: **Laughter**

JH: There's this weird experience about these overt wonderings or questions about moving more towards the center, becoming more Chickasaw or feeling more Chickasaw or whatever that is. And the old folks are like, "I don't know what this guy is talking about. That's weird."

The relevancy of providing this conversation example is that there is a constant, incessant barrage of disassociated academic theoretical ponderings for nearly every endangered speech community in North America, and across the greater part of the world. Willingly participating in a linguistic or sociocultural or anthropological education

teaches you tools, that almost always need to be *refashioned*, *remade*, and *recontextualized* to address the macro- and micro-level issues. The Indigenous experiences needs to be shared in strategic ways to address specific community-based encounters which impact LAR.

Cautionary Transcultural Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity in Storytelling

A good and thorough education in language acquisition and linguistic fields will equip a scholar with tools and techniques that can often be used to assist in building a vessel to wait out a storm of macro- and micro-level issues. There are many tasks in LAR that are necessary busy work and these tools allow for the ability to step back and refocus on a technical problem with language documentation, analysis, and/or curriculum. Sometimes the best move is to disengage from a cycle of sociopolitical and interpersonal issues which can be unpredictable, flustering small groups before they eventually sequester. Even though there are very practical tools gained in these academic fields, Lokosh and others have expressed the need for more realistic community-based skills. Hinson expressed, there is still so much that needs to be done to address, assess, understand, and combat the multiplicity of issues faced by Indigenous language activists. The potential of their narratives provides a process of clearing the paths they have taken to address issues that can serve as models for other language activists along their own journeys. For this reason, these beginning introduction chapters are the only primary spaces where outsider academic ideological critiques are engaged. This is to place high priority on the actual narratives of the Indigenous language activists, without heavy reinterpretations framing what parts are meaningful.

As an Indigenous language activist, I personally know the help that such narratives and mentorship provide. As such, I am drawn more to the scholarly work of those who recognize the realistic application of theoretical and language acquisition methods within Indigenous communities. Narratives and storytelling are among some of the methods to cut through the noise. Kroskrity (2012), informed by his conversations and research with Indigenous scholars in the book *Telling Stories in the Face of Danger: Language Renewal in Native American Communities*, states that,

Narrative functions are precisely those recognized in Native accounts of the importance of language renewal...(and) Native Americans clearly see healing, teaching, and identity creation as more important than non-Indian discourses of language endangerment that emphasize ‘universal ownership,’ assess in hyperbolic and materialist imagery their ‘intellectual treasure,’ or attempt to quantify heritage language death rather than qualitatively confront it” (4).

Having an outsider academic ideological priority can be caustic to relationship making, maintaining, and sustaining actions on the ground. Kroskrity has crafted a model of transcultural narrative interdiscursivity which prioritizes the Indigenous voice and knowledge.

Indigenous language activists engage in these discussions (Johnston, McDougal, Noodin, O’Regan, Perley, Simpson, and Treuer), but have learned there is a place and space for this. If I even begin to discuss anything anthropological or *linguistical* within the context of language learning experiences or group gatherings, I’m dead. I might as well just go make food beforehand, pre-package paper sacks with traditional treats, and just show up already apologizing for my mistakes. The only “imagining” I’m going to be doing is that with my Gah-ghuuk’s and Maguu’s voices ringing my ears, maybe even a tear in their eyes, saying, “this one, here. I raised her better. *You were raised better than that!* Why are you wasting their time, your time? *E Gadz! Skuuh!*” This is not because there is a lack of understanding or education, it’s a lack of relevancy.

I love neurolinguistics, morphology, and comparative ancestral language shift with contemporary language speech patterns, but I know there are very few who will participate in conversations and research with me if that's the focus of the work. No academic outsider or Indigenous theoretical discussion is going to save the language day-to-day. Only through the act of speaking the language will it be revived and maintained.

Realistic Application

The purpose of this exercise, discussion, and critique, is to point out very real outcomes of priorities, goals, and work that is not the act of language learning and speaking. At the root of this issue is the actual educational teachings that are causing this bottlenecking of intentions, priorities, and capacity. The *reimagining* and *reindigenizing* that needs to happen in the field of LAR is associated with the very understandings of what are the actual internal causes of language attrition in a language speech community. The work of engaging broader intellectual ideologies needs to happen in spaces that do not detract from the language learning and use. I'm not asserting that this work should not be done. I'm asking whether there is a priority for such work versus the priority of speaking the language. This is the same concept of spending more time talking about the language than talking in the language. Once there is a higher level of language comprehension by integral group members, these same discussions should be shifted into the language and English used to clarify any confusion.

A group's ability to broaden the scope of their domains within the language spaces is part of the responsibility in knowing the capacity of group members and the current levels of language comprehension. With my own languages, there is a growing lack of language comprehension to articulate meanings in multifaceted domains, such as philosophical concepts. This could be done before colonization, assimilation, and educational genocide, but it is not

actively being done by most of the language speakers today. This is contrasted with the language comprehension and usage of fluent te reo Māori language speakers who still have dynamic language domains, even though there continues to be the threat of endangerment and loss.

These issues bring back the necessity of understanding personal and programmatic educational intentions and priorities, especially when LAR efforts can be so easily misled and/or convoluted by almost all other topics and actions in a person's life. The very cultural activities and revitalization actions associated with the ancestral language can give a false sense of participating in a progressive language acquisition process. Paraone Gloyne, a leading te reo language activist wrote the following statement on his public social media Facebook page on October 19th, 2015. "Moko your tongue before you moko your face." Ta moko is the Māori tattoo and cultural practice. Just like the Hiraacá arupi 'tattoos' that hold cultural teachings, rights, and status, they are part of a movement of cultural revitalization. The context of Gloyne's statement took place just after he completed another annual Mahura Māori month, where he only speaks in te reo.

He clarified his intentions of the statement, which received positive and negative feedback, in another post on October 27th, 2015. The statement was made to "push people to wānanga, reflect and think about the intrinsic value of language and identity, and the inherent bond between the two, and our responsibility to ourselves as Māori to ensure the life of our language and culture is well, and strong." Reflecting on intentions, priorities, and one's honest consistent and realistic actions to learn and speak the language are sensitive but necessary. This reflection or "looking back upon" is an Indigenous traditional educational practice and has different context-based steps. In the context of this research, the educational abilities of

narratives are to assist in addressing the gaps and unknowns in the current educational literature and resources in the field of LAR.

Realistic Accessibility

The narratives presented here from language activists and from my own truth telling and meaning making, may still possess “missing pieces and unknowns” to readers and scholars who are not participating in consistent Indigenous LAR in community-based settings with unique cultural knowledge contexts. The resounding interconnectivity of these narratives, beyond culturally specific contexts, is that these experiences are humanistic. Furthermore, I am not claiming to know everything about these fields and the academic influences. For example, one influence in LAR is Native literary nationalism (Warrior 1994; Weaver et al. 2005) that I am still unclear about their impacts. What I know about the field of Native literary nationalism is that it is important in the scope of Indigenous intellectual traditions. It has created a space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars to *reshape* and *reimagine* the here and now and the future of intellectual traditions through the act of engaging “both historical and contemporary intellectual work” (Weaver et al. 2005, xvi). The gatherings and conversations through this field feed hearts and minds. Many of these scholars carry their language knowledge into these spaces and derive meanings and puha ‘medicine’ from that knowledge. Yet, those spaces are still confusing to me.

Lisa Brooks (2005) describes, “while literary critics in English departments were battling each other in the so-called ‘theory wars,’ Native writers and literary scholars were gathering together, engaging in ‘upbuilding,’ discussing the interrelatedness of their work and its implication for and in their home communities” (233). Finding a balance between engaging broader debates about Indigenous intellectual traditions brings into question capacity building,

intention, and realistic application. Pushing too far into the method of interdiscursivity is always a caution with transcultural intertextuality. This is not to negate the adaptability of Indigenous knowledge, as Keavy Martin (2012), in *Stories in a New Skin: Approaches to Inuit Literature*, points out as always being an Indigenous tradition of ingenuity and skill when encountering change. However, Martin also poses questions about the premise of Native literary nationalism being, “using the terminology of the academy” by Indigenous scholars, in order to translate traditions of narratives and storytelling “into forms that the institution can recognize” (Martin 2012, 6). My caution with going too far into these ideological academic waters for narrative meaning making is not a philosophical question of “is it possible,” rather, purely realistic application, accessibility, intention, and capacity.

There is an attraction and prestige to being fluent in the language of the academy. Personally, I would still prefer to be fluent in the languages of my ancestors. But there are very few jobs that I can have a career to focus strictly on the language, and still have financial stability which is required for my family’s wellness. This is the type of issue faced by many Indigenous language activists. Access to resources, access to a stable economy within settler states, and access to traditional knowledge. Framing traditional knowledge for the academy, in the language of the academy, can be creating a form of an elitist knowledge exchange. Which within the context Indigenous language speech communities, as I’ve witnessed first-hand, very few people are motivated to read an academic text over a narrative and storytelling text. Finding a balance between academic writing and traditional storytelling has been complicated in my own journey. While I appreciate and purchase (more than I should) academic literary and ideological texts, I still grapple with their accessibility at times. *The Transit of Empire* by Jodi A. Byrd (2011), is among such texts that I would love to delve deeper into, but I even lack the ability to

fully ingest the entirety of a highly praised “work of power.” These works are forms of storytelling, but their structures and academic language can make parts of the integral meaning making inaccessible. Accessibility is therefore paramount with this research. I look to inspiring voices and storywork being modeled by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars that are accessible to me and I can clearly understand the transformative knowledge exchange within their work.

Realistic Knowledge Exchange

In a presentation by Dr. Rangi Matamua (2021), he discusses the efforts he and his ancestors undertook to create one of the most comprehensive works of Māori astronomy. In the last conversation with his grandfather, he was cautioned about releasing the knowledge publicly, but it needed to be done somehow. That was his task and responsibility, to figure out the best means possible to share the knowledge. The last statement from his grandfather about the book he was gifting him was, “knowledge that isn’t shared, isn’t knowledge” (Matamua 2021). The format through which stories are told and knowledge shared is contextual, culturally based, and a relationship of the storyteller to the story and the audience (Archibald 2008, Basso 1996; Doefler et al. 2013; King 2003, Kroskrity 2012, Palmer 2003). Meaning making is an intimate process.

Keith H. Basso (1996), in *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* posed the question of, “what is wisdom?” to Dudley Patterson (Apache culture and knowledge keeper) in their conversations together. His narrative, while still introduced by Basso in his book, was translated from Apache to English, and left for interpretation. Basso honestly admits that he could not comprehend his narrative or how “wisdom sits in places.” “I can safely assume that Dudley’s account was supported throughout by a covert cultural logic that imbued its claims with validity and truth. Yet it is unclear to me what that logic is” (128).

Dudley, seeing that Basso still does not understand, continues the responsibility of his storytelling gifting, by physically bringing him to the places where “wisdom sits,” so that Basso might be *remade* by the knowledge. Again, some meaning making in stories can’t be clearly vocalized, they must be experienced. This is the same with some language and culture knowledge. The following is a portion of Dudley’s narrative:

The trail of wisdom—that is what I’m going to talk about. I’m going to speak as the old people do, as my grandmother spoke to me when I was still a boy... ‘Do you want a long life?’ she said. ‘Well, you will need to have wisdom... You must make your mind smooth. You must make your mind steady. You must make your mind resilient. Your life is like a trail. You must be watchful as you go... If your mind is not steady you will be easily angered and upset. You will be arrogant and proud. You will look down on other people... How will you walk along this trail of wisdom? Well, you will go to many places. You must look at them closely. You must remember all of them. Your relatives will talk to you about them. You must remember everything they tell you... Wisdom sits in places. It’s like water that never dries up. You need to drink water to stay alive, don’t you? Well, you also need to drink from places. You must remember everything about them. You must learn their names. You must remember what happened at them long ago... Then your mind will become smoother... you will see danger before it happens” (126-127).

Dudley spoke in a type of a chant, repetitious and poetic. Later, after Dudley took him to the places “where wisdom sits” and explained in abstract terms what they represented, Basso reinterpreted the meanings in a vernacular he was more comfortable with.

Afterwards, Basso learned that “resilience of the mind” combats external issues, and “steadiness of the mind” combats the internal issues. What Basso does not recognize is the original narrative from Dudley positioned the teller (Dudley) as now an “elder,” and the listener (Basso) as the child. A relationship was defined, and responsibility engaged. Another gift of knowledge from this narrative, is a reminder that in one way or another, each person arrives at the point of the story at a level of education that determines the relationship and the meaning making. Each journey, “trail” to wisdom is storied. In language learning, many second language

learners arrive at the point of the this work as a “child.” Those feelings can be unsettling, and methods are not always employed by the language speakers or facilitators to help that person gain a steadiness of their mind. Storytellers have a skill that brings each listener along this trail of knowledge where a transformative knowledge exchange goes to work on a person in good ways. These are also skills that need to be defined at greater lengths within language learning spaces.

Returning to Gift Giving as an Indigenous Epistemology

Recapturing agency, indigeneity, resurgence, and transcultural intertextuality and interdiscursivity are methods used in conjunction with Indigenous traditions of relationship making, gift giving, and meaning making. Through a review of discussions about the validity and efficacy of collaborative research, autoethnography, and an interpretation of a transformative educational praxis (G.H. Smith), I’ve focused on identifying research methods that can best cultivate narratives and present them in organized ways to address the most pertinent and ongoing interpersonal issues faced by Indigenous language activists. My investigations into these methods continue to restructure my research methods and understanding of narratives, gift giving, and meaning making.

The narrative and autoethnographic works by Gus Palmer, Bernard Perley, Margaret Noodin, Hana O’Regan, Leanne Simpson, Barbara Meek, Brandy Nālani McDougal, and Graham Hingangaroa Smith have *reeducated* my own understandings and intentions with collaborative research. This research journey could not have been possible without their insights and knowledge gifts through their own research and writings. Even after these many years of study, I still get confused and unsettled with the amount of texts and studies I am still working through and learning of. My educational meaning making at the beginning of chapter three expressed my frustration within my linguistic classes and methodologies to analyze and dissect

language. I remember particularly my course in biological anthropology. My research papers were focused on neurolinguistics and how songs have the power to charge the neural pathways within our brains triggering memories and knowledge tied to emotional stimuli and experiences. Songs elicit memory and are being used by families to call back their loved ones who suffer from Alzheimer's and dementia (Devere 2017; Moreira et al 2018). The research in the field of neurolinguistics is massive and has the very real potential to detract from the time and priority to just learn the language. I fought with this for some time that semester, trying to convince myself how switching to neurolinguistics would be more beneficial. In my banter with Lokosh about this, he quickly reminded me, bluntly, by saying "I just want to talk better Indian." Ultimately, so do I. Finding the path to that goal through research is more complicated than the actual work to commit the time and focus on language learning and speaking. Throughout this work, I've been plagued by questions about why do more people not speak their ancestral languages and what is complicating that process?

The utilization of an academic dissertation research project may not have been the fastest path to answer these questions, but the journey to retrieve answers has been life altering. This work has also challenged my own known knowledge and ways of making relations, gift giving, and modifying collaborative research methods. Looking to the work of leading Indigenous scholars has led me to this point in time. Gus Palmer (2003) employed autoethnography and collaborative ethnography methods to pursue meaningful research amongst his own community of Kiowa storytellers. His journey has built a path/trail of how to employ traditional knowledge and practices of gift giving within this academic work. Palmer stated that,

"I thought this over a good many times while doing storytelling fieldwork. I worried that I was somehow supposed to give back to the people I was interviewing and whose stories I recorded, but I didn't know how to proceed. I worried that I needed to reciprocate for these gifts. I worried

that I needed to exchange something for their work and participation. One of the ways I learned that I could fulfill my obligation was simply to listen to what they had to say and to let them express themselves and interpret their stories. It wasn't out of the question to allow my consultants to examine the written text and rewrite where necessary. Collaborative ethnography is an excellent recent development in field work, I had read. It allows, among other things, for the ethnographer and consultant to work together throughout the field study...After writing and rewriting the text, the ethnographer and consultant or consultants may reassess what has taken place as a kind of follow-up to the complete work. Kiowas often impart information freely, but they expect at least a fair hearing. Listening respectfully and closely is a way of showing that what you are hearing is acceptable and meaningful. It helps to fill the need of ceremony..." (xx).

I began this collaborative research in ceremony and gift giving with Indigenous language activists who I've previously met in person and have collaborated with in various ways over the better part of the last decade. This dissertation is an extension of our own relationship making and meaning-making processes. The traditional practices of gift giving and knowledge sharing are used as a foundation for this collaborative research. Through the documentation and presentation of my conversations with other Indigenous language activists here, I am working to make meaningful food for our minds and hearts from these seeds of knowledge and kindness shared with me.

This knowledge has helped reaffirm that traditional Indigenous actions for relationship making are valid and necessary within the process of academic research amongst Indigenous peoples. Continuing the practice of gift giving empowers Indigenous epistemologies and the process through which knowledge is exchanged. Margaret Kovach (2005) expressed that, "Indigenous epistemology is fluid, non-linear and relational. Knowledge is transmitted through stories that shape shift in relation to the wisdom of the storyteller at the time of the telling" (27). Gift giving is the most comprehensive methods to embark on relationship making and meaning making. Returning to my conversation and relationship making with Karehi Dick Grace, I'm

again transformed through his act of gift giving that specifically targeted the necessity to continue in a process of reflection, even after years of work is done. Reflection needs to be repetitious, no matter how much education or prestige a person has gained.

The Gifting by Karehi Dick Grace

Part of the materials that Grace sent to me from Aotearoa included the following document. Grace wrote the Kōrero Whakataki ‘Forward’ for the 1997 *Visions for Māori Education* published by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. His writings provide an opinion on the outcomes of the restructuring of the educational system in 1988-89. They speak to the faith in the work needing to be done and the people leading the charge, but he also stresses the importance of research and investigating more into the roots of the issues.

The views expressed attest to the anxiety Māori feel about the education of Māori students from pre-school through to tertiary. As a former teacher, principal, administrator, and bureaucrat over the past forty years, what strikes me most is the fact that little has changed. The basic achievement levels of Māori continue to fall far short of those of non-Māori, and the gap between the two is widening. Why is that so?...A range of very important issues has been commented on in this publication. These include the Treaty of Waitangi, the principles of rangatiratanga and partnership, a holistic approach to education for life, planning strategically for the future, better pre-service and in-service training, a unified belief in the value of education, empowering whanau members, establishing high standards for quality outcomes, centralizing Māori issues from their current marginalized state, and avoided old-fashioned, inflexible structures and methodologies. However, while many contributors see the need for change, most of their suggestions appear to be aimed at bandaging the same body rather than performing drastic surgery! Patching up a shoddy system is not likely to deliver the goods...To conclude, I would like to see many more publications like this one so that we have a feast of views and ideas from interested people across Aotearoa, be they Māori or non-Māori. There is a need for more in-depth research and comment on the what, how, and why of Māori education before we even consider new structures based on current models that might not meet our aspirations. Māori communities throughout Aotearoa have different views on, and expectations of education. The bower brokers need to sort out a flexible framework of systems that best meet their needs. Let’s move forward to a future of our own making. Kia ora tatou katoa.

Looking back to these words that I read so long ago, I'm reminded of the continual advocacy, assessments, reflections, research, and conversations that have been part of the progress and improvements upon forms of education, the methods of delivery, and the systems that either empower or stifle growth of the kōhanga reo movement. These models are paths/trails to make our minds "smooth, steady, and resilient." Integrating these practices into internal language acquisition methods and guidance for social relationships in those spaces are through the tools and practices of assessment, evaluation, and repetition. The next steps are in revealing the validity and efficacy of wellness and holism determined through these methods, models, and assessments.

The Māori educational and language revitalization models have been incredibly impactful to the language acquisition and revitalization movements and educational methods utilized by Indigenous people around the world. The meaning making associated with Grace's writings, I've chosen for this research is connected to the experience of his original gift of knowledge and kindness in 2008. Gift giving and meaning making doesn't need to be a complicated process, however being in a mindset to receive advice and be open to input and self-reflection is necessary. Had I been closed off to conversations, stories, and a traditional form of knowledge sharing and gifting, I may have missed this opportunity and experience that continues to feed my inspiration and motivation to invest energy, time, and heart in this work. How drastically my path may have took shape if these values were not instilled in me by my elders and mentors.

The second part of meaning making here is reflecting upon Grace's reminder to continuously engage multiple voices within assessments and research of current methods, experiences, and outcomes of educational systems. The community-based language acquisition groups are part of a larger network and movement for the decolonization of educational systems.

Yet, within the layers of language learning methods, we can adopt Grace's knowledge to aid deeper reflections through the following questions: how are the structures of our language groups and their teaching and learning methods part of "a holistic approach to education for life, planning strategically for the future" (Grace 1997). Sometimes we are too close to an experience or rooted too deeply within a social group to clearly see the tensions and successes in the dynamics and variables. Being a language activist means a person has committed to a long-term consistent relationship with their language acquisition processes and speech groups. Through the engagement of voices outside of our primary spaces, we invite and encourage elevated conversations beyond the reach of the impactful and influential context based issues impacting individuals and speech groups. Utilizing the voices of Indigenous language activists who have been involved in community-based Indigenous LAR for over a decade, their experiences, knowledge, solutions, and questions are not from a novice's point of view. They are from a position of heightened educational and personal experience. They are either first language speakers or are second language speakers who have achieved successful levels of conversational fluency. Their intentional and strategic efforts continue to push towards the increased usage, presence, vitality and stability of their languages and speech communities. Their gift giving is a transformative knowledge exchange for the purpose of helping other language learners to be inspired, motivated, and prepared for community-based LAR work in all its vibrancy.

Intentional Transformative Educational Praxis Employed in this Collaborative Research

During conversations with Manatowa-Bailey, he would make inferences to Graham Hingangaroa Smith's research and how it was where we should be looking for knowledge to address variables within the field of LAR. I've taken another look at that work and followed through on the recommendation to read G.H. Smith's (1997) thesis, *The Development of*

Kaupapa Maori: Theory and Praxis. There are some writings that you encounter which reshape your thoughts in such a way that your lens expands overnight. I experienced this type of knowledge blast while writing my master thesis. The work of Leanne Simpson (2011), in *Dancing On Our Turtles Back*, found me and shifted my perspective so much that I spent a month reflecting on my work up to that point and began again. G.H. Smith's thesis, in many ways, has provided points of reflection upon issues I was grappling with how to express. G.H. Smith revealed how various types of personal narratives and lived experiences of personal struggles provide a link between meaning making on a personal level which can address a wider collective struggle. "[...] the act of 'struggle' itself, is seen to be an important factor in the cycle of conscientization, resistance and praxis' in not only 'making sense' of one's life, but in also transforming it in more meaningful ways, and ultimately re-claiming it" (24). The personal narratives presented within this dissertation are intended to expand upon G.H. Smith's own shared narrative which contributed to a process of self-reflection and assessment of educational tensions.

G.H. Smith utilizes kaupapa to direct the development of an educational theory and praxis. A kaupapa, "is a set of values, principles and plans which people have agreed on as a foundation for their actions" (Teara 2021). The narratives from language activists are used to demonstrate a variety of values and principles that they have learned throughout their language lives which maintain and sustain their language acquisition work past the social dynamic highs and lows. Through the engagement of multiple voices within a field of transcultural transformative Indigenous knowledge making, the journey of the Indigenous language activist is the focus of this research, not their specific language community. Furthermore, there is a clear shared set of values amongst the Indigenous language activists, we are each like-minded in many

ways. The principals and plans are clearly defined through the set interview questions for our conversations together. Yet, we've actively assessed these questions and the notions they infer and modified their definitions and meaning making through this process. Lastly, this is not an exercise in quantitative methodologies to survey specific Indigenous language groups. This research is focused on the Indigenous experience and the complexities that human motivations, intentions, and needs create within Indigenous adult language speech groups.

I'm conscientious that decolonizing methodologies caution against the "individual" being representative of the "whole" society, which is a product of "research through imperial eyes" (L.T. Smith 1999). To which, L.T. Smith argues that, "[t]he individual, as the basic social unit from which other social organization and social relations form, is another system of ideas which needs to be understood as part of the West's cultural archive. Western philosophies and religions place the individual as the basic building block of society" (49). The purpose of this research and analysis is to document, investigate, and reflect upon the variety of interpersonal social relationships experienced by Indigenous language activists within their LAR worlds, actions, and reactions.

This parameter of my research is pursued through the understanding that at the core of these social relationship dynamics, personal lived experiences are inherently individualistic. Regardless if the experiences are shared, individuals make the choices that lead to their actions to participate in LAR and to either engage or disengage from various social issues and relationships. While there are group dynamics and team-based choices, no matter how positive or negative a language learning environment is, an individual is the one who carries out their own actions. In this context, the focus on the individual is strategic. The individual decides to take intentional action. Their actions then impact the whole. Being part of a team means that each

individual doesn't just have knowledge of a set of values and principles, each individual is making the choice to agree upon these and reinforce them through their actions.

Each of the Indigenous language activists' narratives present reflections on the dynamic struggles and successes they have experienced, while also reaffirming the humanistic nature of such experiences within their broader communities. G.H. Smith (1997) explains that the purpose of him sharing his own personal story is to "show and declare the link between personal struggle and a wider collective struggle" (24). Intentional transformative educational praxis within the context of collaborative research with Indigenous language activists makes the process of meaning making from their narratives a foundational method to gain perspectives on the field as a whole. While there are many different types of language acquisition methods and structures, there are basic building blocks for an intentional transformative practice. Manatowa-Bailey (2021) described the relationship between structure and change as a fundamental piece of language revitalization.

You have to have structure. You have to have a pathway. Now this goes back to the psychology and it doesn't matter if we're talking about an individual or a group for embodied cognition...The fundamental premise of language revitalization is change. If we didn't need change then we wouldn't need language revitalization...And what we need is intentional change because what we are experiencing is unintentional change. Change is happening whether we like it or not. The question is, are we going to recognize individually or collectively that it is happening and then intentionally change the way that we want to or at least head in a direction that we choose, or are we going to just let it happen to us? And so, intention is one part. It doesn't have to come first.

LAR is an embodiment of change, one that many are ill prepared for and do not conceptualize or are cognizant of how these shifts are impactful in their every-day-lives and the shared language spaces.

Identifying and reflecting upon lived experiences that demonstrate sites of struggle, challenges, and empowerment are the praxis of this collaborative research. The transformative

process is that narratives/stories are intended to become teaching tools to assist in “making sense of one’s life...(and) transforming it in more meaningful ways, and ultimately re-claiming it” (G.H. Smith 1997, 25). What becomes meaningful to a person at the point in time they are exposed to these narratives will contribute to their own intellectual tool kit of transformative praxis; tools to identify and inform actions of change and stabilization.

Tensions and disjuncture therefore offer an opportunity for change. Reflecting upon the variables through models of interconnectivity and meaning making has the potential to reshape the field of LAR and the practitioners in those spaces. Meek (2010) has described the importance of reflecting on language revitalization through a sociolinguistic process to identify interactional moments and experiences of disjuncture. “The concept of sociolinguistic disjuncture is a way to talk about the breakdown between and across theories and practices. It is in these moments of sociolinguistic disjuncture that the sociolinguistic field is reconfigured and the course of language shift (re)directed, but also when opportunities for negotiating and containing disjuncture exist” (xxiii). While some actions are carried out without a detailed structured plan, the long-term work of Indigenous language activists in this field allows for a reflection on unintentional change, purposeful structured change, and a reflection on the outcomes of both. Their narratives are examples of how relationships are made, *remade*, and/or *redirected* in meaningful ways.

Leanne Simpson (2010), in *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-non-Indigenous Relationships*, describes the necessity of understanding the process and outcomes of building relationships around shared goals, amongst Indigenous groups as well as amongst non-Indigenous groups. The building or making of relationships is part of a key strategy in movements for change. However, Simpson (2010) critiques these processes she’s been part of

and a witness to by acknowledging the difficulties that are present to create and maintain these relationships. “Too often we have forged these relationships without taking the proper time to clearly discuss our different roles and responsibilities. Too often, tensions and misunderstanding plague even the very best of intentions” (xiii-xiv). These words are strong points of reflection within the LAR journey I’ve embarked upon haphazardly in some cases, as well as those that I’ve been a witness to.

I once believed that deeply rooted personal goals amongst members of a same group would be strong enough to overcome issues that caused tensions and misunderstandings. That “if you build it, they will come.” That the investment and belief in the need to document, preserve, learn, and create a next generation of speakers would lead people to put aside their differences to collectively pursue the goals. My misunderstandings have been attributed to not fully understanding the scope of the issues and variables impacting internal language endangerment and complex language acquisition goals. I’ve also been told that I’m too trusting and optimistic. I don’t see this as a handicap of my own, by having a preference to trust and look at the positives, but I do see a repeat of misunderstanding the full impact of various tensions and instances of disjuncture. Therefore, the development of my own research methods had to account for these complex shortcomings. I needed to repeatedly reflect on how I was being impactful and influential and how I was being impacted and influenced in ways that were not representative of who I know myself to be.

Contextualizing an Informed Collaborative Research Methodology

The abilities to engage in a process of negotiating and containing disjuncture (Meek 2010) is either because a person has been trained/educated in methods to engage in this process and/or they’ve developed processes in response to past experiences. The benefit of sharing

narratives of these kinds is that they add to the repertoire of knowledge that may help in guiding a person away from or to better address instances of disjuncture. Issues of disjuncture are not always fully transparent and deeply rooted tensions can cripple even the best of intentions for reflection, action, and change. Manatowa-Bailey introduced the concept of a “Jedi Paradox” that exists amongst Indigenous peoples. There is an assumption that some Indigenous people are born with a magic ability, “midi-chlorians”, and these automatically connect a person to a deeper force. In this case, the value and drive for culture and language education. “As language workers we assume that the interest and value of our Native languages is inherent and obvious. Interest must be developed over time. Value must be learned” (Manatowa-Bailey 2013). My personal experience has informed me that values are taught and reinforced through knowledge sharing and the method of transmission. Understanding of a person’s upbringing and educational background is vital to pursuing collective goals. Furthermore, as language activists we can’t ignore the importance of pursuing an understanding of the broad scope of contexts surrounding instances of disjuncture and actions for change.

Grace and G.H. Smith have engaged in and promoted processes of evaluation and *reenvisioning/reimagining* of the Maorī educational systems. After nearly one-hundred years of intentional educational *remaking*, there is still intentional processes and methods being created to assess and problem solve each structure and pathway employed to achieve goals and outcomes. “Māori communities throughout Aotearoa have different views on, and expectations of education. The bower brokers need to sort out a flexible framework of systems that best meet their needs. Let’s move forward to a future of our own making” (Grace 1997). The contexts in which these actions are taking place reveal the interconnectivity between the core goals and the periphery variables, macro- and micro-influences. For the Māori educational reform of the

1980s, G.H. Smith (1997) speaks of the impacts of the ongoing context of “wider political, cultural, and...free-market reforms of the New Zealand economy” (212). The national movement for economic and political change, emphasized the failure of the state in intervening in the Māori educational crisis, which motivated and *redirected* a continuous action for creating their own structures and goals for educational reform (G.H. Smith 1997).

The context of language acquisition and revitalization reform is hinged on the very foundation of sacredness embodied by the ancestral language, and the inherent rights of Indigenous people to access such knowledge. This context is a prime arena for an educational *remaking*. “Language, in particular, can aid in decolonizing the mind. Thinking in one’s own cultural referents leads to conceptualizing in one’s own world view, which, in turn, leads to disagreement with and eventual opposition to the dominant ideology” (Haunani-Kay Trask 1993, 43). The language activists through their truth telling narratives engage in a process of reflection on their own understandings of their positionality, work, and long-term intentions. They are collectively involved in forms of resistance and opposition to dominant ideology, both that are of external colonial and internal Indigenous making.

In contrast to the broader scope and context of Indigenous language acquisition, my own predicament with crafting research methods through my positionality of being a student within a sociocultural linguistic anthropology program has provided a plethora of methods and techniques to investigate the social experiences of Indigenous language activists pursuing LAR within their own speech communities. An analysis of their experiences, methods, structures, techniques, and outcomes has questioned my own intentions to engage research that prescribes definitions and interpretations about Indigenous groups that I am not part of. Tensions within language communities are of course caused by many different variables. However, the study of social

relationship variation and language variation within language communities should not add to these tensions. Duranti (1997) eludes that linguistic variation theorized by Bakhtin is ripe with continuous tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal forces are “the political and institutional forces that try to impose one variety or code over others” (Duranti 1997, 76). Centrifugal forces “push speakers away from a common center and toward differentiation...represented by the people (geographically, numerically, economically, and metaphorically) at the periphery of the social system” (Duranti 1997, 76). Obviously, centripetal and centrifugal forces impact the core in different ways. Through an Indigenous lens, storywork also has such power to push and bring people together. With this knowledge, I put myself in check and reflected on the impacts of this collaborative research. The research methods and actions I envisioned and supported pursuing could not directly impact the relationships within my own language communities. My journey to determine the specific research methods have touched upon an experience of my own academic *remaking*.

Remaking Collaborative Research Parameters

My educational background and personal experiences informed me that while these topics are sensitive, the importance of pursuing an understanding of impactful and meaningful relationship making experiences amongst Indigenous language activists needed to continue. There are far too many variables that are unknown and/or not addressed through language acquisition methodology training which later manifest into troubling disjuncture amongst language group members and their speech communities. Manatowa-Bailey (2021) stated that, “the variables wrapped up in language revitalization and how they impact each other are not well understood within the field.” As a means to assist in identifying these variables and how they

impact language acquisition and the wellbeing of Indigenous language activists, I've defined the following parameters for the disjuncture variables.

Centripetal forces are deliberate divisive actions experienced within language groups, such as symbolic capital. These forces when not recognized and mitigated can contribute to a destabilization of the core of a holistic language acquisition practice. *Centrifugal forces* are the unintentional dynamics that occur on the periphery of the core, such as the overall status of the language and the status of the Indigenous community within the colonial nation-state. The opportunity to truly investigate these macro-and micro-level issues amongst my own speech communities was intriguing. Unfortunately, when I discussed with family and different people whom I have close social relationships with, about my ideas for anthropological and linguistic research which would identify the social relationship dynamics of our specific language groups, I could literally feel the energy between us shift.

People became uncomfortable, cautious, and guarded. I felt a spotlight on me, and a dramatic pull back shot and montage of me looking back upon my life thus far, and where did I go wrong. This is because the negative experiences with anthropologists and linguists in my own family and collective community histories are either still too close to us or are still ongoing. This type of energy shift invoked images of Vine Deloria Jr.'s (2007) narrative:

“From every rock and cranny in the East *they* emerge, as if responding to some primeval fertility rite, and flock to the reservations. ‘They’ are the anthropologists’...all brands of the species, embark on the great summer adventure...he usually has a camera, tape recorder, hoola hoop, and life jacket...An anthropologist comes out to the Indian reservations to make OBSERVATIONS” (182).

Even though this is a new century, these types of academics are still found every summer in my own communities. I am not that researcher. I am highly aware of the tensions my academic lens creates in the relationships I have with my language community members. While practices of

“salvage ethnography” are treated as a distant past within contemporary anthropological research methods, this is not the case within the reality of my own Indigenous communities or language acquisition journey. The colonial salvage ethnographers still exist amongst my communities, they still embark on summer adventures, and funnel, redirect, and compete with Native institutions, researchers, and practitioners over language acquisition, documentation, and revitalization funding. Specifically, there are ongoing tensions with many of the non-Indigenous foundations who are awarded large grants to redistribute to small short-term projects, while they acquire large chunks of the funding for non-profit administrative fees.

Additionally, the ongoing “authoritative voice” of the anthropologist, linguist, and/or academic research has created very real and caustic intertribal notions of “authentic” language and cultural identity. If I wanted to embark on a research project about social relationships within Indigenous community-based language acquisition groups, I would need to very seriously weigh all the variables involved when using academic tools to help identify the interpersonal issues impacting the creation, maintenance, and stability of relationships at hand. Next, in-depth reflections on the known and applied tools and methods used to identify variables at each layer in Indigenous revitalization movements was necessary. The core represents the issues at the micro-level, the periphery are those at the macro-level. How do I investigate the micro-level without doing a case study that would result in a prescriptive classification of a specific Indigenous language group?

To Survey or Not to Survey

In the previous chapter, models of interconnectivity, holism, and decolonial research methods provided examples of preexisting variables on the periphery of the core. There is an ongoing context of broader social, financial, and governmental variables in combination with the

context of micro-variables faced by speech language groups. There is a core and periphery of LAR variables being shaped within an already complex larger and broader space of Indigenous core and periphery variables. Simply Indigenous language activists have become minorities within their own minority Indigenous Nations and communities. For example, some government leaders and programs within Indigenous communities do not always participate in language learning or teaching, and there is a lower priority for language acquisition amongst broader issues of financial stability, housing, healthcare, and educational standards. The language speech groups are impacted by both the broader community macro-issues and the larger nation-state macro-issues.

As I stepped back from being within my own speech groups, I grappled with how these layers of macro- and micro-level issues could be defined, named, and quantified. A method to gauge these impactful issues within speech groups could be pursued through the form of a survey. Surveys are high priority tools used to identify similar issues and contexts impacting language endangerment and vitality. These forms of inquiry have been widely adopted and used by language speech groups, tribal academic institutions and governments, as well as non-Indigenous institutions, non-profit groups, and for-profit organization.

Language endangerment and vitality assessments created by Joshua Fishman (*Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale*, 1991), Ethnologue (2021), and UNESCO (*Language Vitality and Endangerment*, 2003), and Simons and Lewis (*Extended-GIDS*, 2006) are utilized to analyze the number of speakers, domains, attitudes, language transmission, and documentation resources within each community. These are big picture, macro-level, assessments of micro-level experiences, but are used to quantify responses to crafted survey questions and community expressions that provide a perspective on the status of a language amongst specific types of

community members. While useful in the process of quantifying language endangerment of an entire language group, this process, in my experience, does not take into account traditional forms of knowledge exchange to pursue an understanding of interpersonal relationship dynamics occurring at the individualistic level.

Surveys can be tools which distance oneself from the survey participants. I gave this knowledge and my experiences creating, conducting, and analyzing surveys a long in-depth analysis, and have chosen not to utilize a survey for the research at hand because of the sensitivity of the research topics. A survey was not going to engage a traditional method of relationship making and gift giving that are protocols when conversing about such personal issues. I also looked to my past experiences with surveys and research with Indigenous communities to direct what type of engaged and informed research would best uphold my own teachings and the relationships I have with other language activists. A survey sent via email or an online platform would not cultivate a mutually beneficial experience between language activists/practitioners. Relationship making and meaning making occurs through the act of transmission, sharing, and conversation between the invested parties.

The use of a survey to investigate and identify leading causes of interpersonal stresses in language groups presented a flood of other periphery issues that could possibly detract from the research at hand. Continuing with my previous example of symbolic capital and power dynamics wreaking havoc on language communities, nation-state census surveys used in minority communities has been a form of power over the community. Surveying the status of educational success and wellness has been fraught with frameworks that can be very subjective and bias. The history of the use of surveys in anthropology and linguistic research with Indigenous communities creates a very socially disconnected process to acquire sensitive information.

Maggie Walter and Chris Andersen (2013) in *Indigenous Statistics: A Quantitative Research Methodology* state that, “[f]or Indigenous peoples, especially in first world countries where population statistics powerfully influence governance and social services, these numbers have become a foundational lens through which we, as Indigenous people and peoples, become known to our respective nation-states and how we engage in many of our relationships with government actors” (8). Being aware of the historical and contemporary use of survey tools by academics and institutions, I felt less confident at this point in time in the use of a survey for this research topic.

Contributing to this caution, was the action of superimposing my own lens and reinterpretations of other people’s experiences which would violate my belief that, “if it is not our words, it is not our story” (Professor Rangi Matamua, Instagram 2021). Employing a research method to uphold this belief supported the use of my own narrative only representing my own story, and the narratives of the language activists would be their own representations of their own stories. Further meaning making would be representative of a modification of my own understanding of their story gift giving. This meaning making is context based and is fluid across space and time. The source material, the original narratives, for the meaning making would need to be accessible throughout time. These stories would not be available in a survey based model. The utilization of survey data as a primary source for my research engaged a minimal relationship investment.

Additionally, there were few ways to ensure that the data collected from surveys would be a whole truth, particularly because a survey is not an honest reciprocal relationship. Walter and Andersen (2013) caution that,

the first premise is that the quantitative methodologies that guide the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data about Indigenous peoples both reflect and constitute, in ways largely invisible to their producers and users, the dominant cultural framework of the nation-state within which they (that is, statistics)

operate. Although the statistical depictions used to summarize the social complexity of Indigenous communities (all communities, for that matter) are neither natural nor normal, the cultural weight and power of statistical techniques and the numerical summaries they generate speak a ‘truth’ about the communities on which they shine their statistical light. But the way that they shine that light pushes out other ways of conceiving about and acting upon those communities” (9).

These cautions raised very real concerns of my own. Am I in an academic position to quantify and classify other peoples’ deeply rooted personal experiences through short answers to survey questions? Am I comfortable with using my own lens to interpret them, label them, and use them for my own research purposes, all while being socially disconnected from them and not engaging in a reciprocal relationship? Is this how I have been taught to be? Is this the type of data that aligns to the types of relationships and outcomes that I want my research to represent?

In the past I’ve created Indigenous language survey tools, circulated them, held community events to encourage participation, and worked for long hours to enter the data, organize, analyze, and report on the outcomes which classify the levels of endangerment, vitality, and apathy towards language learning. Through these experiences I’ve seen an overwhelming lack of participation of community members to invest time in completing surveys. Those who do invest the time don’t tend to provide answers that reveal the detailed roots of the issues embedded in their language lives. These factors created a risk of uncertainty regarding data that could misrepresent the detailed interpersonal experiences of language activists involved in community-based language acquisition efforts.

As an Indigenous language activist participating in decolonization research methods, I am highly aware of the ramifications of any information of internal knowledge being fed to an external academic institution. As many Indigenous people know, words of the “academics” and institutional research findings can debilitate Indigenous peoples for centuries. Manatowa-Bailey

reminds us that, “[w]e should be careful about what we bring into academia and equally careful about what we take from it.” Specifically, the power of presenting survey data or any other form of quick inquiry of personal issues could do more harm than good. Simply saying there are deeply rooted issues within language groups that are exasperated by the contexts of greater social issues is not doing justice to the lived experiences of language activists, nor is trying to reinterpret their experiences through my own lens.

Finding a middle ground between quantitative and qualitative methods became more of a detraction from my research goals and was complicating my own position as an Indigenous language activist while being a doctoral student. I again looked to Walter and Andersen (2013) for guidance in understanding this multifaceted issue:

“we need to be more cognizant of the translative processes through which non-academic knowledge is translated into the academy. In other words, while many qualitative researchers (Indigenous or otherwise) position their work as anathema to statistical research, we both remain invested in the sets of power relations specific to the academy. Therefore, when Indigenous qualitative researchers speak to the importance of cultural markers without accounting for the particular forms of translation or refraction that occur—must occur—for their use in academic scholarship, they elide important conversations about the difference between ‘community’ and ‘academic’ knowledge. Equally, quantitative researchers who fail to attend to these differences make the same mistake” (10).

I am confident in sharing my own personal narrative through this research, however, the topics discussed with the Indigenous language activists must be in the participant’s own words to preserve their integrity and meaning. I returned to my communities to approach multiple people about having our conversations documented. Because of the sensitivity of the topics, there are boundaries to what could be directly documented within my own language communities.

I have incredibly beautiful, positive, and inspiring relationships with my elders and colleagues, who are my family and mentors. We discuss these personal experiences of ours in-depth and actively work to empower each other. Together, we are on a journey towards language

documentation, preservation, acquisition, and revitalization. The intimate conversations in certain circumstances between each other are for us alone while we continue to navigate through these variables within our own communities. These are the boundaries I need to be supportive of. Instead, knowing how important and sensitive these topics are, I would have to find voices outside of my own communities. Voices from long-term Indigenous language activists who are confident and strong enough to share their lived experiences with the purpose of these being part of this publicly shared research knowledge. I would need to find a safe space to continue this work and it would have to be with people who would not be negatively impacted by their truth telling. The relationship parameters for a participant are that this person is someone who I knew would share honest experiences and who in return trusted me to share such sensitive experiences with. The only solution would be to seek out a community of Indigenous language activists outside of my own language communities, but who I have positive experiences with and who represent various types of wellness pursuits within their own language lives. Pursuing a form of collaborative research with Indigenous language activists through these parameters has been a beautiful and hugely meaningful educational positive Indigenous experience.

Autoethnographic and Collaborative Research Design

Our individual lived experiences and reflections on these are only representative of our “progress to date” (G.H. Smith 1997, 26), because it is our human nature to change and shift over time. In 2012, I began an intentional process of inquiry with language activists who I knew had a long and consistent active participation in their ancestral language learning and teaching. Looking back on my notes throughout the years, I’ve noticed a few consistent reoccurrences. Many initial opinions shared in 2012 compared with those shared after 2020 by younger language activists have changed. Older, more experienced language activists have held steady to

their opinions. I've intentionally sought out and cultivated a generationally varied group of Indigenous language activists, as well their Native American and Indigenous affiliations, years of experience, types of language acquisition methods, size of speech communities, and geographic locations.

Throughout 2012 through 2017, I engaged in relationship making through gift giving, knowledge exchange, collaborations, honest conversations, creative actions, project planning, event planning, and working to bring more language speech groups together for mentorship. From these relationships, I've focused on only including Indigenous language activists who have had over a decade of experience in language acquisition and revitalization. In 2012 through 2019 I was involved in events that brought language speech groups together for training workshops, gatherings, and intensive language courses where I collaborated with many of the language activists involved in this research. Particularly of focus is the 2014 Bringing Our Languages Together: Sharing Language Revitalization with Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo. In 2017, I traveled across Turtle Island/North America to meet and visit with language activists I had previously had long-distance collaborations with but I had not met in person. In 2019, I was invited to be part of the Global Indigenous Languages Caucus during the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

During this gathering I continued gift giving and relationship making through the sharing of Indigenous knowledge and conversations amongst the cohort of participants. During the beginnings of the Covid-19 pandemic at the end of 2019/beginning of 2020, the world as we know it shifted and still has many unknowns about the future for every community and family. It was imperative for me to once again reach out to the language activists I had been previously collaborating with to reflect on their perspectives and feelings towards some of the issues we

have previously discussed. During the beginning of 2021, I began another round of inquiry with the language activists. I was not surprised that a number of the previous participants had opinions that had been *remade*. Some requested to have their discussions removed, as they would like to revisit the topics, but could not emotionally at the time, or were not in a place or space to engage in the topics presented for the conversations. I've given them thanks through prayer and gift giving and I'm encouraged that we will continue to collaborate in our greater work.

Interview Questions

The final topics and question utilized for the conversations were reviewed by each language activist and together we determined which to focus on and what issues to dig deeper into through open ended questions. The following are the interview questions approved by the OU IRB and provided to each Indigenous language activist. After their reviews of the questions, our conversations focused on various questions and we engaged in a process of actually *reinterpreting* and *redefining* what some of the concepts meant and represented within their own contexts and perspectives.

Interview questions:

I. Topic: Defining relationship types that occur in language revitalization work

1. How would you define what an "important impactful relationship" is within your personal work as a language activist?
2. What types of relationship have you experienced within your language revitalization work?
3. How have the different types of relationships impacted your language revitalization work?
4. How have your relationships shifted over time?

II. Topic: Defining the dynamics of social experiences occurring in language revitalization work

1. What types of experiences, both positive and negative, have impacted your language revitalization relationships?
2. What have been some of the most impactful events that have weakened and reinforced these relationships?

3. Have you noticed a connection between the types of language learning and teaching methods and the impact they have on your ability to make and maintain different types of relationships in your language revitalization work?

III. Topic: Social Environment and language acquisition

1. How important is the type of social environment in making and maintaining relationships that reinforce positive and progressive language revitalization?
2. Have you noticed specific types of language learning and teaching methods that have greater impact (both positive and negative) on your experiences with making and maintaining relationships in your language revitalization work?

IV. Topic: Personal relationship with language(s) being revitalized

1. How would you define your own personal relationship with your language?
2. What experiences have had the most impact on your relationship with your language(s)?
3. Have you experienced a separation between your language work/career and your personal life? For example, your usage of the language increases or decreases when you leave work for the day or when you change your environment?
4. Have you experienced “burnout” in your language revitalization work?
5. What have you done to make and maintain your own relationship with your language(s)?

VI. Topic: Reflection on the year of Covid-19 quarantine and social distancing

1. How has Covid-19 quarantine and social distancing impacted your language revitalization work?
2. How has this impacted your ability to make and maintain your relationships with your language revitalization community?
3. Has there been an impact on the types of language learning and teaching methods you utilize?
4. How do you intend to continue learning and/or teaching your language(s)?
5. What is most important for you to continue language revitalization work?

Structure of Conversations with Indigenous Language Activists

There are a total of 14 Indigenous language activists sharing their voices and minds with this research, myself included. Of these, 11 have chosen to be identified by their names, Indigenous languages, and background information. Three have requested to be included as anonymous, with their genders and description of types of LAR work used as identifying markers. Additional “Anonymous” quotes from the language activists here have been integrated throughout this dissertation to protect their identity because of the

sensitivity of the subject matter. Each of my conversations with the Indigenous language activists have been transcribed in the following chapters. These have been reviewed and edited by each speaker, and additionally edited for clarity and length. The meaning making statements within each of the conversations are my own reflections and also provide some supporting information and/or facts or links to additional sources.

The conversations with each of the Indigenous language activists hold insights and experiences that are greatly beneficial in understanding disjuncture variables. In some of the conversations, I've removed identifying markers and rewritten certain specific statements as generalized descriptions. These have all been reviewed by the speakers and/or they've given me permission to do so when necessary. Some of the conversations have been reorganized to aid with the flow of the discussion topics, while others have been left as a sequential stream of discussions. The organization of the conversation questions introduce each language activist and the beginnings of their personal language journeys, and where they are today along that journey. Additional narrative sections provide discussions of various topics and themes associated with the original participant interview questions.

The organization of the conversation chapters are crafted into four parts. Each part has introduction chapters presenting a discussion and critique of the theme issues. There are Meaning Making Guide in the forms of illustrations or poetics for each Indigenous language Activist and some include an additional meaning making graphic illustration story about a particular moving concept. **Part II: Learning to Begin a Journey in Indigenous Language Acquisition and Revitalization** introduces a discussion about what do we know about LAR and the complexities of being a first

generation to create LAR programs within their own communities. These are contrasted with notions of wellness in each person's ability to maintain and sustain a longevity of active participation and leadership in LAR. Included in Part II are conversations with Rev. Dr. Richard Grounds (Yuchi and Seminole), Jacob Manatowa-Bailey (Sauk), an Anonymous Indigenous Woman (1) in North America, and Lokosh (Dr. Joshua Hinson, Chickasaw).

Part III: Love, Loss, and all the In-betweens of LAR introduces the theme of an unlearning and *re*learning of relationship journeys and wellness. Closing discussions reflect on an awareness of Indigenous life stages, relationship health, and prioritizing positive productive relationships. Included in Part III are conversations with Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen (Mohawk Kanien'kéha), an Anonymous Indigenous Woman (2) in North America, the Sunray Family (Randi Sunray, Kiowa and Ponca, and Cedric Sunray, MOWA Choctaw), and Ryan DeCaire (Kanien'kehá:ka Mohawk).

Part IV: Bringing Our Languages Together: Sharing Language

Revitalization with Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language” revisits the actions of intergenerational transformative knowledge exchange as a form of gifting of seeds which represent interconnectivity amongst Indigenous language activists across space and time. Included here are conversations with Sir Dr. Tīmoti Kāretu (Tuhoe and Ngāti Kahungunu ‘Māori’), Dr. Hana O’Regan (Ngāi Tahu ‘Māori’), and Hēmi Kelly (Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Tahu-Ngāti Whāoa ‘Māori’). The closing chapter is a discussion of Indigenous relationship making and a retelling of my introduction to Te Panekiretanga mentors and cohorts. This is followed by a personal narrative of my project planning to host a three-day gathering with Te Panekiretanga in

Oklahoma. Additionally, I've provided my personal narratives of my experiences during the Sharing Language Revitalization with Te Penekiretanga LAR workshop, the second co-host gathering day with the Sauk Language Department at the Sac & Fox Nation grounds, the third co-host gathering day with the Chickasaw Nation Department of Language at the Chickasaw Cultural Center, and a closing dinner gathering hosted at my home.

Part V: We Are Born Into a Universe of Pre-existing Relationships includes the remaining conversation with an Anonymous Indigenous Language Activist, who is not identified by gender or location because they have worked in many high-stress language situations around the world.

Indigenous Language Activists List

PART II: Learning to Begin a Journey in Indigenous Language Acquisition and Revitalization

Rev. Dr. Richard Grounds, Yuchi and Seminole

LAR work:

- ✦ 30+ years of language learning and revitalization experience
- ✦ Father and grandfather
- ✦ Executive Director of the Yuchi Language Project. Master-Apprentice program started in 2002, helping to create 16 new second language speakers. In 2018 the gOnE (baby) class was created which grows each year with the students age (Turning Heart 2019).
- ✦ Ph.D. in the History of Religions at Princeton Theological Seminary
- ✦ Professor of Anthropology at the University of Tulsa
- ✦ Active in Picket Chapel, the local Yuchi Methodist church, and at Polecat Yuchi Ceremonial Ground
- ✦ Chair of the Global Indigenous Languages Caucus
- ✦ Prominent voice calling for an International Year of Indigenous Languages since the beginning of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2002
- ✦ Humanities in Education Award from the Oklahoma Humanities Council for 2013
- ✦ Served as the Expert for the North American Region at the Expert Meeting on Indigenous Languages held by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2016.

- ✦ Aided in the implementation of establishing the Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019 and the establishment of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in 2022
- ✦ Advocacy for national and international Indigenous language rights, education, and policy
- ✦ Immersion teaching language nest with fluent elders, second language speakers and teachers, and learners
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Program development and grant writing

Jacob Manatowa-Bailey, Sauk

LAR work:

- ✦ Second language speaker, learner, and teacher of Sauk.
- ✦ Learner of Meskwaki, Kickapoo, and other Algonquian languages
- ✦ 25+ years of language learning and revitalization experience.
- ✦ Founding Director of the Sauk Language Department for the Sac and Fox Nation (2005-2016)
- ✦ Developed team-based Master Apprentice model which aided in creating the first conversationally proficient second language acquisition speakers of the Sauk language
- ✦ Founding Director of the Center for Tribal Languages and the Tribal Languages Degree Program at Bacone College
- ✦ Language Project Advisor and coordinator for the MICA Group's Next Steps Project
- ✦ Doctoral student in the Department of Indigenous Education's Indigenous Language Revitalization cohort at the University of Victoria

Anonymous Indigenous Woman 1, North America

LAR work:

- ✦ 25+ years of language learning and revitalization experience
- ✦ Mother
- ✦ Second language adult master-apprentice language learning and teaching
- ✦ Immersion language learning and teaching
- ✦ Language Nest development
- ✦ Local and national language policy initiatives
- ✦ Language acquisition and revitalization consultation work
- ✦ Traditional foods and artistry
- ✦ Advocacy for Native and Indigenous language rights

Lokosh (Dr. Joshua Hinson), Chickasaw

LAR work:

- ✦ 20+ years of language learning and revitalization experience
- ✦ Father
- ✦ Master-apprentice methods
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation

- ✦ Award winning artist
- ✦ Bachelor degree in painting
- ✦ Artistic work with the language
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Program development and grant writing
- ✦ Media tools development
- ✦ Master degree in Native American Art History
- ✦ Ph.D. in Native American Language Revitalization
- ✦ Author of books *Anompilbashsha' Asilhha' Holisso*, *Chickasaw Prayer Book*, *Chikasaha*, and *A Concise Chickasaw Dictionary*.
- ✦ Descendant of Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), Cherokee, and Euro-American

PART III: Love, Loss, and all the In-betweens of LAR

Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen, Mohawk Kanien'kéha

LAR work:

- ✦ 20+ years of language revitalization and acquisition work
- ✦ Father
- ✦ Master-apprentice methods
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Artistic work with the language, music translations
- ✦ Musician
- ✦ Language teacher
- ✦ Media tools development

Anonymous Indigenous Woman 2, North America

LAR work:

- ✦ 15+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Mother
- ✦ Second language teacher
- ✦ Language department Director
- ✦ Language media development
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Grant writing

Sunray Family: Randi Sunray, Kiowa and Ponca, and Cedric Sunray, MOWA Choctaw

LAR work:

- ✦ 20+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Parents
- ✦ Second language teachers and advocates
- ✦ Development of language nest
- ✦ Veteran (Randi)
- ✦ Grant writing
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation

- ✦ Grant writing
- ✦ Sports and fitness advocates

Ryan DeCaire, Kanien'kehá:ka Mohawk

LAR work:

- ✦ 15+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Intensive adult language immersion
- ✦ Language teacher
- ✦ Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Centre for Indigenous Studies at the University of Toronto
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Farmer and horticulturalist
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Grant writing
- ✦ Ph.D. Candidate in Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization Program at the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

PART IV: Bringing Our Languages Together: Sharing Language Revitalization with Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language”

Sir Dr. Tīmoti Kāretu, Tuhoe, Ngāti Kahungunu (Māori)

LAR work:

- ✦ First language speaker
- ✦ 90+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Intensive adult language immersion
- ✦ Language, culture, and traditional knowledge keeper
- ✦ Māori Language Commissioner
- ✦ Executive Director of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust
- ✦ Founding member and mentor of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo Māori “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language” alongside Dr. Te Wharehuia Milroy and Sir William Te Rangia Pou Temara
- ✦ Knight of the New Zealand Order of Merit
- ✦ Curriculum development and examination
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Language and educational policy development
- ✦ Chairperson of Aotearoa Traditional Māori Performing Arts Festival Committee and Te Māngai Pāho
- ✦ Author and composer

Dr. Hana O'Regan, Ngāi Tahu (Māori)

LAR work:

- ✦ 40+ years of language learning and revitalization experience
- ✦ Mother and partner
- ✦ Immersion language learning and teaching
- ✦ Local and national language policy initiatives
- ✦ Author and composer

- ✦ Language acquisition and revitalization consultation work
- ✦ Doctor of Philosophy, Te Ara Poutama, Culture and Society
- ✦ B.A. in Māori Studies and Political Science, Victoria University
- ✦ Post Graduate Diploma of Arts in Māori Studies at Otago University
- ✦ Master of Arts, Maori Studies, Otago University. Publication of thesis, *Ko Tahu, Ko Au: Kāi Tahu Tribal Identity* (2001)
- ✦ Graduate of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo Māori “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language”
- ✦ Advocacy for Māori language teaching, policy development, education, and community equity
- ✦ Tumu Whakarae (Chief Executive Officer) of CORE Education
- ✦ Dean of Te Puna Wānaka and the Director of Māori and Pasifika Studies at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology
- ✦ Māori Language Commissioner
- ✦ Ngāi Tahu Māori language teacher and advisor

Hēmi Kelly, Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Tahu-Ngāti Whāoa (Maori)

LAR work:

- ✦ 20+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Participant and teacher in intensive adult language immersion classes
- ✦ Language teacher and lecturer in te reo Māori at Auckland University of Technology
- ✦ Graduate of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo Māori “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language”
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Māori literary translations
- ✦ Author of *A Māori Phrase a Day* (2020) and *A Maori Word a Day* (2018)
- ✦ Co-translator for the Māori language version of Lorde’s *Te Ao Mārama* album (2021)
- ✦ “A Māori Phrase a Day” social media content creator
- ✦ Language documentation, preservation, and translation
- ✦ Māori language planning and revitalization initiatives

Part V: We Are Born Into a Universe of Pre-existing Relationships

Anonymous Indigenous Language Activist

LAR work:

- ✦ 20+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Partner and parent
- ✦ Second language speaker
- ✦ Participant and teacher in intensive adult language immersion classes, language nests, Master-Apprentice, and a plethora of long-term and short-term LAR methods
- ✦ Language teacher of multiple ancestral languages
- ✦ Public and private teacher and professor
- ✦ Indigenous advocate

- ✦ Curriculum development, project planning, language endangerment and loss assessments, group dynamics assessments, and efficacy of LAR curriculum and methodology assessments
- ✦ Author and literature reviewer
- ✦ Grant reviewer
- ✦ Language learning material content creator
- ✦ Language documentation, preservation, and translation

**PART II: LEARNING TO BEGIN A JOURNEY IN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION AND REVITALIZATION**

INTRODUCTION: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION?

CHAPTER 5: REV. DR. RICHARD GROUNDS, YUCHI AND SEMINOLE

- ✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide
- A Conversation with Dr. Richard Grounds
- ✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide

CHAPTER 6: JACOB MANATOWA-BAILEY, SAUK

- ✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide
- A Conversation with Jacob Manatowa-Bailey
- ✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide

CHAPTER 7: INDIGENOUS ANONYMOUS WOMAN 1, NORTH AMERICA

- ✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide
- A conversation with Indigenous Anonymous Woman 1

CHAPTER 8: LOKOSH (DR. JOSHUA HINSON), CHICKASAW

- ✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide
- A Conversation with Lokosh

Introduction: What Do We Know About Language Acquisition and Revitalization?

Language acquisition and revitalization (LAR) efforts are profound. The methods and efforts flow across interdisciplinary fields and thrive in almost every area of life. LAR actions chronicle social, environmental, political, educational, and economic issues. They hold memories of gatherings, celebrations, and positive and negative experiences. LAR breathes contradiction; intimacy and distance, our known universe, the unknown, and the not yet created. We know that even a sleeping language (lost/dead language) can be revived and first-generation speakers once again created (jessie little doe baird and the Wôpanâôk “Wampanoag” language). We know that LAR efforts can be driven by one person or an entire Nation. You don’t need to be a linguist or a fluent speaker, but you have to have access to the language. The world of LAR is ever expanding because language shift is fluid and driven by speakers, learners, descendants of ancestral languages, and impacted/influenced by tribal/Indigenous governments, colonial settler states, and internal and external academics (Harrison 2007; Hinton et al. 2018; Kroskrity 2012). In many ways, some forms of LAR have been ongoing since before colonization. LAR was involved in strategic intertribal diplomacy efforts, group/band separation and preservation, culture and language revivals after war and loss, alliances, reinforcement of society and ceremonial teachings, and the fulfillment of visions. In all of these, the stabilization and use of specific languages was pinnacle to the achievement of people’s goals. These storied histories are still being learned and *re*learned.

The history of anthropology and linguistics, specifically their influences on the field of LAR, have grown out of more contentious and unethical practices of salvage ethnography, romanticism, frontierism (Frederick Jackson Turner), evangelicalism, linguistic relativity and diversity (Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Lee Whorf), and research about the “exotic”

(people, cultures, and languages), their endangerment and death (Duranti 1997; Harrison 2007; Hinton and Hale 2001; Hinton et al. 2018). The exact point at which purveyors in these fields began to be reshaped by their work and the state of their world is debated, but by the 1980s questions about the “contexts of power, resistance, institutional constraint, and innovation...and the wider practice of writing about, against, and among cultures” alluded to a “crisis in anthropology” (Clifford 1986, 2-3) and fueled self-reflexivity, and shifted relationships between the academic and the “informant” and “intolocator.” The field of linguistics and the utilization of tools and methods for the analysis of speech sounds, patterns, and language shift, combined with pragmatics and language ideologies, produced theories and analysis about language use and structure is a representation of how human beings intersect socially and create greater social meaning making (Duranti 1997; Hill 1998 & 2009; Pishwa 2009; Schieffelin et al. 1998). Deeper research and discussions about sociolinguistics and social cognition (Hymes 1974; Pishwa 2009); discourse of nostalgia (Hill 1998), poetics (Bauman 1977; Clifford and Marcus 1986), performance (Bauman 1977; Duranti 2009; Hymes 2009) and communicative development (Ochs and Schieffelin 2009; Sharifian 2015). Somewhere before, within, and beyond these revelations, the field of LAR began to grow out of actions on the ground, grassroot movements, reactions to academic and settler state rhetoric, and speaking back to these continued to be through the very act of speaking ancestral languages.

I remember my Jho-jho (maternal great-grandma) telling me they spoke some when she was a child before she was taken to the Flandreau Indian Boarding school in the early 1900s. She said all she could think about then was not getting punished. She still had scars on her knees from having to kneel on dried peas for hours. The act of speaking in of itself is not difficult, it does take effort, but access is paramount. When I was first starting college, I went to our

reservation library and asked for language materials. I kept getting told to come back. Soon, each time I came back, there was never anyone there. Finally, I spoke with another man at the library. He asked, “are you a tribal member?” I said no, but told him who my grandma was. He told me, “well, these materials are only for tribal members.” I didn’t try again for another few years. When I was told the same thing, my Gah-ghuk (maternal grandma) said, “they just don’t like me, that’s all.” She told me she’d get them and mail them to me. Over the next few years, I’d receive “illegal” xerox copies from her with a few pages of the Shoshone language. Gah-ghuk would laugh and say she’d have to sneak copying them during her lunch break at her elder employment site. LAR happens in actions of resistance and love. Today, the Shoshone language dialects are accessible through numerous books, recordings, applications, and across social media, but it’s still endangered. I still hear stories about access, and I know how easy it is to just walk-away when confronted with tongue and cheek adversity. I didn’t grow up with fluent speakers in my home. I can only pursue being one for my own grandchildren in the future. So, what do we really know about LAR?

The amount of resources detailing LAR research and practice available in print, online, across universities, non-profits, private groups, Indigenous entities, and from the elders is gargantuan! There is no possible way to read, watch, listen to, and to know everything in the field of LAR and associated fields. That’s ok, because I only need to know my own ancestral languages, right? If I’ve learned anything from the language activists, this work, this life, is never truly only about our ancestral languages. It’s also work that will never be done. There isn’t an end date to this work, there are only completions of smaller and bigger tasks along the way. The work should always pull, inspire, and call us to stay present, to live in the bliss of the moment, to experience true meaningfulness with the language, culture, and family. LAR takes

form in vibrant unique ways; in different methodologies, curriculums, programs, domains, kin, strangers, academics, fluent speakers, conversational speakers, readers, writers, mentors, lovers, ex-lovers, and baby-daddy's and baby-momma's, with all ages, and even with animals and nature. There is no single description. Defining it is continuously ongoing. The important part is that it's happening. The key point I'm pushing for, is that it is happening in good, positive, healthy, productive, and reciprocal ways. Wellness, holism, balance, and positive relationships should be high priority standards. There is an immense amount of strength, guidance, heart, curiosity, and stubbornness that is also required. A mixture of these is what often starts a person on their LAR journey, even though it is difficult to discern which area of LAR to begin with.

Beginning a LAR journey can be as simple as listing to the remaining speakers. It can be as happenstance as a person being inspired one day to write down what they know in the language. The documentary *Recording a Dying Language* (Vaughan-Lee 2014), shares the story of Marie Wilcox, one of the last fluent speakers and elder of the Wukchumni language, born in 1933. She had not spoken her ancestral language since she was young and therefore had not taught the language to her children. Upon learning that her children were trying to learn the language, she slowly began to speak again. Then the language flooded her memories. Marie would quickly scribble down each new word or phrase onto whatever paper was near her. She even had an older computer set up in her home so she could learn to type the words. She said, "I'm just a pecker. I peck one word at a time. And I was slow. Just peck, peck, peck. When I had all these words together, I thought it would be a good idea to make a dictionary" (Vaughan-Lee 2011). In 2020, Marie turned 86 and had been working on her dictionary for seven years. The Wukchumni are not federally recognized. They are part of the broader Yokuts peoples in central California.

Another journey can begin in an actual dream. My own did. Memories of Hiraacá words being spoken to me. My mother said I used to talk Hiraacá in my sleep. I still do. For many language activists, the dream inspires us. It encourages and taunts us to learn more of the language if we can. It shows us how language can feed us and lead us. Eventually, sooner or later, the language weaves its way into our very beings, planting itself deep and takes root. For jessie little doe [sic], she had such a dream. It led her to reach out to her family, elders, academics, and grew into her pursuing her ancestral Wôpanâôk language through the archives until she remade her own tongue and ears. Her daughter became one of the new first-generation speakers. little doe baird described her dream in the 2011 documentary *We Still Live Here- Âs Nutayuneân*.

I started having these dreams some years ago. And I was seeing all these people that really looked familiar but I didn't know them...they were talking to me and I didn't understand what they were saying. I had never heard the language before. It sounded familiar but I just thought I was getting a little nutty. Sometime after that, I was travelling down this road and I saw that sign for 'Sippewissett.' I don't know why but the light just went on and I thought, 'Oh! You know, I wonder if that's Wampanoag language I'm hearing' (Makepeace 2011).

All of this, made from a dream, curiosity, intention, and tenacity. Upon reading articles written by little doe baird and watching the documentary, I knew that my own experiences were not crazy. I was not crazy to be inspired to pursue a life in higher education so I could learn more about LAR. The only regret I have is that my studies have taken me from my families, my reservations, and from my speech communities. Unlike the story that will be shared by Dr.

Grounds, Yuchi, I was able to continue learning a language close to Eastern Shoshone, Comanche kept me close to home.

Part II of this dissertation focuses on the theme of beginning a LAR journey, looking back to those days and experiences by the language activists, and contrasting them with the work their lives today. The narratives of Dr. Richard Grounds (Yuchi), Jacob Manatowa-Bailey (Sauk), an Anonymous Indigenous woman from North America, and Lokosh (Dr. Joshua Hinson) (Chickasaw) are shared here. These narratives do not focus on in-depth demographic or the status of each language activists' ancestral language groups. Instead, their narratives highlight their personal experiences with building relationships, trial and error, and defining their own parameters for the types of language lives they live and want for their future. I've provided my own notes and reflections as “◆ Starlog Notes’ about specific topics in each narrative. I've created introductions for each language activist represented in “◆ Meaning Making” illustrated guides for each language activist. Some have introductory meaning making poetic pieces, and some have a separate illustration which shares an interpretation and reflection of mine on their language journey. Through the following language activists' narratives in Part II, III, and IV, it is my goal that their stories, *their truths*, will help inspire, mentor, and guide an understanding of life stage experiences and various issues that occur within the language journeys of Indigenous language activists.

✧ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ✧
Part II: Learning About Linguistic Relativity

[Visual guide text]

Page 1: Home for the summer.

Brother: Hey Sis.

R: Hey Brother! Did you know that the father of anthropology is some German guy named Franz Boas.

Brother: German? Like those ones dat wanna be Injuns?

R: ... ? [*connecting the dots*]

R: *Maaaybe?* I'm not sure.

Brother: ... Nope. Didn't know dat.

Brother: Gonna go in around 3.

R: K.

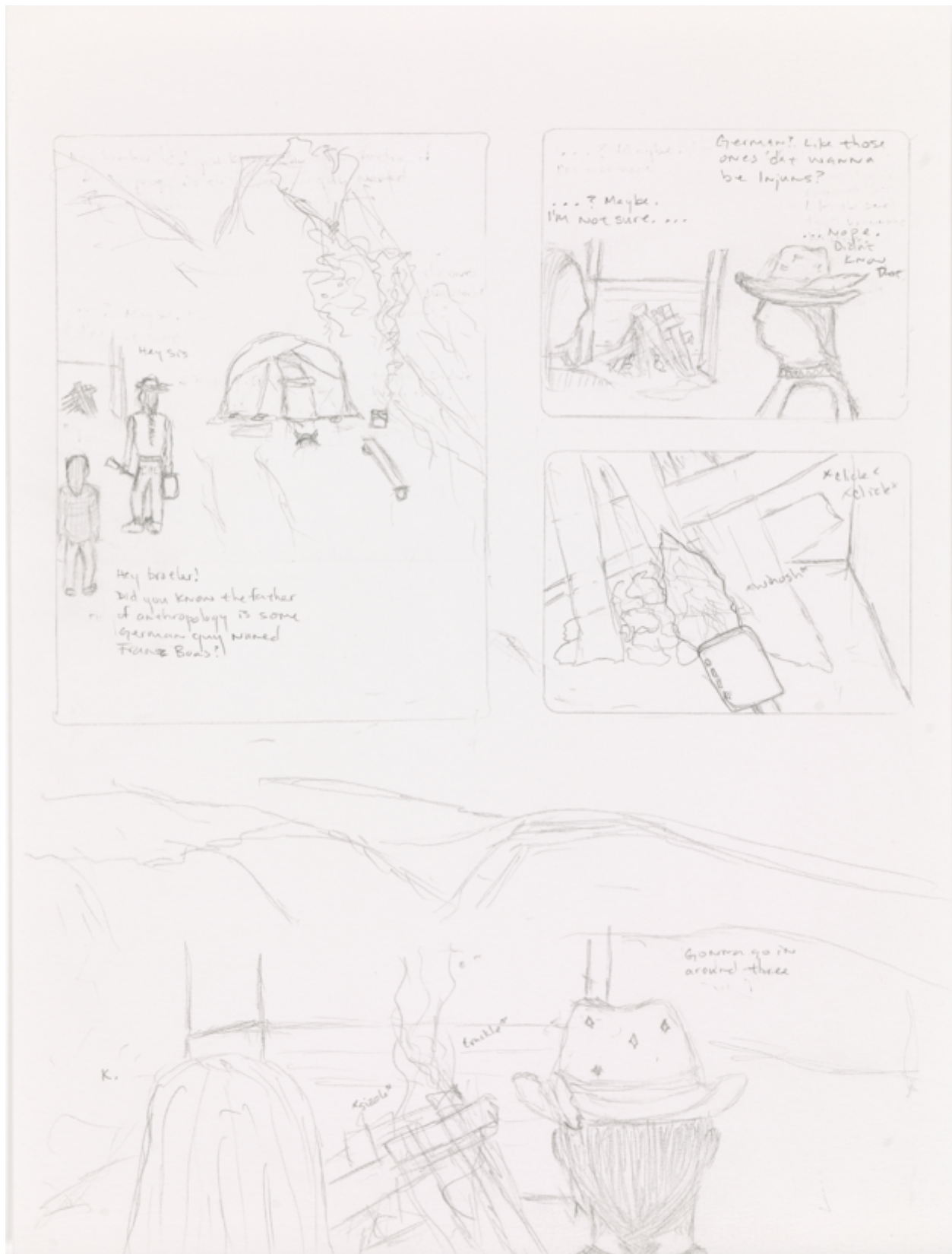


Figure 21: Coming Home for the Summer. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

Chapter Five: Rev. Dr. Richard Grounds, Yuchi

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Rev. Dr. Richard Grounds, Yuchi and Seminole
yUdjEha KAnAnô, yUdjEhaLA nÔ'wAdA
We are Yuchi, we speak Yuchi

Naagagaa: It's crooked.

Ceesha: ? It's fine.

Naagagaa: I'll fix it.

Ceesha: Leave it.

Naagagaa: *

Ceesha: It's not meant to be perfect.

...

Naagagaa: Niiwaagiráshic

Ceesha: I know.

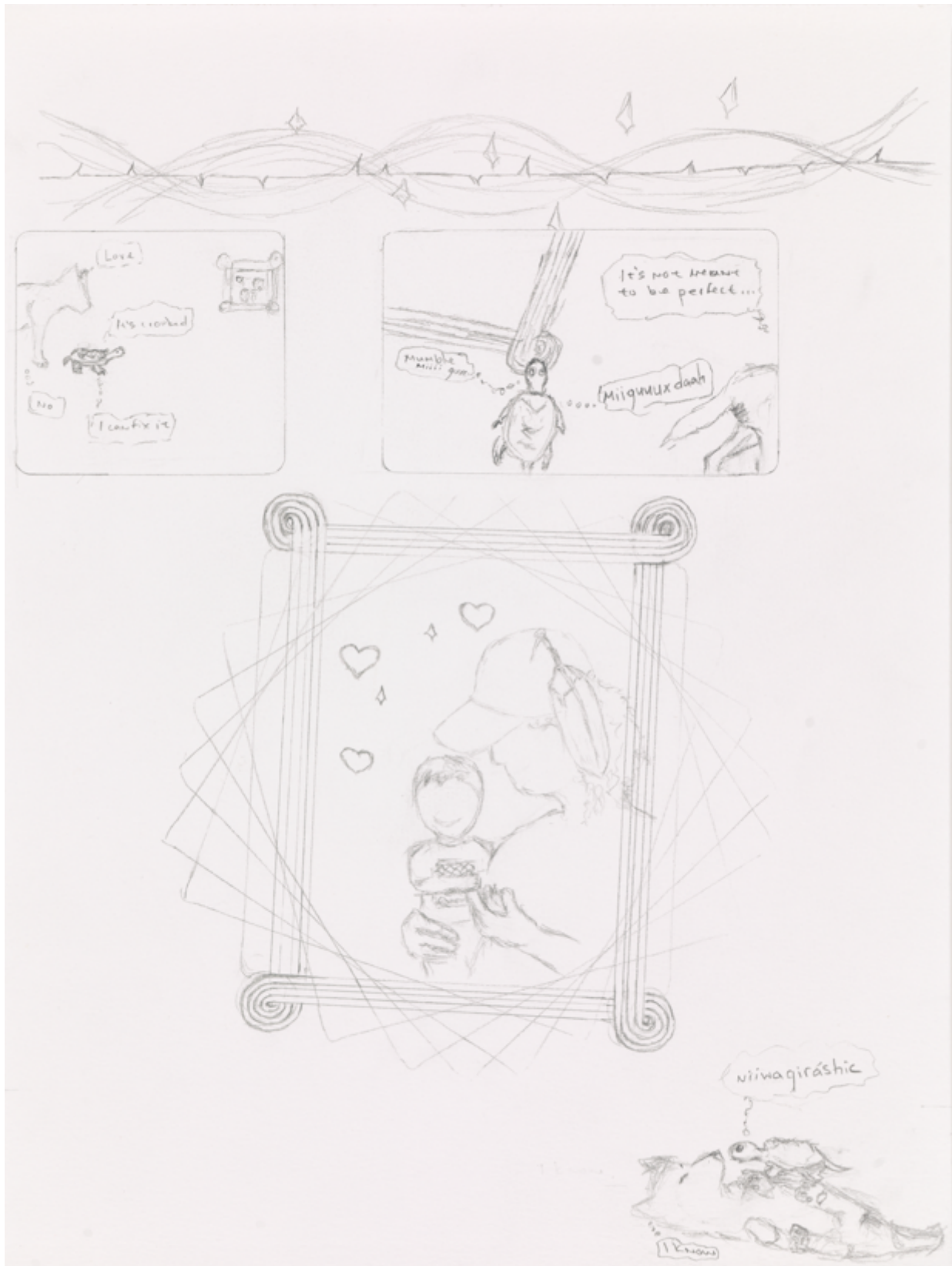


Figure 23: Rev. Dr. Richard Grounds, Yuchi and Seminole. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Rev. Dr. Richard Grounds
Yuchi and Seminole

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ 30+ years of language learning and revitalization experience
- ✦ Father and grandfather
- ✦ Executive Director of the Yuchi Language Project. Master-Apprentice program started in 2002, helping to create 16 new second language speakers. In 2018 the gOnE (baby) class was created which grows each year with the students age (Turning Heart 2019).
- ✦ Ph.D. in the History of Religions at Princeton Theological Seminary
- ✦ Professor of Anthropology at the University of Tulsa
- ✦ Active in Picket Chapel, the local Yuchi Methodist church, and at Polecat Yuchi Ceremonial Ground
- ✦ Chair of the Global Indigenous Languages Caucus
- ✦ Prominent voice calling for an International Year of Indigenous Languages since the beginning of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2002
- ✦ Humanities in Education Award from the Oklahoma Humanities Council for 2013
- ✦ Served as the Expert for the North American Region at the Expert Meeting on Indigenous Languages held by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2016.
- ✦ Aided in the implementation of establishing the Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019 and the establishment of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages in 2022
- ✦ Advocacy for national and international Indigenous language rights, education, and policy
- ✦ Immersion teaching language nest with fluent elders, second language speakers and teachers, and learners
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Program development and grant writing

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

“R” represents the voice of Royce. “RG” represents the voice of Dr. Grounds.

[✦ Starlog Notes]: After a short exchange about how we were both doing we began our review of the interview questions. We discussed what areas would be best focused on with the time we had and the most important topics at the time of the conversation.

[► PLAY]

R: Dooshaci! Could you share a little bit about your experience with your language and what the main focus of your work has been?

RG: (Greetings in Yuchi)

So, I have both Seminole and Yuchi family on my father's side. My grandmother did not learn English until she went to Eugene, Mission boarding school, here in Sapulpa, in her teens, maybe 13 or something. Which means she was too old to have the language washed out of her mouth, as some of the little kids did from being at the boarding school for a long time and being so young and all of that.

From what they did, in some sense, to wash the language out of her brain, they brainwashed her, so to speak. She still spoke every day the rest of her life after she got away from there, but, uh, she wouldn't speak the language to my father. So, we didn't grow up with the language. We only heard it when we were around my grandmother. Her sisters, you know that generation.

And then my grandmother married a Seminole guy and their family all spoke Seminole or Muskogee language. And they actually served as interpreters in the court system. And, you know, different operations like that.

R: Oh, wow!

RG: When I started coming back to the language, I was already in a PhD program and trying to, you know, get back to the language. I was getting study grants, funding support to study languages that are important in European intellectual colonialism, such as French, German, Hebrew, and Greek.

But there was no money to study the language of my grandmother. So, there was a deep irony there. I had to decide whether I was going to go back to really focus on Yuchi or Seminole language, and my idea was that I would try to learn both of them.

You know, I would do a quick job of learning Yuchi first because it was the most endangered. We at that time, had like maybe 20 first language native speakers in the community that we knew about. And so it was clear that we were losing our speakers each year, just based on the demographics of the age of our last speakers, like most of Indian country.

Our last cohort of Yuchi speakers was the World War II generation. Kids that were raised in the 1920s, the majority of them spoke the language but they didn't carry the language to their kids. Almost all of those were raised by their grandparents, which meant their grandparents were monolingual. So they couldn't speak English to them in the home so they were raised speaking only Yuchi.

R: So when you were starting out, there was still around 20 language speakers?

RG: Yeah, but the point of saying that is to give the context of just how extreme the suppression and assault on our languages was. Even 100 years ago, the kids that grew up speaking were themselves mostly being raised by their grandparents. Or otherwise, they didn't speak, other than a couple of sentences.

It was just a total assault, and that's what we were up against. That's why I was wanting to focus on Yuchi first and then I was gonna go and pick up Muskogee the next week, right. And of course, today I'm still working on Yuchi.

R & RG: **Laughter**

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Dr. Grounds' language journey also became his children's journey and life in with the language. His daughter, Halay Turning Heart, is a Project Administrator (among her many roles) for the yUdjEha gO'wAdAnA k'ak'ânE "Yuchi Language Project." Halay commented on the decline of the remaining speakers in her article "gOnE Enû O'wAdAnA: A New Generation of Yuchi Speakers," featured in the 2019 *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine: Hear our languages, International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019*. "The decline of the language has been from about 24 native speakers 20 years ago, to 6 speakers 5 years ago, to now only 1 fully fluent elder speaker... gOlaha (Grandmother) Maxine was raised speaking Yuchi by her grandmother, and she is the last fully fluent speaker of her generation....At 93, she is very active and dedicated to sharing her wisdom...She often says that she believes gOh@nTOnA (God) has given her long life so that she can fulfill her purpose of sharing her Yuchi stories, songs, and language with the children" (Turning Heart 2019).

[► PLAY]

RG: To talk about it in terms of the full circle, when I was working on my dissertation at that time, I came back to Tulsa and started working on the language, and I would pull my kids out of the public-school systems and do home school so we could work with these elders that we knew we had a limited time to work with.

And to kind of get them out of the inherent brainwashing of the kids in school who are taught to look down on their own heritage, tradition, history, systems of governance, language. So, it was a difficult process. And having a teaching post at the University of Tulsa, etc., I didn't have the amount of time that I really needed. But what was happening, literally, I was learning the language the same time as my kids.

Ideally, I would like to have learned the language pretty well to some level of competency, so then I could turn around and be the resource person for my own kids. It was clear to me we didn't have that much time.

I didn't know it was gonna take me another 20 years to get pretty good with the language, but I did understand that we needed to be doing all we could while we could. The strategy was whatever I learned from the elders, then I would replace the English language interaction with my kids with these new words, these new phrases, and new kinds of domain for discussion.

The process I don't say it was at all perfect or ideal. I'm not trying to idealize it, but the result was that my kids did hear a lot of language from elders. They actually developed the

ability to hear the language better than I had the ability to speak the language and kind of fluid natural Yuchi speaking patterns.

The strategy was, whatever I learned from the elders then I would replace the English language interaction with my kids with these new words, these new phrases, and new kinds of domain for discussion.

And now, to put that kind of the end point where I'm going with this is, now my daughter is raising her three kids solely in the Yuchi language. We have never spoken to them in anything by Yuchi.

So, these are the *first kids raised in the language since 75 years* or whatever it is.

R: Wow!!

RG: As far as the community growing up speaking the language, it's been 100 years. That's what we're dealing with.

It's an important indicator that it can be done, that progress is being made, but it's also, of course, a sign that that we're in pretty serious distress and then we've got a lot of challenges, and there's no simple fixes. And we're just working with what we have and doing the best that we can.

R: Absolutely! This is a lot of wonderful information. You know, learning alongside your kids, as we saw when we were at the UN together, can be uncomfortable. Especially for me, because I'm not at a level of proficiency that I'm comfortable with to be teaching my kids. I still feel less confident when we're amongst a group, but I'm very confident when it's just us alone together. In the group setting, it is still stressful and difficult at times.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: In 2019, my family and I were invited by Dr. Grounds to be part of the Global Indigenous Languages Caucus during the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages in Manhattan, NY. We participated in a week of language revitalization and acquisition workshops and projects with the Yuchi Language Project and other Indigenous language activists from around the world.

[► PLAY]

R: Do you have a specific type of language teaching and learning methods that you personally use more?

RG: We are big on total physical response. I don't know that we're very good at completely staying in our lane in terms of a particular methodology.

We think it's important as a way to intensify the exposure to the language. Ultimately, the amount of time spent in the language really matters, but also you can intensify the amount

of time by hearing the language, saying the language, doing the language, physically acting on the language.

So yeah, I think all those things matter and total physical response is a really good way to, you know, engage body memory so you're not just talking about the language, you're actually doing the language. So, I think it's an important way to intensify the exposure to the language.

We tried to use kind of the master apprentice methodology. We were fortunate here in Oklahoma to have some of the ICLS, advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival in the early days before the book had come out, "How to Keep Your Language Alive," that was put together by Leanne Hinton. But of course, ultimately, we are adapting this for us.

We just did not feel like we could take our *most valuable gift, being the knowledge of our elders, the language of our elders, the love of our elders, and only have one learner.*

They (ICLS) seem to talk mostly about one-on-one learning. I'm not opposed to it, but in order to multiply the time of our elders, we tried to have at least four learners working with the elders or potentially even more.

We think most of the benefits of intensive interaction in the language happens in a very small circle. But amplify the number of learners so that their time is multiplied because that's the most valuable thing that they have to offer with their knowledge.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: After the 1830 Indian Removal Act, the Yuchi (Euchee) were forcibly removed to the area around present-day Sapulpa, OK. Even though the language is an isolate (unrelated to any other language), the federal government does not recognize them as their own nation. Instead, they are instead listed part of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation (Jackson 2012). The Yuchi Tribal Organization, Inc. submitted a letter of intent to petition for "Federal acknowledgement" in 1990, and after a decade long but were denied federal recognition in 1999 (US Interior 1999).

[► PLAY]

R: There are a lot of unknowns, when you begin to work towards revitalizing the language, that we're not necessarily told about. What are some of the additional things that you have had to work on alongside your language learning and teaching to maintain progress?

RG: I'm not exactly sure what kinds of arenas you're thinking about...

R: Yeah, all kinds.

RG: Well, as you are aware, the Yuchi community is a small community. We do not have federal recognition. Our language is identified as a language isolate, meaning it's not related, it's not part of a larger family. There's not any other neighboring tribes that we can go to and say, "well, how do you all say this," and then we could figure out how to say ours or compare notes

or compare how the grammar works. You know, we just literally have to go to our elders and everything we try to figure out is at that level.

It also means, not only are our elders living encyclopedias of our Yuchi language, it also means that I have to do all the fund raising. That means I have to do all the grant reporting. It means that I have to do all whatever publicity and whatever else. It means there's so many pieces involved in just administering the program, in keeping it going and finding funding and massaging all of those processes.

So, as with most small language programs, there's a kind of a bottleneck effect. At this point my daughter is back in the community working with the language full-time. That's a big boost for us, but it's hard to find support in the community for all of the program's needs.

In terms of writing the language, in our case, it depends on the language. But in our case, we have a lot of glottal stops, a lot of nasalization of sounds. We have these in-between sounds, is what we call them. The writing of the language needs to be precise and accurate if we are to represent how the language is supposed to be pronounced. And there's a bottleneck of, who can do that accurately and reliably for these issues with the grammar.

And who's effective in working with elders?

There's just so many overlapping things that seem to bottleneck with just a few highly proficient leaders at the top, and it's hard to find the skillset and develop the capacity of others to pass these things along to carry that load.

R: Hmm. Yes there is.

RG: And I guess my excuse, well it's not a good enough excuse, but you know, that's my excuse for not being better at the language today than I am. Because I've spent so much time, you know, chasing these grants that we have been blessed to get, like the recent Administration for Native Americans Federal language grant. But writing one of those is a major investment of time and even after you get it, all the reporting and keeping up with it is also a big process and that *all* takes real time.

In some ways, you know, I don't think it's a very fair competition. Say between a small fledgling nonprofit language program like us versus large tribal governments who may have significant gaming money or other funding resources where they have whole rooms filled with seasoned professional grant writers. And we're trying to do it on a shoestring and compete with them.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: We discussed a few more issues about small programs compared to large programs. Every different dynamic and scenario all came back to a few key target areas: capacity, education, skills, intentions, and consistency. The act of assessing even the simplest projects that I've been part of was mentally exhausting.

[► PLAY]

R: In your own experiences with wearing so many hats, how has your attitude or workload impacted your ability to form and maintain relationships in the language groups?

RG: I suspect that it makes it a little bit difficult. I'm not really in a position to hang out with the young learners or foster social connections that maybe some would have liked. That could be something of a barrier for some young learners who may be anticipating that kind of or immediate social connection. But because I have deadlines and other things to get done that cannot be allowed to let slide, that to some extent, limits the level and manner of interaction.

R: I've experienced that quite a bit. Reflecting on my time trying to build a program, I definitely see how that aspect of relationship building can be difficult for some, myself included. I'm not a super social person. I'm a bit of an introvert and I'm very detail oriented. I love academic work. Looking back at how that positioned me within my own language cohorts, I can see how that may have caused some issues with relationship building. Even though I was experiencing feelings of success in my own work, my social relationships weren't as strong as they may have been if I was more comfortable being a social butterfly.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: You have to actually experience being in a "management/administrative" position to know the full force of such responsibilities and how they impact your relationships, activities, and progression in language work.

[► PLAY]

R: Have you noticed a certain type of method that assists in building relationships between the cohorts and mentors?

RG: Uh, I don't know that we have been that focused on particular methods.

We learned from our elders when we started out, one of our main activities was to invite a group of speakers to talk to one another in the language. We would offer them a meal and plan a discussion session. One of the things that we learned from them is that they were always laughing. There was always humor. There was always such an enjoyment of using the language, of speaking the language. A lot of joking.

So we've really tried to carry that forward. I don't think they *articulated* that in a direct way, but they *modeled* it. We feel like that is important. Certainly, with young people, we focus on having fun with the language. You want your language to be cool and engaging. So that's a

critical piece. I don't know we've been that specific about a particular methodology, as much as we've got to be having fun in the language. Whatever process you're using, you've got to have lots of laughter. And that relates to, as you were saying, burnout, relationships across generations.

You want to be able to *tolerate one another*. If we really are trying to wrap up the amount of time we are spending with elders it needs to be *enjoyable* by them. It needs to be *survivable* for the learners.

If it's just drills and demanding, detailed focused for long periods of time, it doesn't work that well for young people. Doing things that are enjoyable but doing them in the language. Learning how to grow the language.

We tend to mix and match methodologies.

R: Yeah, which seems to be more of the case. All of these methods and techniques that we learn, all of those have to be modified to fit each learning environment at that time.

RG: Yeah.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: There are so many different types of language learning and teaching methods that it can be overwhelming. Part of determining what methods could be used and then how to modify them is knowing how to assess/evaluate a priority of needs and goals with realistic and honest skills and capacity.

[► PLAY]

R: When you think about your life thus far, could you describe a couple of the most impactful relationships within learning and teaching the language that you've experienced?

RG: *We had an elder who was just incredibly gifted.*

In our language the men and women speak different forms of Yuchi. He grew up talking like a woman, but he didn't know it because he wasn't around the other speakers, you know. He was a fluent native speaker but he was talking woman's way. It really wasn't until he was an adult and we started working on the language that he got clear about, you know, men's way and women's way. The gift of it meant that he could do both!

He had this kind of mind that he could just shift back and forth. You could throw something at him. He could give you the women's way, the men's way. He was just an *amazing gift* and he wasn't necessarily real talkative or expansive in telling stories and that kind of thing, but what he did say was very *reliable*, it was very *solid*.

R: That's so wonderful! There are certain aspects of each speaker that go far beyond just comprehension in the language.

RG: One of the things an elder said was, *we're all learners of the language. We're all improving our language. We're all growing our language.*

I just thought that was such a beautiful thing to come from this elder Yuchi woman with four Yuchi grandparents, both her parents spoke Yuchi, and she's telling us, you know, we're all learning and growing our language. She's giving us permission to maybe not always have perfect command of what we want to be able to say. I don't necessarily talk that good, but I keep trying every day, you know.

And just to have her *give us the permission* to say, you know, "*we're all working.*" She didn't say, "you all are all working." She *put herself in that circle.*

So, I thought they were just such a beautiful way of showing leadership and pointing at the direction toward continued growth in our language.

R: Yes, that type of teaching and mentorship, you know, helps foster the trust that we have in each other and it helps to keep us in a good way with each other.

RG: Yes.

RG: One of the things an elder said was, *we're all learners of the language. We're all improving our language. We're all growing our language.*

I just thought that was such a beautiful thing to come from this elder Yuchi woman with four Yuchi grandparents, both her parents spoke Yuchi, and she's telling us, you know, we're all learning and growing our language. She's giving us permission to maybe not always have perfect command of what we want to be able to say. I don't necessarily talk that good, but I keep trying every day, you know.

And just to have her *give us the permission* to say, you know, "*we're all working.*" She didn't say, "you all are all working." She *put herself in that circle.*

So, I thought they were just such a beautiful way of showing leadership and pointing at the direction toward continued growth in our language.

R: Maacagiraac, agith-tiwa cagic "thank you so very much" for sharing some of your knowledge. It is so wonderful to speak with you and to learn a bit more.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Dr. Ground's daughter, Halay said this in a 2019 interview after the trip to the UN. "At the end of the day, language is tied to everything...It is a lens through which we see the culture. Without the language, we would lose our foods, ceremonies and stories" (Jakober 2019). Positive environment, love, and knowledge, these weave into memory.

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Generational Roots

[✧ Starlog Notes]: Relationships can be as strongly woven as family. They can be strong as roots, deep in the ground, growing through each generation.

Naagagaa: Language is the fungus.

Ceesha: No. ... Maybe, in a way.

RG: We're all learners of the language...We're all improving our language...We're all growing our language!

Halay: I knew my son Chaské ashtalA was internalizing the Yuchi language when he began speaking Yuchi in his sleep—he was dreaming in Yuchi.

The language was in his subconscious and at every level of his being. Now that he is almost three years old, he can articulate those dreams to me in Yuchi. He tells me, badOIA k'ala dOw@^ jî ("last night I had a dream..."). I'm amazed by how much he knows intuitively in the language that has not been "taught" to him. That's the beauty of immersion and getting the language to young children while their brains are ripe for language development... We maintain a butterfly garden and feel especially connected to the monarch butterflies because in some ways their annual migration pattern, which is critical to their survival, mirrors our journey to restore the endangered Yuchi language.

(Turning Heart, 2019).

Yuchi: nÔk'@k'ada nÔk'â'wAdA: The language lives in community

Yuchi: yUdjEhaIA KAIA nÔk'Âgû: Bringing the language home

Yuchi: yUdjEhaIA: The Yuchi way

R: I still dream in Hiraacá. I hear Maguu speaking it to me. She tells me each of the plants, rooting me into the land.

R: I still feel her holding my hand, leading me.

R: I feel the grass between my fingers. I see the tips of the flowers and grasshoppers. I feel the meaning of the words, emotions and memory.



Figure 24: yUdjEha KAnAnô, yUdjEhaA nÔ'wAdA 'We are Yuchi, we speak Yuchi.'
Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

Chapter Six: Jacob Manatowa-Bailey, Sauk

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

[✧ Starlog Notes]: Are we chasing languages or life?

Ceesha: He's going somewhere.

Naagagaa: Yeah, somewhere.

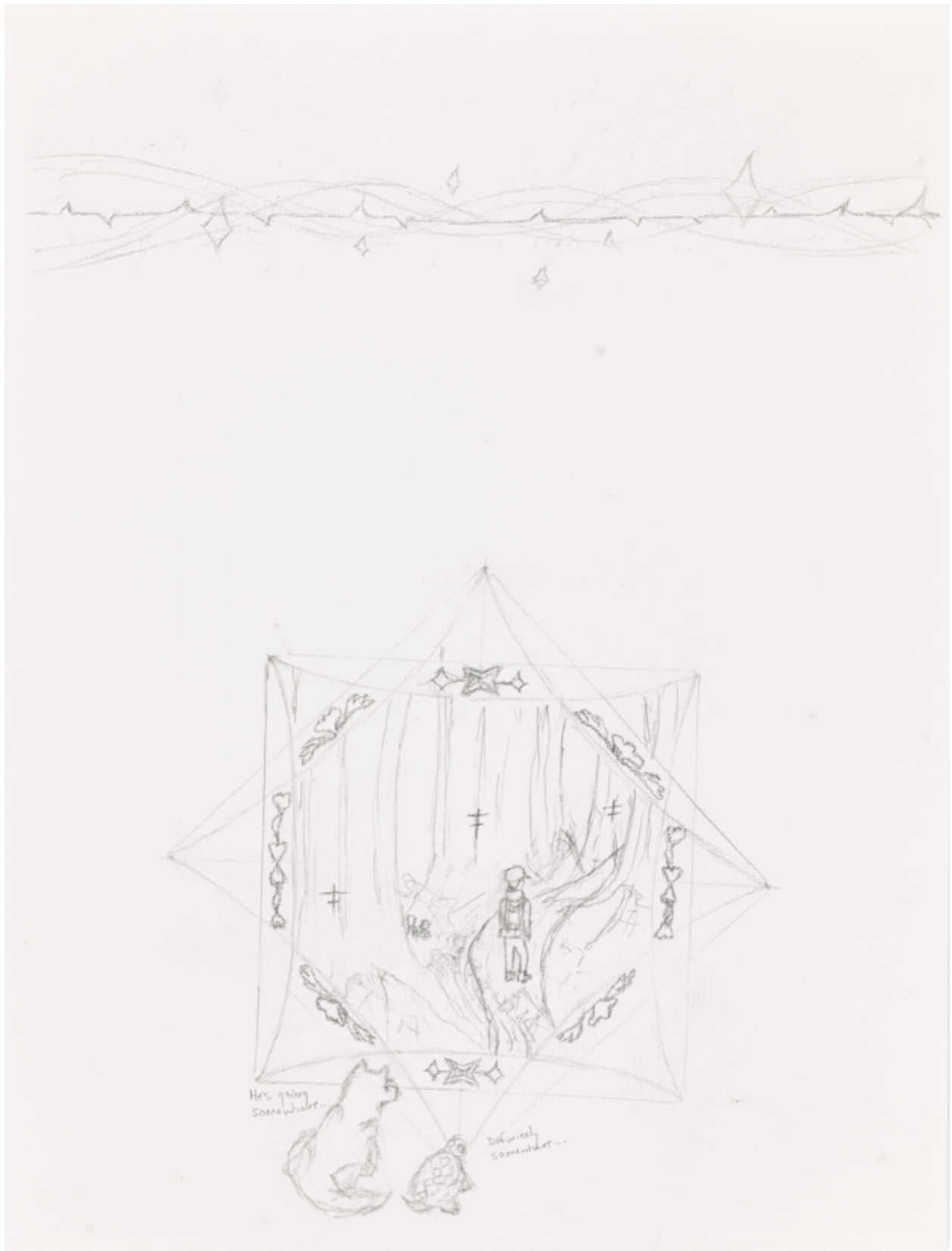


Figure 25: Are We Chasing Languages or Life? Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Jacob Manatowa-Bailey Sauk

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ Second language speaker, learner, and teacher of Sauk.
- ✦ Learner of Meskwaki, Kickapoo, and other Algonquian languages
- ✦ 25+ years of language learning and revitalization experience.
- ✦ Founding Director of the Sauk Language Department for the Sac and Fox Nation (2005-2016)
- ✦ Developed team-based Master Apprentice model which aided in creating the first conversationally proficient second language acquisition speakers of the Sauk language
- ✦ Founding Director of the Center for Tribal Languages and the Tribal Languages Degree Program at Bacone College
- ✦ Language Project Advisor and coordinator for the MICA Group's Next Steps Project
- ✦ Doctoral student in the Department of Indigenous Education's Indigenous Language Revitalization cohort at the University of Victoria

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

("R" represents the voice of Royce. "J" represents the voice of Jacob)

[✦ Starlog Notes]: "The creation of even a single new fluent speaker of an endangered language extends the life of that language by decades. Each generation of fluency opens the door to sustaining the fragile connections that keep the language alive" (Jacob Manatowa-Bailey, Talk Sauk 2020).

After an exchange of greetings, we had a quick run-through of his thoughts on the questions and what we should focus our discussion around.

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

[► PLAY]

Royce (R): Okay. Alright. Let me pull up my questions here and if it cuts out, I'll just call you back. K?

Jacob (J): Okay!

R: How long have you been working, doing language revitalization? Even if it wasn't your focus.

J: My first kind of language revitalization related job was in 1995.

R: What was the job?

J: My first job at Sac and Fox Nation was as an intern. At the time it was the repatriation committee. NAGPRA was brand new and so I helped set up what became the historic preservation department. And that work, you know, it just automatically intersected with the language. We were dealing with bundles and lots of other things and so language was very heavily involved in that work.

R: When did you switch gears and kind of make learning your focus?

J: Well, I started going to community classes as soon as I moved back home in 1995...but my focus was originally NAGPRA and historic preservation. I had to go back to California to finish school for one semester... and my cousin was supposed to like “hold down the fort” while I was gone and she loved the NAGPRA job so much that I just let her have it. So, at that point I needed to find a different career because I gave my job away.

R & J: **Laughter**

J: So, I needed to find other work. The second job I took was with a small-organized community based non-profit that a group of Sac and Fox tribal members had put together called the Thâkîwaki Foundation...we did everything, including a lot of language work, also traditional agriculture and cultural stuff, as well.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Language intersects in so many fields. Some of us moonlight as language activists while we have careers in other fields. What a dream it would be to progress to the point in our speech communities where comprehension in an ancestral language was a job requirement in fields outside of language acquisition. At this point in time, Manatowa-Bailey has since left being the Director of the Sauk Language Department and is on a doctoral journey.

[► PLAY]

R: How would you describe the current language work that you are doing?

J: Well I am doing multiple things at once. We have to take them kind of one at a time. On a personal level, for my own learning, I am still learning and studying Sauk and other Algonquin languages. That is not work for which I currently get paid. Is it still work? **Laughter**

R: Yeah. **Laughter**

J: It's still work! There's that portion of my life that has gotten much smaller than it used to be.

A lot of that is just the function of where you get your paycheck because we all have to, um we don't have to, but we all continue to choose to live in this world. **Laughter**

So, the bulk of my “work” currently is doing advising for language programs. One, through my work with MICA, and two, through independent contracts.

R: And you’re a doctoral student right now, as well?

J: And I’m a doctoral student. And an informal adviser, too. Well, nobody let me off the hook. So all my unpaid advising that I used to do, I still do.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: When I started my doctoral program at the University of Oklahoma, I searched for more Native American and Indigenous language learners who I could learn more about intensive language learning. Additionally, people who I could look towards a future of mentorship with. Two colleagues pointed me in Jacob’s direction, calling him the “*Jedi*.” Being a nerd at heart, I was intrigued and curious. I was told various stories about Jacob’s humble beginnings. How he had moved back home to Sauk country, built a cabin with no modern technology, and trained, *all intense like*, only in the language with his aunties, some of whom were the last fluent Sauk language speakers. The ingredients for “*Jedi training*”, or so the stories went.

[► PLAY]

R: And a Jedi. **Laughter**

J: Well, everybody kind of makes a story, right. They tell a good story. And so, I, *I did build a cabin in the woods* where I lived. And the reason I did that was so that I could spend time with older folks. I wanted to essentially not be in kind of the rat race with the 40 hour a week job.

I wanted to have the flexibility to hang around with older people and go to feasts and be a mamîshî. And so, I did a lot of language learning at that time as kind of my overall experience, but not focused specifically on language. Just like, everything is everything, really, it all goes together.

That was hugely important in terms of the relationships that I built and in terms of giving me a solid foundation, but the work of actually becoming conversational and intensive focus on proficiency didn’t come until after we started the Sauk Language Department.

So, this thing that they refer to, is double sided. On the one hand, I built a strong foundation to do later language work upon and I made some really good relationships that became important.

On the other side, I spent most of my twenties, not getting really deep language learning.

R: Okay. So it kind of was in reverse, that you were doing that relationship building to really be with people, without the motivation being strictly an *intense* focus on language learning in the beginning?

J: Yeah, so my experience was that intensive language learning is really stressful, even under the best of circumstances. I think that lots of people have done lots of different things so I can only speak from my own experience. In my own experience, we wouldn't have been able to do the things we did if the relationships had not been built up beforehand.

Trying to create those language relationships in a working environment would have been challenging.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: After meeting Manatowa-Bailey for the first time, I was part of a community Master-Apprentice methods workshop where he introduced a new concept, in regard to a "Jedi" conundrum. The definition of the "Jedi Paradox" is provided in Chapter 4. "As language workers we assume that the interest and value of our Native languages is inherent and obvious. Interest must be developed over time. Value must be learned" (Manatowa-Bailey 2013).

[►PLAY]

R: "Jedi Paradox." You coined that at a community workshop where you described the issue where some people are looking for that one solution, that one way (method) that is going to solve language endangerment.

J: Yeah, the "silver bullet." I think that we haven't, in terms of this field or movement, fully understood that ILR (Indigenous Language Revitalization) work is profoundly different than any other kind of language effort. It's not like any other thing that we are told to "study."

Because there is a necessity of navigating the complex human dynamics related to language, cultural, and territorial loss, while people are also attempting to sustain and strengthen identities, lifeways, and like a relationship to the Universe! **Laughter**

The conditions that ILR practitioners face are unlike any other kind of other type of language worker, learner, teacher.

And the one thing that is kind of the theme that I see that is consistent, is that ILR contexts are highly specific, hugely diverse, and very resisted to Western education science and other institutions. Because, our Indigenous languages come from an entirely different understanding of the Universe, of the cosmos, or whatever you want to call it. So, they (Indigenous languages) don't like Western schools. They don't like môhkomâna schools and môhkomâna schools don't like them.

R & J: **Laughter**

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: If we narrow it down, in your own experience, what have been some of the most beneficial relationships you've formed to maintain or sustain your language work?

J: It can take on different forms, but when people decide to really commit to doing their part. Whatever their part is. If they really commit to doing their part, and they do their part and even a handful of you are all doing that together, that can really make a big difference.

I did my part and the learners did their part. And for a little while, everybody was really committed to that. And we had an administrator who was really committed to doing her part. That was hugely important.

Some people, to a certain extent, it doesn't matter the scale or the subject, when everybody understands why they are doing what they are doing and they are being honest. They're not making a story about, they're not saying, "well we're gonna save our language, and we're gonna do that by having community classes once a week."

They're telling themselves an honest story. They understand what they are doing. They understand why they are doing it. They understand the limitations, which is a huge one. They understand that they are *not* doing everything, but they have a focus. And then everybody does their part.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: Reflecting on the types of relationships that you've built or experienced within all of your language work, what's an extreme on both sides? Both close or personal and distant or impersonal?

J: Some of us had pre-existing relationships with speakers and learners that went back decades. Again, I have to say that intimacy versus distance can cut both ways. Sometimes when you're very close to someone it's really hard to talk about change or conflict. It can come back around and bite in a way. Similarly, in a relationship where everything is brand new and you're the authority figure in the scenario, it can be really hard to establish trust. All of the human dynamics are in play.

R: In your experience, have you noticed any types of methods of group building, language learning or teaching that have impacted the growth of the relationships?

J: I actually think it's the other way. Mostly, your dynamics impact your methods. Not so much the other way around. If everybody is committed to a common goal. If everybody understands their role. If you've built some kind of system of protocols around those things, then you're able to take more risks, to push further. People feel clearer.

What I would say, in terms of language learning, human dynamics will not save a crappy method. At the same time, a great method will not save crappy human dynamics.

J & R: **Laughter**

J: Right, you need a Tai Chi circle. You need to come up with some pretty solid working dynamics and a solid method. You have to have both. Again, we're just talking about language learning. There's language learning and then there's revitalization. We got them all mixed together, but they're not necessarily the same thing.

R: Can you elaborate on the difference between those two.

J: I think we have a good sense of how language is acquired. How language can be learned. And so, for language learning, for the development of proficiency in a technical sense then you can use something like the American Council on the Teaching a Foreign Language oral proficiency index.

But revitalization, which is kind of this idea that language and culture and history and community and family and ceremony, it's all of these things, that are all bundled together, and we don't have a very good sense, as a field, how one might impact the other. When we're talking about them, people aren't separating them out.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: American Council on the Teaching a Foreign Language website, <https://www.actfl.org>.

[► PLAY]

R: How necessary is "language revitalization" to "language acquisition" for Indigenous communities?

J: The story that it has been for the 25 years that I've been in the field is that "we are going to save our languages." That's the story, but if you ask 15 ILR practitioners what that means, you're going to get 15 different answers. Because we don't have a common definition and I don't know that we can because every single context is different.

At some point you come down to, "what is the work that you are going to do and who are you going to do it with, and what do you think that work will do, and is that honest?"

Have you assessed honestly? And then you do the best you can. And then you have to figure out who is willing to do that with you, whatever that is you are trying to do. Sometimes you get to exercise some choice over that and sometimes you don't.

R: Can you just learn a language, fully, an Indigenous language without participating in a broader revitalization?

J: Yeah, I think you probably can. The question though is, should you?

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: "Should you?" What would influence a person to only learn the language and not semantics? What would cause a person who can speak the language or who is learning the language to not be an active part of a speech community or speech group?

[► PLAY]

R: You were saying, "learning to talk." Can you elaborate on that in the context of the stressful environments that can exist alongside language learning?

J: Yeah, I feel like a lot of the kind of conflict and tension that I sometimes see around language revitalization, the piece that intersects with trauma, colonization, and all of that, that aspect of it, and a lot of the power dynamics of it, take place in English.

And when people move past this plateau of doing all of their language revitalization work in English, and they move to doing their revitalization work in the language, it seems like sometimes that, that piece settles down.

R: I think it's more necessary to learn how to find those little lights to guide you out of those dark places. Where conflict and dysfunction, and toxic environments can be easily created simply, like you said, because language learning can be very stressful. The stress can push people to behave and react in ways that they might not when outside of a very stressful environment.

J: This goes back to how our language learning is very different than any other type of language learning.

Natural language acquisition happens in an environment without effort. Intentional language learning requires a huge amount of effort. So, you're taking something that already requires a huge amount of effort because there isn't a country called "blank" that you can send someone to, where language learning would just surround them.

You have to create the country, but then when you create the country, it's not just a language country, it's a cultural country, a community country. There's all of these other things that come into play.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: So, this social environment that you've experienced, it kind of seems that there is no easy solution. But like you've said, the types of relationships that are created also means responsibility. It could be made a lot less difficult if the people there are committed.

J: Yeah, committed and you have to have structure. You have to have a pathway. Now this goes back to the psychology and it doesn't matter if we're talking about an individual or a group for embodied cognition. A large portion of what we do is automated. Automated habit, right.

The fundamental premise of language revitalization is change. If we didn't need change then we wouldn't need language revitalization. Right?

And what we need is intentional change because what we are experiencing is unintentional change. Change is happening whether we like it or not.

The question is, are we going to recognize individually or collectively that it is happening and then intentionally change the way that we want to or at least head in a direction that we choose, or are we going to just let it happen to us? And so, intention is one part. It doesn't have to come first.

You have to have intention, but then you have to follow it with some kind of structured system of practice. And a really easy way to know that you're making progress in whatever you are doing is that you're doing the exact same thing over and over.

If you are not doing the exact thing over and over, if you are switching models and directions and goals, and methods constantly, then you haven't arrived at a system of deliberate practice. When you do that (repetition), that is when you are actually starting to get somewhere.

R: So, this repetition?

J: Yeah, repetition which is how language is learned, but it's also just like life. People tend to do the same thing in a pattern over and over again. There's lots of research that shows that we actually don't have that much brain space for new stuff on a daily basis.

R & J: **Laughter**

R: The brain space.

J: **Laughter** We don't!

I remember that from when we (language group) were doing six hours, well we started off with more than that, way too much. We had to pull back and even after we pulled it back when we went into full immersion, after six hours we were just dead. Just exhausted. Just physically, mentally, emotionally exhausted.

Because we were creating an entire universe from scratch. **Laughter** And supporting it in this little tiny space with just a few of us. There was not anything outside those walls that supported it (meaning there was no other immersion language space).

If your immersion environment is programmatic, then when you leave it, and if you go into another immersion environment, which would be your home or a community that does not have an active speaker population you can interact with, then everybody experiences proficiency drop. Well, as far as I can tell, and I've talked to a lot of people from a lot of different places. Again, we're not a computer, much of the language use is in the environment. Take away the environment and you're going to get a drop.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: As a kind of a reflection on your personal relationship with the language. I think that's a good segue because once you leave that immersion type environment, whether that's school or work, when you're away from that, what becomes the defining factor for your environment when it *is* just you and the language?

A lot of scenarios I've experienced, and also that I hear about, is once that clock stops, people just leave and their work's their work. If they are of that capacity that they are working within their field to learn the language or teach the language. But when they leave, it stays there, in that environment. They don't bring the immersion with them.

For you, how would you describe your own relationship with your language?

J: Now? **Laughter** Or like the entire history?

J & R: **Laughter**

R: Yeah, let's go through time.

I think people have a misconception about that, that when you do language work that suddenly there's this "ah-ha" moment, that you're so close and one with the Creator. But the experiences are not like that, they're about discomfort and not just with the language.

J: I moved home and I wanted to know everything. The stories that I grew up with as a kid, they finally made sense. It was like I never understood them, and I was like, this is it, it's here, it's alive. And I just wanted to know everything there was to know about it. Because it's different being in community, for better and for worse. **Laughter**

I just wanted to know everything there is to know about it and language was a big part of that. So, I started there, but I didn't have any kind of methodological way to get past talking about the language in English.

So, I learned a lot about language, about languages relationship to other things. I learned a lot of individual words and wrote lots of stuff down. There was no structure to engage in intensive language learning.

Building an entire pathway from scratch is possible but it's really difficult. It's a lot of work. Even if you have a structural box, even building something inside that box is exhausting.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Beginning a language journey before the creation of intensive second language, master-apprentice, and total physical response methods, such as Manatowa-Bailey and Dr. Grounds, represent a very organic process. Access and the relationship to the language (speakers or archival materials) shaped their work.

The educational backgrounds and interdisciplinary studies that each of them had already been learning also lent to the formation of their own development of LAR methods and practices. The following narration was after a discussion about Manatowa-Bailey's work in Outdoor education.

[► PLAY]

J: Storming, norming, and forming, as we say in experienced Outdoor Ed.

R: Wait, wait. Go back. **Laughter** The "storming?"

J: Storming, forming, and norming.

J & R: "Storming, forming, and norming."

J: Yeah.

R: Okay, and what is that?

J: Any kind of, again, the essential thing that you're saying in any kind of language revitalization scenario is, "stop doing what you've been doing for your entire life.

Right. Stop acting the way you've been acting your entire life. We need you to do something different. So that's the essential nature of language revitalization.

That requires letting go of old patterns or old behaviors, almost inevitably it involves conflict or at least tension and stress.

Change is not a peaceful process.

R: Hmmm.

J: Right. So that is your "storming." You get to storming and then you start "forming" and you start coalescing around something, right.

There's still maybe some things that are in the mix that are not working but you're starting to coalesce around something. And then you get to "norming" which is like when people are like, "this is the way it's always been, this is how we always did it."

J & R: **Laughter**

R: It's a giant jump.

[■ STOP]

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧



Figure 25: Storming, Forming, Naming. Graphite, ink, and watercolor on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Obviously, language revitalization is about change. Change is necessary. Change is uncomfortable.

[► PLAY]

J: Again, so much of it is automation and habit.

I used to, well, so I took everything that talked English out of my car. No English talking things in my car and then I filled my car with cd's where the language was spoken. And I got in the car every single day, and it took a while, but I got used to it.

And I was like, "okay, no music." And there was this attachment, right. "Oh my god, I gotta drive four hours and I can't listen to my music."

R: *Laughter*

J: Right. This is straight-up Buddhist, object of attachment, desire, like, “I want the candy!” It’s true you want it, but you don’t need it. You don’t need it. You don’t need the candy.

So you learn and you just put the Sauk in, and then you don’t understand it, but you just listen. And then there’s all these emotions around not understanding, and then you’re like, “okay, well just listen to it.”

And then you do that every single time you’re in the car. Over and over, and over and over again until it becomes automatic. That it doesn’t cost you any effort.

Once it becomes automatic, it’s just the thing that you do.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: There is a lot of trial and error when you’re just starting out to learn the language without pre-existing language curriculum materials that have been tried and tested, and then assessed and then modified as needed, again and again. Repetition.

After our conversation, I was reminded of another discussion Manatowa-Bailey and I had had a few years ago about what it’s like to be at the beginning stages (whether for a few months or a few years) of pursuing language revitalization without a pre-existing structure or effective curriculum and methods. The weight of such work has to be motivated by passion, love, and sometimes pure stubbornness and the tenacity to push forward against all odds.

In that conversation, I had laughed, saying something like, “those of us doing the work, day after day, we’re rock stars. We’re shooting for the stars. We can’t be afraid to dream bigger (a play on a line from the film *Inception*)! Jacob quickly quipped back, “yeah, but we don’t want to burn out like shooting stars!”

That statement really made me pause and think about the daily routines of intense language activists. Of my own work. My own life. I thought, “woah, how true. How sad to be a lone shooting star.”

Later, while Manatowa-Bailey and I were part of the Global Indigenous Languages Caucus workshops in 2019, he presented some of the issues faced by “typical language and culture workers” who are at the beginning of their language revitalization journeys. Those who are faced with the creation of the curriculum, the language programs, revitalizing the language and culture for their people, and an obvious unrealistic number of tasks and new responsibilities.

He related our journeys to that of an “Astronaut.” Shooting for the stars.

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

You Are Now An Astronaut

[✧ Starlog Notes]: Manatowa-Bailey (2019) presentation “Now You are an Astronaut.”

J: **Huge burden, complex mission, overwhelming odds.**

- You are now an Astronaut.
- You don’t get any training but you need to build a spaceship and fly it through a dangerous asteroid field to a distant planet.
- Here is the name of one old lady who might help you, a pen, a few notes from the last failed mission, and \$20.
- Call this linguist. He knows how to build a spaceship.
- Report to this committee of people who don’t know anything about spaceships and fight all the time about how you might build spaceships. They are your bosses.
- Everybody is going to be watching you build the spaceship, criticizing, and telling you what to do.
- Don’t screw up. The entire future of our people depends upon your success.

[► LAUNCH]

Home Sweet Home

Custom T-shirt

Custom Windbreaker

For my future crew. Custom T-shirts.

Notes form archive.

- Linguists
- Anthropologists
- Tapes
- Old T-shirt designs

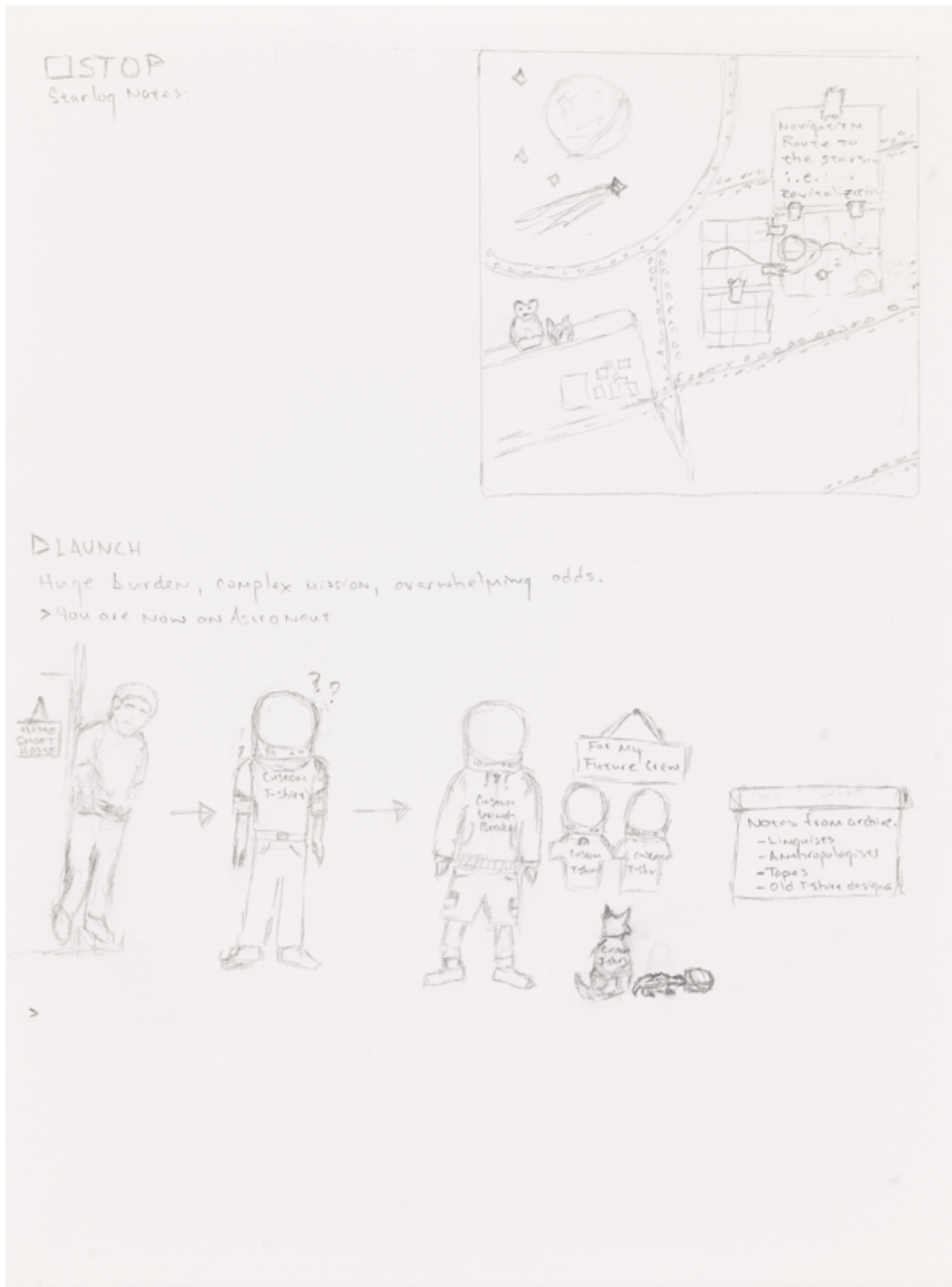


Figure 26: You Are Now an Astronaut. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

Chapter Seven: Anonymous Woman 1, North America

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Language learning begins in the womb.

[✧ Starlog Notes]: On Turtle Island “North America” another language activist was beginning her own LAR journey and that of motherhood.

Ceesha: You know, they say that our grandpa in the baby caves...

Naagagaa: ...

Ceesha: Before we're born, we live in a good place with everything we need and could want. The baby caves. Well, sometimes that baby don't want to go, to leave the cave. So grandpa has to put his foot on their bum & push them out over the log in front of the cave.

Naagagaa: *OOOOhh!* So that's where that mark of a baby's back comes from!

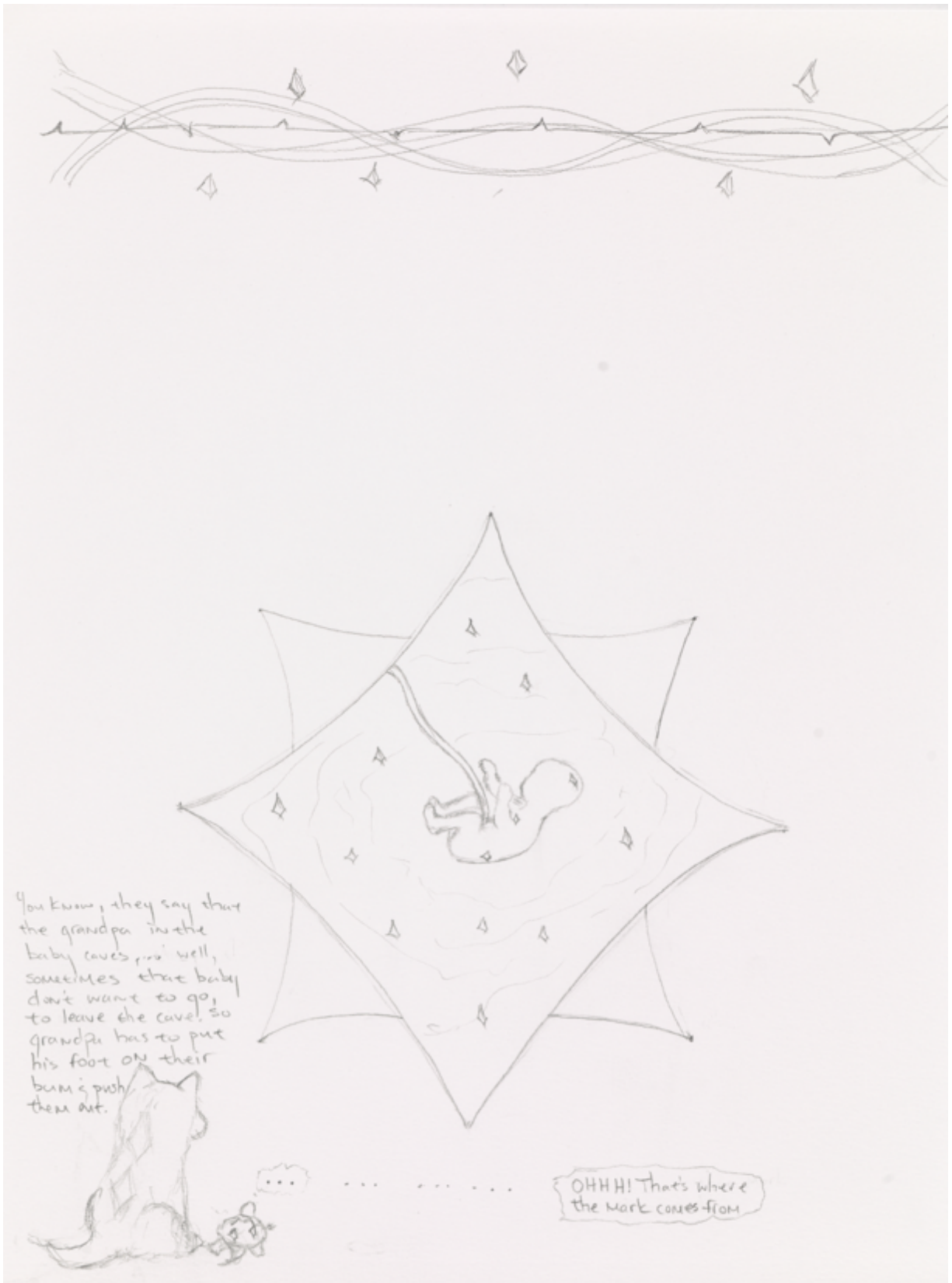


Figure 27: Anonymous Indigenous Woman 1, Language Learning Begins in the Womb. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Anonymous Indigenous Woman 1

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ 25+ years of language learning and revitalization experience
- ✦ Mother
- ✦ Second language adult master-apprentice language learning and teaching
- ✦ Immersion language learning and teaching
- ✦ Language Nest development
- ✦ Local and national language policy initiatives
- ✦ Language acquisition and revitalization consultation work
- ✦ Traditional foods and artistry
- ✦ Advocacy for Native and Indigenous language rights

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

(“R” represents the voice of Royce. “A1” represents the voice of the Anonymous woman 1)

[✦ Starlog Notes]: The act of creating is powerful. Nothing is as powerful as the act and responsibility of creating life. Motherhood and a life with language carries multiple journeys in one. The raising of a child during a parent or guardian’s LAR journey can create a new life for the language and the child.

After an exchange of greetings and getting caught up on the last years of our lives, we had a quick review of the interview topics and decided which questions to focus on.

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

[► PLAY]

R: OK. What types of language work have you done and how has it shifted overtime?

A1: I began my own language learning starting, you know, all those years ago. That was kind of the first push. It was just me as an adult trying to learn the language...that very personal individual learning as an adult and then moving out into community places where we were doing volunteer community language tables, here we met weekly for, you know, a place to speak the language with other people.

Then developing and being in a master-apprentice program over a period of years. After that, collaboration with other same language tribes and communities, so that we had a tiny cohort of younger folks trying to learn the language, and as adults, and with a cohort of elders to spread across a few different language communities.

And that was probably 20 years ago or so.

So really trying to just mobilize people to be like, “hey, let's learn the language, you know, with these yahoo adults. **Laughter**

Also continuing language tables. Articulation projects, gathering elders to talk in the language about life and learning. “What does this mean? What does education mean?” And,

you know, getting ah, a language immersion school up and running and running that, for like a decade.

Doing all those kinds of things, and then you get into, “okay more community language learning topics!” And then very focused and professional development for all the different roles in an immersion site. Community planning.

More of these mobilization strategies and support strategies for wider community learning 'cause we wanted to help the families of the students come along as well. So that was an elementary language or elementary level language immersion site, Kindergarten through 6th grade.

And then Working on community planning efforts and advocacy efforts, and advocacy regarding language policy on a national level and aligning that policy with what's happening on the ground in Indian country and in Native American language communities. Because we know that they're not all tribal lands where language revitalization is happening. There's stuff in the urban areas. There are places that don't have treaty lands left. There are also territories like Guam and the Chamorro language communities. So, it's not enough to say “Indian Country,” as the “legal definition.” I'm talking about language policy and how to advocate for the rights to use our languages in all of our spaces.

So what have I done? That's what I've done! **Laughter**

R: **Laughter** So much! So much!

R & A1: **Laughter**

R: What are you currently working on?

A1: Currently, I am working on community development and I'm in a graduate degree program for evaluation studies.

R: Oh wow!

A1: 'cause everybody hates evaluations. **Laughter**

So, I'm like, “maybe if we learn how to do it, we could make it better! You know, we could do better!” 'cause I started to hear myself saying, “we really need to evaluate why are we making this next task? Why are we doing this thing?”

You know, it's like, “oh, why don't I go learn how to do evals better?”

R: Yeah, yeah.

A1: But also “community development” is a broad umbrella term, and mostly focused on Native American language programming and development, but there are other areas where I'm helping folks out, you know, where it's a different field.

But, it's like, “hey, you want some program planning tips with a cultural base? I'm here to help you with some program planning.” And people just gravitate.

Eeeh! They gravitate towards, “yeah, we need to make this look more like us!” And so, doing a lot of facilitation and helping to draw people out. And then still doing advocacy for language rights.

R: It is such a need! I think that there’s a huge area of education that we still need. There’s so many people still really passionate about the language, but we’re not engaged about project planning.

A1: Right!

R: And realistic goals. What is our capacity? What is that person’s best way to work? And how can we utilize that?

A1: Yeah.

R: Maybe it can’t even be called, “evaluation or assessment.”

A1: Right!

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Beginning my conversation with A1 discussing the amount of work she has done reminds me how much the journey grows. How the amount of work, topics, and actions can come at you all at once. In one year of LAR work, I was going back and forth between at least a dozen different responsibilities that could easily have been, should have been, the responsibility of multiple staff members for each task. Each time you have an idea or a question, you literally set out on another journey, another search, that brings you to a dozen other topics and issues. There still isn’t a user-friendly guide that connects one question with an array of possible options and examples of work to learn. Which leads to the work of many language activists having a set of tools gained through cross-pollination. It also risks burnout, stress, anxiety, and inconsistent support and social harmony if one person is expected to carry the weight of so many responsibilities.

[► PLAY]

R: And so, with the work that you’ve done, this breath of experience that you’ve had, if you could think of a couple of very impactful relationships that have shaped your work or been monumental in your work, what would those be?

A1: Okay, so, having a child, being pregnant and having a child, really made me take stock of my life. This just isn’t me learning the language now. All of a sudden there is a whole future to look at.

R: Yeah! **Laughter**

A1: Which was really cool while I was young. It felt really good to connect with people and to connect with my language, and then I'm like, **deep breath** "oh my gosh!"

So the world shifted at that point. People would be like, "how'd you do it? What do you gotta do?"

Well, for me, and this is just for me, I got really, really, really dedicated when I got pregnant. So, you have kids, you have to look at them and look at the world. But that's not the answer for everyone, you know, "go have kids!" **Laughter**

But that really kicked me into overdrive. Besides that, that's not an answer for the world! Ehhhhh!! **Laughter**

R: **Laughter** Well, I think it is, though. I know people who are, they're like, married to the language. They're married to their work. They don't have kids. They're students are more the one's they're teaching, but they don't have their own kids.

And most of the people I've been working and talking with, is we're at a point where we've been doing this for like a decade.

A: Yeah!!

R: And so now, it's not work. It's our life.

A: It does. It becomes our life.

R: So, it's almost a natural course that in our life, we may have children and that is a huge relationship and how that will shift what we're doing.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

A1: Another key relationship was definitely my master, in my master-apprentice program. I owe her the world.

I owe her the world! She's super cool!

And if we think back, 23 or 24 years ago, you know, trying to introduce the idea of, "hey, can we hang out and just live our lives, and you talk the language, and I listen and try to learn it." **Laughter**

And she's like, "you don't understand a word of it. Why would I do that? Why would I speak for no reason? You can't understand. What the heck!" **Laughter**

And eventually, going through, culturally, chasing her down and asking her multiple times, and finally wearing her down. And she's like, "uhhh, you're just not going to stop, are

you?” And she didn’t understand what the heck we were asking her to do. She was like, “this will never work!”

But she was the kindest person in the community who joined on and was willing to take the chance and do it.

And she was like, “ah what the heck, I’ll get some bingo money out of it!” **Laughter** “Maybe it will work, it probably won’t!” **Laughter**

And, over the time period, we had 14 months together. 20 hours a week was our assignment, and we were paid. After a few months, she was like, “ohhh, you are picking it up! Woaahh!” **Laughter**

So then she started to let down her guard and tell other folks, other speakers in the community that this could actually work.

R: Oh wow!

A1: Because other speakers in our community were like, “what are you doing old lady? You and your tail!” **Laughter** Because, you know, I was her tail.

And they were kinda teasing her, too, “why you talking Indian to that girl? She don’t know what’s going on.” After a while, for her to say, “mmm, she understands. Yeah, she’s coming along.” You know, it takes some time.

She was so kind, and she was a really good speaker...She was funny and just her generosity and willingness to do that, I owe that old lady the world. That was one of the biggest leaps in my learning.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: The “Jedi Paradox” exists even amongst fluent speakers. There is always a period of introductions, encouragement, earning trust, understanding, and then getting to a level of comfortability to be honest and move together towards a goal.

[► PLAY]

R: Do you remember specific ways that you encouraged that relationship? I know you said that you kinda tracked them down and kept at them. **Laughter**

A1: We had to talk people into it. We had to scan the community, right. Our rez has, like, over ten different villages, which all have their own personality, and all have their own dynamics, and all have their own histories.

And in some of these villages the language was kept up in some of the families, and in other villages it was totally wiped out. Nobody talked Indian there anymore. People go to church and think Indian language is the devil.

Looking at our communities, understanding who is out there and finding out who speaks the language, finding out who is positive about speaking the language because there are a lot of people with a really negative view of talking Indian.

And we're like, "man, that old man really talks good Indian." And he'd be like, "ahh, you don't need that! No, you sound like crap. Aw, you're never gonna get it!" **Deep breath**

That'll just deflate you.

So, scanning the community and knowing who was out there, that meant going out and talking to people, and testing our assumptions. "I assume this person talks Indian, I've heard them out in public before." Then going out and approaching them, and sometimes there was a really positive reception and sometimes there was a really negative. So then coming back in and being like, "uhh, let's not try that one."

R & A1: **Laughter**

A1: And saying, what's it gonna take to develop this relationship and to bring this person along. And also knowing culturally appropriate ways to approach someone.

Some folks, who were language teachers working in colleges or high schools at the time, would help us out. They were like, "alright, we'll go with you." Because that's a real tribally specific thing. If you go sit with someone, that shows you support them. You know, while their having their doings, or while their doing something. So, we would have a speaker with us and they would try to bridge that to help us.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: This process can be unique to each person. There are differences between being from a community and being a tribal/Nation/descendant member who has not grown up in the speech community. These can be complex experiences, with positive and negative experiences. I remember when I started my degree program at the University of Oklahoma, I travelled a couple hours a few times a week to attend Comanche language classes. The elders in the program were so kind and eager to welcome me as a descendant and a relative from their northern families. Each situation is unique and like the anonymous woman I'm speaking to here, I've tried to let my heart lead the way, even in the face of adversity.

[► PLAY]

R: Does something come to mind that is the opposite of the spectrum? That you learned, this is something that did not support the development of relationships. This did not sustain a relationship. Was there actions that you experienced or even a missed step on your part that was like, "yeah, that was a learning lesson. Let's not do that again?"

A1: Yeah, expecting an immediate joining. Ehhh! **Laughter**

Expecting them to immediately join on and be like, “yeah!! The language is great! We’re going to do this!”

Being impatient. Just knowing that one way enthusiasm is not enough! **Laughter**

I mean that speaks to the wider status of the language of where we were at and at the time of what was being fed to us in this wider colonial world.

This was at home, at my rez. We can talk tribal sovereignty, rights, and everything all we want. I mean, but really, what is the condition of our acceptance and readiness. We really gotta understand people’s values and where they are and why they are feeling and understanding and promoting a certain value set.

So, really trying to understand why these dynamics are happening.

And having help with folks telling us, “you know you just totally approached them like a white university kid. You just went to them and said, ‘can I record you.’”

So yeah, you gotta build up that trust. They gotta know why you’re doing this and what you’re gonna do with it. And they want to see that you’re gonna do something valuable.

It’s a tribally specific thing. We don’t talk for nothing, for no reason. Every one of our words, every one of our sounds creates. Our language creates the world. That’s how our language was given to us, from the spirits and we share that ability. It’s a really deep cultural teaching and we had to be told, “we don’t talk for nothing. Everything we do is deliberate with intent.”

So people aren’t just gonna “yack yack yack” for no reason. They want to see that it’s going somewhere.

And probably a lot of our speakers probably couldn’t even articulate that kind of idea, but luckily we had some tribal cultural bearers and speakers who were able to put that out for us.

So being impatient and being pushy got in the way. A lot of societal attitudes, they were told they were dumb Indians. They were told at a certain point in their lives that, that language would do nothing for them. As they moved forward, their carrying a lot of that hurt forward.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: The work of “first generation” language activists who are creating LAR programs, departments, and such involves a wealth of relationship building. Not every speaker is eager to participate in intensive language programs, but those that become inspired and are motivated to participate, later become foundational pillars.

[► PLAY]

R: Ok, so when you were learning the language in your own community, amongst your own elders or speech community, there is stress. It can be a stressful environment, no matter the context, cooking, games, or natural everyday activities. At what point did you notice that stress started to alleviate a bit, where you felt more confident. Or maybe your relationship with your teacher and/or speech group was strong enough to help the uneasiness go away?

A1: I think there's a few different stages, I would have to say. Like, I used to be really extroverted and really, you know, adventurous and willing to do anything. Eee! Really brave. And so, I got a few canned phrases under my belt with what you'd call a "novice." Memorized phrases pronounced well, you know. And so I would go up to tribal people and start talking in the language to them. And they'd be like, "oh, you understood that." Then they'd start talking back and I'd be like, **deep breath**

So there's real excitement that comes with learning some phrases and some real basics and you got the pronunciation down and you've got it memorized, and I could introduce myself. You know, I could monologue with all of these memorized phrases about myself. That's a really great step because that gets people to engage with other speakers.

There's kind of that stage and then there's the stage where the teachers, the master speakers start to gain confidence and show their confidence in you too. You know where they're really generous and you can kind of see their shifts in like their corrections.

And where that relationship becomes more automatic, it becomes more accepting. But also, like, "Oh yeah, you made a mistake." They don't have to say, "oh, you made a mistake" where all of a sudden they're modeling is just like, "here's the correction."

So we found that we really did have to do a lot of training days and days and days of training for our master apprentice teams when we started them up just to get our elder first speakers ready for what we wanted.

But also, you know, training our younger second language learners how to ask these things and how to remain in the language. So, really solidifying those practices and then we took that into professional development spaces and our language immersion school.

And that's another shift where all of a sudden we could see a shift in practice happening in other learning and teaching settings. And then as our language learners start demonstrating more and more, it just becomes more natural and habitual in the community to speak to them.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Hearing her emphasize the journey of the elder language speaker is an eye opener. It really takes me back to my sessions with some of my language teaches. Being the learner comes with so much responsibility and goals, but so does being the speaker. Once the speaker is invested, the responsibilities they begin to develop and their own drive to share what type of knowledge and how does not always come naturally. Learning and modifying training for the speakers is just as important as it is for the learners. There are many different ways to elicit various types of knowledge from an elder speaker. At the beginning of my work, I found that this was one of the most enjoyable times, to sit and visit. To broach different topics in round about ways so that I could maybe catch more of the language through storytelling. While not the most effective or quickest way to document words, sentences, morphology, and semantics, it was the most meaningful for me.

[► PLAY]

R: Have you noticed a method that impacts the development of creating and/or sustaining and maintaining a relationship among speakers and learners?

A1: Wow, that's interesting. That's an interesting question. I think showing up and sticking around. I guess you could boil it down to the word "persistence."

Does this student stick around? Do they come to a speaker and say, "hey, help me learn," and then never show up again? If you don't see them trying, then a relationship does not build there. So, I mean, just the persistence that that person would state the intent and then start showing it.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: Have you seen that it's not particularly about a method that someone gravitates towards, but long-term success wise, it's more of a personal and social issue?

A1: Yeah, what is it in the person's personality that we can appeal to encourage a long-term commitment, to encourage putting in the time? How do we identify that in a learner or even in the elders, too? Making sure that they stick around until a beginning learner starts moving up the ladder to speaking. They might hear the learner speaking some canned phrases and think, "yay, my job here is done! I gotta go to bingo now."

A1 & R: **Laughing**

A1: If people aren't all in an understanding and agreement of the mission, committed, you know, of any project or program or undertaking, it's going to be real easy to gum up the works, right? It's gonna be real easy to throw things in to mess things up, to misstep.

So, reflection is a constant piece. Individual self-reflection. Group dynamics reflection is an important piece of this and constantly saying, where are we? How are we doing?

Again, this is where I love the idea of evaluation. Where are we? How are we doing? Why would we take any next step? Because that's also language revitalization. We know there's not an end.

Hundreds of years of wiping out our languages has left us with just little grains of sand of knowledge of our language and our life. There's always gonna be something for us to learn something new for us to build, you know. We're never going to be done, so there's always something new and something we can move towards.

Again, it's facilitating that supportive dynamic in the community. Even having shared understandings every time we're working on relationships and working on activities with folks. As long as we are in agreement on the terms were using, on the actions we're using, and that we're safe enough to honestly talk about where we are and why we would take the next step.

And that's something we've learned, identifying values and principles of the people involved. Identifying who we need to have involved. Again, that takes looking at and learning

about values and principles. What drives this person that we think inspires this person to be at the table. What drives me and why do I want to be at the table.

What are the values that are driving this person and how do we work on this issue that's outside of all of us and also inside of us. We can't just work on one person's vision if you're trying to get others to come along.

And saying, this is our intent. This is our goal. Are we all able to move towards this? It is constant reflection. Constant member checks and that kind of stuff.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: One of the constant reoccurring issues discussed amongst all of the language activists is "honesty." Not just in assessments and evaluations of curriculum and pragmatics, but in individual and group actions, relationships, capacity, and addressing realities within their environments.

[► PLAY]

R: What's your ideal social environment for making and maintaining relationships for language work?

A1: I'm just at that point, wherever I am at is the ideal place. That's me. But that's where our language needs to live. And wherever an auntie is living her life, is where her language should be. Because for a long time her language was not allowed to be anywhere. Her language was hidden in the kitchen. With her mom. And uncle's language, my grandpa's language only existed out on the trap line with his uncle. At the last of it, you know when he was a kid and then he got taken, stolen away to boarding school. And my grandpa's language only existed in the other room with his cousins. It didn't exist with us as kids.

So, to take it out of isolated spaces. Wherever in the community is where language should exist. A lot of this language revitalization work is intent creation of a space where the language is spoken, right? So, it's creating an artificial language space to eventually normalize language being spoken.

But first we have to remake a place where language is being held up and languages are being spoken. And so, there is the danger of, like, "this is the one place where it's happening." But forming it in a way that it is a social experience. That it is an experience that carries over into other aspects. And you have to be intent. Some folks have found that they have had to create artificial social experiences just to bring this into the "normalized behavior."

But you start to see it long-term. You can certainly press to accelerate it.

Like doing cultural activities. We'd start every day with a tobacco offering. Literally, every day. Somebody dreamed of a pipe for our school and so every morning before anything happened, we would give that talk to the spirits and then start the day. And then you start to see that behavior normalized.

And someone says, “oh, my child wants to see this happen at home.” That’s awesome. That’s really a good thing. Here are some phrases and ways to take that practice outside of the school setting.

Some of the parents would be like, “I don’t know how to offer my tobacco. I don’t know what to say in a tobacco talk.” Okay we’ll help you with what is okay to say. And that’s the same thing our elders did with us. “Make sure you talk to these spirits and these ones, and this one does this.” And there was a direct learning phase.

So, you gotta be intentional. We need to recreate those places, but eventually they become normalized. They become habituated. And then we’re not working so hard to recreate.

R: Right. And that’s really pushed forward by your intentions, your values. And when people have that in their minds that this is their goal.

A1: Uh-hmm.

R: It’s not something that just happens because we’re Native.

A1: Right!

R: With that, what is your relationship like with your language?

A1: It is always something I’m striving to improve. Learning more verb forms. **Laughter**

Everyday we gotta do this. We live our lives in this language and with this language. Also, it’s an attitude of gratitude. Eee! **Laughter**

Just being so grateful. Waking up and saying, “oh my gosh, you let me live again! You let me have the eyes to see this. This is incredible”

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: It is truly humbling to have such knowledge shared with me. It is very easy to get caught up in the everyday tasks when you are working to create a language program and to also learn the language. The comprehension benchmark goals and administrative tasks can become overwhelming. Reflecting on how each task contributes to the different aspects of the long-term goals and the future being strived for can aid in creating an evaluation process. Some tasks or activities directly benefit language comprehension, some benefit the journey, team building, and should ultimately strengthen relationships.

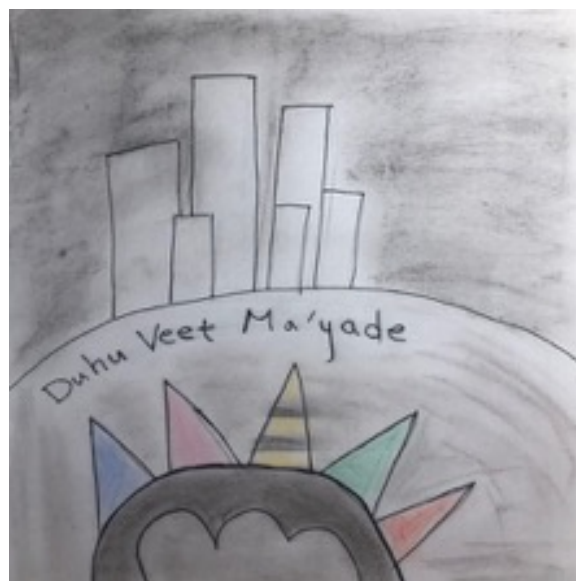
My discussion with A1 reminded me of a Newe daigwape “the people/Shoshone language/talk” comic book I worked on with my children. The words were complicated to find, because we didn’t just want to learn colors. My children were not motivated to do another color, numbers, and animals activity. Neither was I. Instead, I wanted them to have a meaningful experience and reflect on how our ancestral language changes our minds, how we see the world.

It was a funny activity at first, how do we focus on colors without just teaching colors? My boys really got me thinking about the meaningful ways words can be learned and used.

Together we wrote and illustrated *Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black City."* My boys, Winterhawk and Oh-hah-moeh submitted this comic book to the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair. They were awarded first place. We still read this comic book together. We got to read it to my grandmother, their great-grandmother. She said she could feel how the colors made the animal feel. This comic, simple as it may be, it represents much more than just colors.

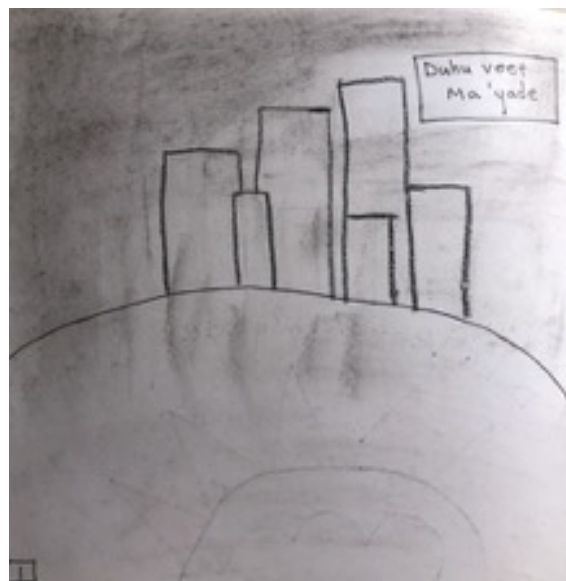
✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[✧ Starlog Notes]: Lessons about seeing. Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" written in Newe Daigwape "Shoshone/People Words/Talk." By Winterhawk John Young Wolf and Oh-hah-moe Harris Young Wolf



Duhu Veet Ma'yade
Black Town/City

Figure 28: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" Cover page. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Duhu Veet Ma'yade
Black Town/City

Figure 29: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" title page 1. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Wah'suh'p buhn 'kah'nah kahn ma'yade
Wild animal that lives in town

ee'duh ge'h ideeq ne baaru.
it has no color/is clear.

Ne' duhu veet.
He is black.

Figure 30: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" pages 2. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Wah'suh'p dahn waani vai
Wild animal in Spring time

enq ha vuike aingaocha na'vunde
sees an orange looking

mu'bii.
automobile

Figure 31: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 3. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



? ... Veet?
Color?

Figure 32: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 4. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Wah'suh'p ya'ilt mu'bii
Wild animal goes in automobile

anda n'angkwa
to other place

Figure 33: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 5. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

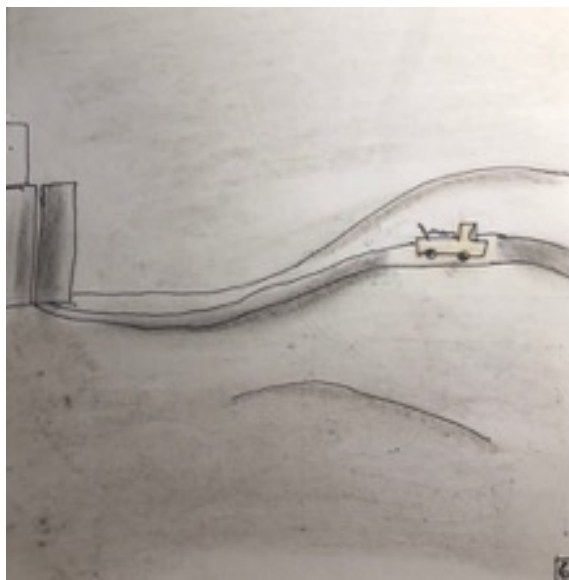


Figure 34: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 6. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

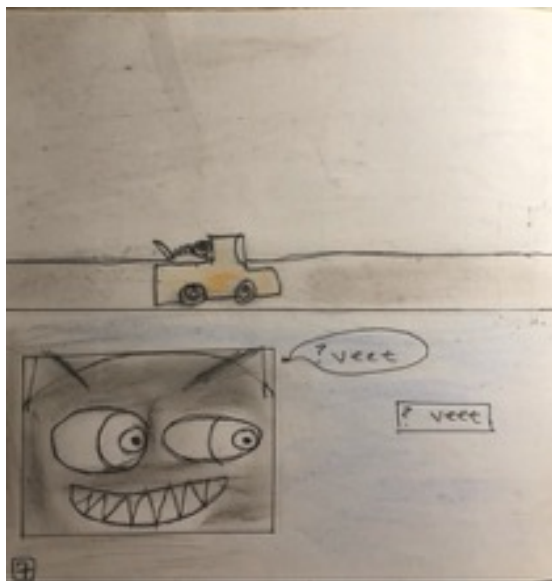
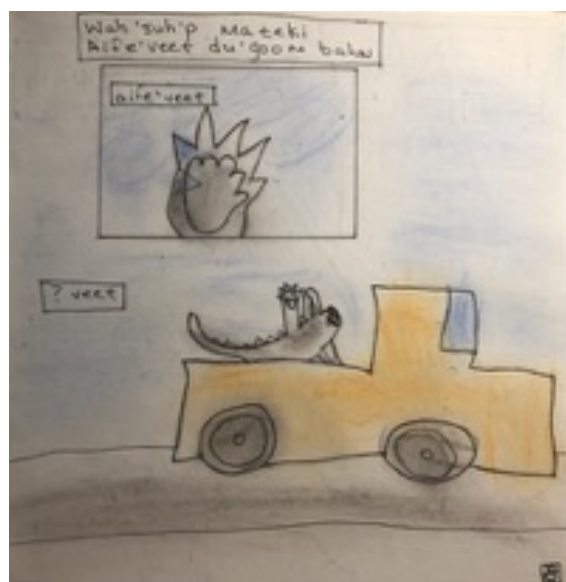


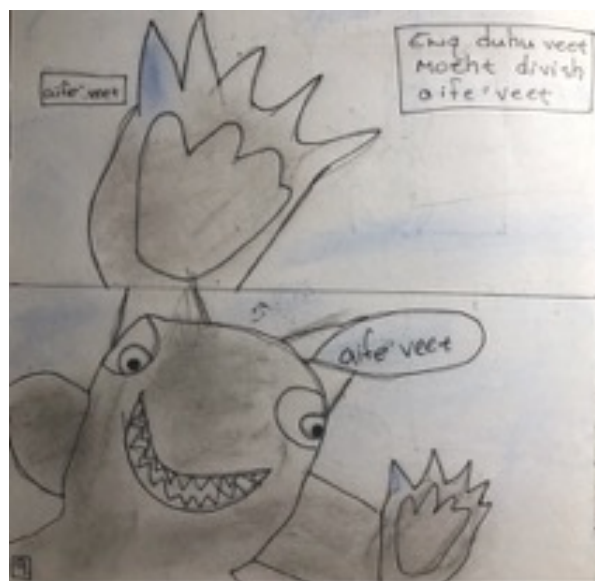
Figure 35: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 7. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Wah'suh'p mateki aife'veet
Wild animal touches/catches blue color

du'goom bahn.
sky.

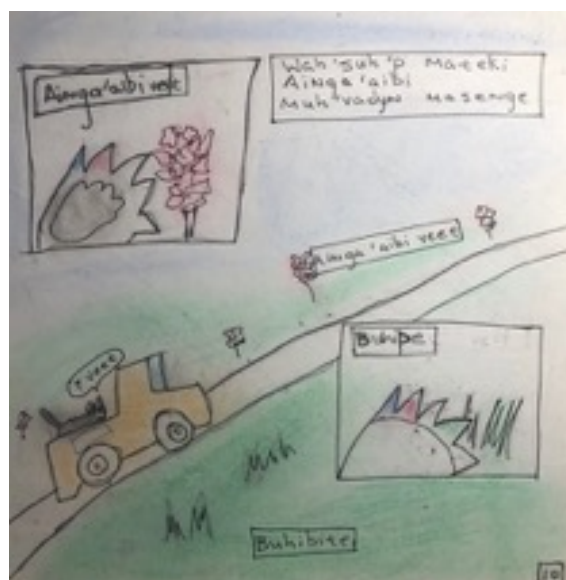
Figure 36: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 8. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Enq duhu veet moeht divish
With his black hand now really

aife'veet
blue color

Figure 37: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 9. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Wah'suh'p mateki ainga'aibi
Wild animal touches/catches pink

muh'vadyn masenge. Buhipe.
blooming plant. Green growing.

Buhibitee.
Green.

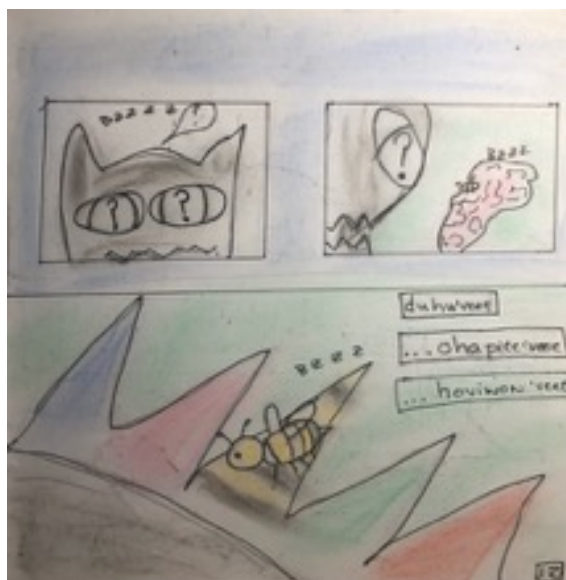
Figure 38: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 10. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Wah'suh'p mateki
Wild animal touches/catches

ainga'veet apoq.
red apple.

Figure 39: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 11. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Duhu'veet.... ohapite'veet
Black yellow

hoviwon'veet
bumble bee color.

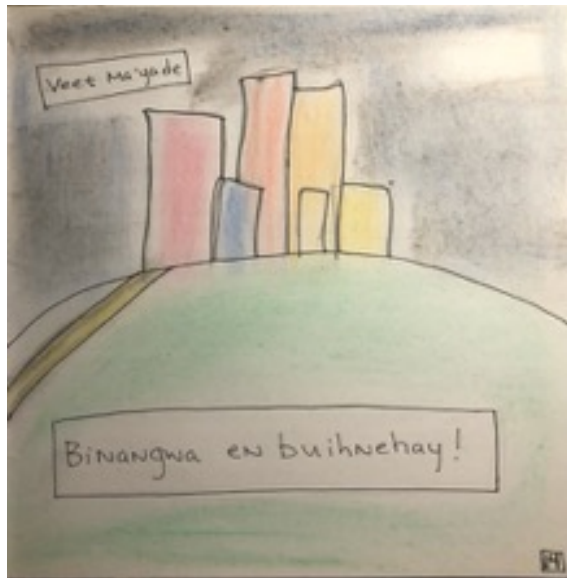
Figure 40: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 12. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Wah'suh'p ya'ih may'yade
Wild animal goes on/to town/city.

Wah'suh'p ya'ih kua' baaru gahnin.
Wild animal goes and colors houses.

Figure 41: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 12. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.



Veet Ma'yade
Colors Town/City

Binangwa en buihnehay!
See you next time!

Figure 42: Duhu Veet Ma'yade "Black Town/City" page 13. Graphite, crayon, color pencils, and ink on paper. Winterhawk J. Young Wolf, Oh-hah-moe H. Young Wolf, and Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

Chapter Eight: Lokosh (Dr. Joshua Hinson), Chickasaw
✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

[✧ Starlog Notes]: Finding balance.

“The proper way to begin a story about Chikashsha okla, Chikashshiyaakni' (Chikashsha people,' 'the Chickasaw Nation', and Chikashshanompa'. We begin when the ground was firm enough to stand on, when Aba' Bínni'li' (Creator/God) formed us and blew air into our nostrils. We were preceded by the creation of Yaakni' Ishki' (Mother Earth) herself, along with her children including Shakchi (Crayfish) and Fala Ishto' (Raven), powerful animals whom we still honor today. Many centuries later our Ancestors found themselves in a land of trouble, and were forced to leave, following the itti' fabassa' holitto'pa' (Sacred pole) sanctified by Aba' Bínni'li'. After the loss of our Ofi' Tohbi' Ishto' (Big White Dog) at the Sakti' Lhafa' Okhina' (Scored Bank River/Mississippi River) we emerged on the other side as a unique and separate people from our Chahta brothers. These two narratives, each a deep teaching, are the only way to begin to tell a Chikashsha nannanoli' (Chikashsha story), and to orient us in time and space and relationships” (Hinson 2018 3-4).

Tweedy: Chokma

Naagagaa: Dooshaci



Figure 43: Lokosh (Dr. Joshua Hinson). Graphite, ink, and watercolor on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Lokosh (Dr. Joshua Hinson) Chickasaw

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ 20+ years of language learning and revitalization experience
- ✦ Father
- ✦ Master-apprentice methods
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Award winning artist
- ✦ Bachelor degree in painting
- ✦ Artistic work with the language
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Program development and grant writing
- ✦ Media tools development
- ✦ Master degree in Native American Art History
- ✦ Ph.D. in Native American Language Revitalization
- ✦ Author of books *Anompilbashsha' Asilhha' Holisso*, *Chickasaw Prayer Book*, *Chikasaha*, and *A Concise Chickasaw Dictionary*.
- ✦ Descendant of Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), Cherokee, and Euro-American

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

("R" represents the voice of Royce. "JH" represents the voice of Dr. Hinson)

[✦ Starlog Notes]: Joshua and I started our doctoral programs at OU around the same time. In one of our classes together he led a class discussion. I remember him asking each of us, "why do you want to learn your language?" I told him, because "I want to know secrets." He said, "buh!" That really made me laugh. I always thought that maybe he was expecting or hoping I would share some kind of sacred story. Truth was, that class was always a struggle for me to get to on time, a lot of my classes were. I was running back and forth between two other jobs. I had our family vehicle taken by my ex who was punishing me for leaving him and filing for custody. My first semester in my doctoral program was also the beginning of four toxic years of custody court cases. I was always exhausted, so exhausted. My classes were inspiration, they were a break. Odd, I know. But the portions of the class where I got to listen to the lives of other language activists and the incredible work and life of their languages they were striving for, those moments kept me moving forward. "Secrets." Our lives with our languages hold so many memories. We grow as our language grows in us. What marvelous secrets are held in our ancestral languages. It is a blessing and honor to have Joshua trusting me and this space to share some of his experiences and knowledge with.

[► PLAY]

R: Maacagiraac! Thank you again so much for taking the time for this!

JH: Whatever you need.

R: Could you describe a couple experiences that really impacted your growth in the language or how you feel about the language today?

JH: I think, there were a couple of speakers that really invested in me. One that I always talk about, he passed away a couple years ago in 2018.

They were, you know, they're elder men, both real strong in church and sort of politically connected. Their assistance not just helped me become a better speaker but helped me to understand their lived experience of where they're coming from and what that means to me, and what my obligations are to them and other people.

I was real close with another elder speaker, a woman who taught me a lot. Because we were close, I was able to show her what was happening to address any tensions that arose. Because of our close relationship I was able to explain things to her, to help her grow comfortable, and she became one of our main contributors to a few projects.

I also learned a lot from her about cultural patterns of saying "no" or turning someone down. How do you express that you are not happy with someone, because you know, I'm blind in certain ways and it took me some moments to realize she really wasn't happy with how something turned out.

But because I was in my, "lets get this done. Go, go, go, white guy head," I didn't realize she was telling me to fix something. Initially, I didn't think it was a big deal, because she wouldn't ever come out and just say, you gotta fix that. She'd just ask questions about it in a round-about way.

In the same way, working with another speaker who just turned 99 years old, because I know how she is, I understand how she grew up and how she operates, if she said something like, "yeah, you could say it..." That means, you can't say it!

R & JH: **Laughter**

R: Yeah, I really love that. Back home, they say, "well, *you could say it like that,*" which really means, "yeah, no." Especially asking directly, "is this alright?" And they still say, "*yeah, I guess you could say it that way.*" You either learn that growing up, or you have to be taught that later on to notice these subtle ways of being corrected. But that's a relationship connection that grows over time and interaction together.

JH: We can't help but be changed by this work. They've "Chikacized" me in ways that I'm not fully conscious of. **Laughter**

There's no guide though, no straight guide for that, right?

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Learning how to behave within a community is incredibly important. Even Native members of the community are not just born knowing these ways, and as adults being humble enough to relearn how to be, can be a difficult task.

Each of us have behaviors that are learned and when we begin language work, we need to learn other practices and behaviors, while also unlearning some that may conflict with the success and stability of the program.

[► PLAY]

R: Could you tell me a little bit about learning to work with the language speakers, how those relationships were made and maintained?

JH: You know, I wouldn't undermine my main language teachers. We all get together, we feed them, we record them, we're paying them. They, (the speakers) don't treat me as an outsider, and they don't care that I have a Ph.D. They care about, do I return their calls? Am I nice to them? Do I do what I say I'm going to do? Do I feed them well when they show up for committee meetings?

Well, and I share my wild onions with them. That's the main thing!

R & JH: **Laughter**

JH: Within the first month I moved here, one of my elders said, "you know Josh, the slower you go to more Indian you're gonna be." He's like just, "be cool," basically. "Be cool." **Laughter**

And then I had sort of my natural shyness and like my anxiety disorder that helped me be quiet and observe in social situations, where other people would be loud and proud, you know. I think being quiet and taking my licks over these last 20 years has been helpful. The work now is much easier, 'cause they know me and I know them, and they know that I love them and I just want the best for them.

So even if I do have a "white day", **laughter**, and "I ain't livin' right" they're like, "ok, it's, it's gonna be alright!"

R & JH: **Laughter**

JH: Even if I got fired, I couldn't leave Chickasaw language. I'm gonna die on the rez. I don't care, I'll go teach art at a public school and then teach language at night.

For certain people, it's not a choice, you just, this is what you got and you need to do right by it, regardless of what's happening around you. But when we're not equipped to really deal with some of this stuff we need to think about, you know, you develop these longstanding relationships and you know they age and they're gonna pass away.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Beginning this language journey is filled with complex emotions. What is being done to prepare us for the next stages of our journey? As Joshua stated, "you can't help but be changed by this work." Looking back at how I've grown and changed in the last decade,

some parts of my life are vastly different. Scanning through all the memories, the brightest points are the pockets of time where knowledge bliss was achieved. Just speaking. Just learning. Beautiful communication, support, love, and laughter. If there were not these moments that feed us, the work would not stand a chance. Such moments happen amongst groups and also individually while learning on our own, while dreaming, and during ceremony.

The difficult parts can come in many forms: instability of that space, inconsistency of participants, funding, and such. Learning to navigate through these moments in time is absolutely necessary to propel towards those moments of clarity, of progress, achievements, and just being in the moment with the language, culture, and each other. These are the moments that shape us, become embedded into our skin, and keep calling us home.

[► PLAY]

R: Alright. You know, we're in school for so long learning all these methods and different techniques, and ways to document and preserve the language are beat into our minds, but there is a lot that we don't understand or that we are not realistically prepared for when it comes to navigating our social environments when we're working in this field for over a decade or more.

At some point, having a career in language acquisition and revitalization, the question is "is it worth my time." Whether paid or unpaid work to learn the language.

JH: Yeah, that's intentions. You know, when language left sort of the natural environments in which it transfers from person to person. In our case, if we don't institutionalize it, if we don't give it an economic value, if we can't pay our bills using Chickasaw, will there really be spoken Chickasaw in a hundred years?

R: Hmm.

JH: I don't think so. Yeah, you'll always see a Jesse (reference to jessie little doe baird) or somebody you know to kind of go back through our documentation and bring it back, but it's a double-edged sword, right? You gotta be able to pay your bills, and we've made that possible.

But it also creates this sort of tension. I mean, did work for almost a decade unpaid 'cause I just love the language. When they finally brought me on and said, "hey, we're gonna pay you to do this." I was like, "let's go!"

I think the people that had success in the traditional master apprentice approach, in our case, that were compensated, it still had a lot to do with their resolve. Their motivations for learning, you know their personality, but none of those things are replicable. That's the problem.

R: Yeah. The individual person, and their drive are a huge factor in any type of work.

I had this experience a few years ago. Someone came up to me at one of my language jobs and told me, well at the time it was upsetting, now it's just funny. But the person said, "you're just tenacious." I thought, "ooo, Tenacious D" (In reference to the musical group)!

Laughter So I had laughed when that was said to me, and the person was straight faced and told me, "I just don't get what you're talking about with the language revitalization stuff. I don't agree with what you need for the language learning. And you just keep coming back!"

That was said to me in a bad way by a tribal individual who had an educational position.

And I just thought, "huh, well I'm not leaving my own language to die just because you don't support me as a person." It really wasn't about the language or education. The person was just a mean tator-tot. Now, how do I go around that person and other similar people?

R & JH: **Laughter**

R: Year after year, there's still this same core group of people doing language work. And we can say we've experienced a lot of things that we may never thought we would experience. Myself, even couple of years ago or when I was all bright-eyed dreaming about all the language work, these experiences really flipped my idea of how impactful our social environments can be.

JH: Yup.

R: And then what type of environment we need to push for to foster and sustain to keep a group of people wanting to learn and then turn around and teach it.

JH: Yeah. I think that this sort of, attracting, keeping, persisting, all those sort of things, it's a challenge because you really have to step back and say, "ok, in my tribal community, how many people really want language?" Right?

And of those people, what does that really mean? Now, what does it really mean for them? What are they getting at?

So, I'm very happy with the work we've done in terms of expanding the program and staff. There's a lot more prestige for the language. We've really thrown a lot of things towards our enrichment side. You know, the average citizen just wants to feel good about language. They want to have some cool experiences. They wanna know how to say hello or whatever, right? It's not even hard.

The problem is, you got 70,000 people and you can really only teach 7, day to day to get them really, really good. Well, what do you do with the rest of the people?

R: And there are so many dynamics and reasons why realistically a program can only provide and maintain that type of intensive language learning and teaching to that number of adult learners. Added to that, the issues of creating, reinforcing, and maintaining a social environment where that smaller group works positive and productive together.

JH: Yeah, good institutional support, good interpersonal relationships, clear lines of communication. People who are involved and invested in that process, it's much easier than if we had a combative relationship. If I'm behaving badly and I don't get along with people, you know, this is not gonna fly.

But that's the kind of stuff I think that people don't even really think about. They're like, "oh no, what's the method, though? How do you do your teaching?" And I'm like, man, I mean,

that's a good question, but that's not the war. It's a couple wars, and the teaching methods are just one little piece, you know!

R: Yeah, yeah, most definitely. There's not a clear understanding of the dynamics occurring within language programs, and the impacts from the dynamics happening in smaller communities and governments that contribute to the success of their work, and at times complicate progress or even snuff out opportunities for success.

JH: There could be somebody who has a positive relationship with speakers on the ground and most of their community, but there is maybe tension because they're not enrolled. Maybe people treat the person badly. Maybe the government isn't stable. But the person just doesn't stop.

So, you have an outlander or first-generation descendant that might not look right, maybe they act right, but are not treated right.

That's the recipe, in my mind anyway, that you got these people that are just gritty and they won't quite. They're there for something bigger, not just accolades from the people.

R: Yeah, they're "tenacious!" **Laughter**

JH: Yeah, yeah, for sure!

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: There are extremes of all different types of situations. Lateral violence is an extreme situation which is almost always present within language work and it's not understood fully to the point that we are creating methods and practices to keep language and wellness at the forefront of our work. High stress environments are prime locations where personalities and other agendas have the potential of taking over. Additionally, because the rhetoric and romanticism surrounding language revitalization movements, these experiences often are hidden behind a smokescreen of cultural sacredness and respect for the last fluent speakers. Honest discussions about the roots of the issues and dynamics are less likely to be part of the program benchmarks. These issues are complex and more work is needed to understand how language groups could begin reflecting upon the deeper honest tensions.

[► PLAY]

R: After having talks with more language activists about the dynamics that are not being discussed alongside language acquisition and revitalization goals, there are a lot of professional and personal issues that get blended. Have you experienced stuff like this?

JH: I mean, we all got stuff. I mean, really probably from when my language mentor passed away until recently, it's just been like this kind of slog. For me, I had moments where I was like,

“why can’t I just be like an average white guy? Go make a ton of money in Dallas and buy a boat and a corvette?”

R & JH: **Laughter**

JH: You know, it's like, all my best friends are dying and they're old, and I'm tired and I wanted to hang it up, but I don't have that luxury.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: The larger portions of this conversation have been provided in chapter 4.

[► PLAY]

All of us that do this work, there's stuff that comes along for the ride that you don't think about consciously. You just don't. [01:13:12]

You know, even my emotional stuff, how I used to express myself about why I wanted to be learning the language, it was weird because Chickasaw men don't do that. *They don't do that.*

And my striving to attain these linguistic goals and cultural goals and to be a better Indian, and all this kind of business, it doesn't always make sense to them (the native speakers). It's like asking a fish what he thinks about being in water.

R & JH: **Laughter**

JH: There's this weird experience about these overt wonderings or questions about moving more towards the center, becoming more Chickasaw or feeling more Chickasaw or whatever that is. And the old folks are like, “I don't know what this guy is talking about. That's weird.”

I have one elder I did an interview with, and I said that you know, “there was a moment in time where I felt like, as a child, I was a white kid who happened to be part Indian, which I thought was really cool.” And then sort of, as a college onset Indian. Now I'm an Indian who just happens to be part white. And that really weirded her out.

R: Oh, really?

JH: She thought I was saying that I wasn't really Chickasaw. She's like, “are you enrolled?” I said “Yeah.” And she said, “what are you talking about all that ‘being a white guy’?”

I was like, “oh, oh okay. Well yes, 'cause I weren't raised right. I was raised in west Texas. The only Chickasaws I knew were my white Chickasaw cousins, and we're all crazy you know? I mean, I spent summers with Granny but that's about it.

You know there are other people with similar experiences to me, but my lived experience is so different from yours. So different. I'm not into comparing traumas or sufferings, but yeah everyone has something, some baggage. Some guilt because you weren't raised right or because you were raised right.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: The dynamic changes to the interpersonal relationships amongst speech groups and communities when language work changes from volunteer to paid can be discussed in a multitude of ways. Professional issues and personal issues. Administrative roles to build a program also takes on the role of managing personalities. There are a lot of unknowns surrounding the topic of how the professionalization of the field impacts the social environment of unpaid work. Financial compensation can potentially change relationships between speakers, learners, the speech group, government, and the community.

[► PLAY]

R: Many of the people I've spoken with over the years continue to come back to this issue, this understanding from their experiences that you can have many different types of methods, but what makes or breaks this work, *are the relationships you build*.

JH: Yeah, it's the people. It's the people stuff. I mean, I think that you could make this argument for any job.

R: Yeah.

JH: Right? You could have someone who may be emotionally intelligent and has a bit of a work ethic, they can go far. And you could have some genius who can't play well with others, they may not go anywhere.

With us, this work we're doing, there's just so much weird and oftentimes gross kind of baggage around language loss and so forth that we bring in. Then you add in personalities and envy, and all the other stuff. Yeah, it's just like a fun little stew.

R: And pay. Adding money to this can really change relationships. Once I took a paying job for work that I had previously been doing for years as a volunteer, I was really shocked how drastically some of the relationships I had changed.

JH: There was a change amongst our groups when we started professionalizing the native speakers. They all get paid. That gives us a solid stable group of 8-10 speakers who are always compensated for their time. The tension has seemed to change since we're all professionals.

R: Definitely there is the issue of fair compensation for the work that is being done. But even higher pay does not resolve interpersonal tensions so that the focus is shifted back to progressing with the language.

JH: Some of it is just pragmatism developed over time. I want bad Chickasaw over no Chickasaw. And if we're just loving on one another and we treat each other right, help each

other out when things are tough, that community that should be the goal of a program can sustain itself.

Your work family is your family. We see each other more than sometimes we see our significant others.

We should be able to do everything that we want to do in the language. And if we do, then we're doing right by it.

R: Because it's more than work. It's more than a paycheck. It ultimately becomes our *life*.

JH: Yeah.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Whether a person is paid or volunteers for their language, there isn't a clear way to truly know who will commit to long-term participation. That just happens with time. I've witnessed year after year people who are not paid consistently show up and cause problems. They're passionate about their issues. It's just not the positive ones that contribute to LAR. Like Joshua has stated, "it's the people stuff...(but) you could make this argument about any job."

[► PLAY]

R: Over the years, burnout is a huge impactful experience. What type of burnout have you experienced and what have you done overtime to recognize the symptoms and act upon them?

JH: There is this tension in my work where because I'm a competent speaker, because I have some grasp of the spelling system, I end up doing lots and lots of writing and editorial stuff. Which takes me out of the immersion environment.

In addition to my administrative duties with budgets and reports, and all that kind of stuff.

So, there's this tension where I really need to be in there, I really wanna be in there. You need an advanced learner to push. You know, you have to be able to hang with native speakers to push to get that stuff going on.

That tension it affects productivity. It makes you tired and so forth. I was kind of living in that world where I was really pumping out manuscripts 'cause that is what was expected of me.

And then my main teacher, Jerry Imotichey died, and I swear to God I didn't work for like six months.

R: Ohhhh, hmmm.

JH: I would just come into my office and sit there. There was nothing I could do, right. I mean, I just, I couldn't. I didn't have it. I was as close to quitting as I've ever been.

Ah, and my big boss called me in and she was like, "I'm really worried about. You know she's like, "I know Jerry dying really hit you hard." But basically, she said, "whatever you need to do, you do it. But we need you. We need you to be engaged. This works gotta go on."

After we had his ghost feast, which was a year later, and **deep breath**

I don't know. I kind of got a second wind.

And I had a lot of guilt about again having to prioritize my time in these other areas and not being in the immersion sessions helping in the way that I felt like I ought to. I should be in that little room talking Chickasaw to them.

After his ghost feast, I just came to think of him as like a Saint. He's like Saint Jerry.

JH & R: **Laughter**

JH: What would Jerry do, you know? **Laughter**

So his family are encouraging to me. And I can look at his picture and think about him and it's motivational. He's like my own little Saint and he just goes with me.

You know, just leaning into the other staff and saying, "it's okay. The work that we're doing apart from you being in immersion is worthwhile, and it's powerful, and it's a miracle that we can even do this. None of this has to rest on your shoulders were all going to do this work and it's gonna be fine."

So that was helpful in getting me over this sort of slump of not wanting to write and just life at that time.

Instead of writing and dealing with my sorrow, I just started hunting ducks.

R & JH: **Laughter**

R: Yeah, I've seen all the photos in Instagram! **Laughter**

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: The importance of having a balanced life cannot be overstated. That balance is fluid. It changes with the seasons. But what does each person know about making that a reality? What is our education, our upbringing, our self-education in wellness? Is wellness "normalized?"

Much of the focus in LAR is normalizing language transmission. If a healthy speech community is part of the future we're working towards, normalizing wellness and honest reflections, discussions, and methods is just as important as language transmission. That future, the one where we are becoming the best versions of ourselves and participating in a journey of LAR, it's possible. Working in the trenches every now and then along this language journey can cloud a person's vision, but that future is so much clearer when we form relationships with other successful and positive language activists who feed our hearts and minds. Who tell us and show us, it's possible, it can be done. It takes strength to reflect honestly on what and who in our lives is moving us closer to that goal.

✧ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ✧
Saint Jerry

[Visual guide text]

[✧ Starlog Notes]: Beginning (simply) again, after loss and burnout. We all deal with grief and exhaustion in our own ways. For Lokosh, his mentors, like Saint Jerry, live on through their teachings.

JH: Facebook public post, Aug 14, 2020

The late Adeline Brown's word for praying mantis: nassano'li', (AB) naasanno'li' praying mantis, devil horse

The late Willie Byars word for the same:

Siitan imissoba, devil horse, praying mantis (WB)

I ❤️ our language.

...Post. Post. Post. Post.

[Page 2:]

Static and sound waves.

[► PLAY]

JH: I love scissortails. They mean the "Thunder's Bird." Hilowifoshi'.

R: Oh, really? In Chickasaw?

JH: Yeah, it's like, "the bird that belongs to thunder." It's like his possession. "Thunder's bird." I don't know why, but that's their name.

R: I like that!

JH: Yeah, the other one is something like "scissors." It means, "its tail looks like a pair of scissors," which is fine.

But I like "Thunder's bird!" It's just way cooler! **Laughter**

[■ STOP]

Ceesha: Light across space and time.

Naagagaa: See. They're still here.

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Language fluidity. Gaining language comprehension empowers makers, creators, changemakers to create. Having the comprehension and confidence to understand multiple translations and meanings, then to create new words with meaningful intentions is how I want to be when I grow up.



Figure 44: Always. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

PART III: LOVE, LOSS, AND ALL THE IN-BETWEENS OF LAR

INTRODUCTION: AN UNLEARNING AND *RE*LEARNING

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide: Those Are Fighting Words

CHAPTER 9: KARONHYAWAKE JEFF DOREEN, MOHAWK KANIEN'KÉHA

✧ Meaning Making Poetics and Visual Guide

✧ A Conversation with Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen

CHAPTER 10: ANONYMOUS INDIGENOUS WOMAN 2, NORTH AMERICA

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide

✧ A Conversation with Anonymous Indigenous Woman 2

CHAPTER 11: THE SUNRAY FAMILY: RANDI (KIOWA AND PONCA) AND CEDRIC
(MOWA CHOCTAW)

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide

✧ A Conversation with the Sunray Family

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide:

CHAPTER 12: RYAN DECAIRE, KANIEN'KEHÁ:KA MOHAWK

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide

✧ A Conversation with Ryan DeCaire

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide:

CHAPTER 13: REFLECTING ON LIFE STAGES OF AWARENESS, UNLEARNING, AND
RELEARNING

INTRODUCTION: Unlearning and *Re*Learning

At the beginning of my doctoral degree, I expanded my language acquisition and revitalization (LAR) work by collaborating more with national and global Indigenous language revitalization groups. One group in particular, Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language,” expanded my knowledge of the vast social networking and collaborations amongst global language champions and activists. One of their collaborations is with the Tolman family (Tipiziwin and Ti Tolman) who helped build the foundation and framework for an immersion language nest at the Standing Rock Reservation. I’ve been blessed to have the opportunity to also learn from their family’s work and pursuit of wellness in their lives and relationships. I had previously gifted the couple while making my request for them to be part of the narratives here, but unfortunately because of our schedules and COVID-19 experiences in the past year it was not the right time to have additional in-depth sensitive conversations. I feel it is still important to honor that gifting by acknowledging how our conversations about their language journeys have inspired my own questions about how people come to understand wellness and how they pursue and maintain it in their personal relationships with their partner and their children. The current chapters in Part III, about love, loss, and all the in-betweens that occur during LAR work. After my conversations with the Tolman family over a few years, I continued to reflect on how language work changes us and our understanding of healthy positive relationships and wellness in our lives. How does a language learning replicate a form of an upbringing, life stages for adult language learners? Through various experiences in LAR, each person can’t help but to be changed if they are open to it. This “awakening” comes with awareness, reflection, and often involves a process of unlearning negative relationship

habits and *re*learning positive relationship habits and methods to prioritize wellness for themselves and their family.

Each person's language journey is far too expansive to discuss in the conversations between the language activists and myself presented in these chapters. I've chosen to highlight specific impactful experiences shared by each person which have either negatively or positively impacted their language journeys. The topics range from experiencing lateral violence to choosing to be the change they are striving for in their language communities. Ultimately, the journeys towards understanding and changing unhealthy relationships and social environments in a life-long endeavor. Much of the work begins with an awareness of how a person embodies teachings from their childhood and adult life that create, allow, and encourage unhealthy relationships and habits. The conversations I've had with the language activists here continue to inspire me to reflect on aspects of my own upbringing, education, and family. What do we understand and recognize within ourselves and amongst our families and communities that influence the ways we make, maintain, sustain relationships? Are these healthy positive relationships. The language activists here were called upon to reflect on the relationships they've experienced while pursuing language acquisition and how their understanding of various aspects of wellness, or lack-there-of, have impacted their language acquisition and teaching journeys. The narratives of language activists Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen (Mohawk Kanien'kéha), an Anonymous Indigenous Woman 2 (A2) in North America, the Sunray Family (Randi Sunray, Kiowa, and Cedric Sunray, MOWA Choctaw), and Ryan DeCaire (Kanien'kehá:ka Mohawk) each provide experiences and discussions about some of the most personal relationships within their language lives. The themes of love, loss, and all the in-betweens are represented through their stories. Following the narratives is a reflection chapter on how these journeys are part of a

life stages process of awareness, unlearning, and *re*learning. I compare my own experiences alongside critical conversations regarding intergenerational trauma, lateral violence, and efforts to decolonize relationships between partners, parents and children.

Chapter Nine: Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen, Mohawk Kanien'kéha

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide and Poetics ✧

[Poetics]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Learning about linguistic Relativity. I had first learned about Karonhyawake through his YouTube Mohawk videos featuring his translations and performances of songs by the Beatles and Dave Matthew's Band, as well as the Onkwawenna Kentyohkwa Star Wars videos (Doreen 2014 and Onkwawenna Kentyohkwa, 2013). In 2015, I asked Karonhyawake if he would submit some poetry to the "Language Lives: Native Language Poetry" competition I was helping to organize for the Mark Allen Everett Poetry Series at the University of Oklahoma.

He was also willing to collaborate even more by providing me with a recording of himself speaking the Mohawk sentences. For the poetry reading, I played his recording and then spoke the English translations after each sentence. An inspiration from an Anishinaabemowin and English poetry performance I had seen by Heid E. Erdrich and Margaret Noodin (2013) of their poem *Lexiconography 1, Aabjito'ikidowinan 1, Used Words 1*. Karonhyawake's poem, Nek ne yah tehonateryèn:tare "They just don't know" became a wonderfully meaningful exchange of knowledge and artistic trust.

For me, the poem represents different points on a language journey. A person growing to recognize the importance and values of ancestral language knowledge and looking back upon minds that have yet to understand this. The poem also represents an interpretation of what I came to learn as the "Jedi Paradox" (Manatowa-Bailey 2013). The theme of "unlearning and relearning" is about recognizing our own processes of upbringing and learned behaviors that influence our relationship making, which in-turn influences our LAR journeys.

Nek ne yah tehonateryèn:tare **They just don't know**

By Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen, 2015
Kanyen'kéha (Mohawk Language)

Kari:wes tsi náhe yonkwari:wayen.
I know that it's been a problem for a while now.

Nek tsi, tsi náhe kewennayenté:ri,
But since knowing my language,

Tsi niwakon'wé:sen nen' né:.
It's given me so much joy.

É:so ó:nen yonkwá:ti ne niyonkwarihò:ten,
The problem is that we've lost so much of our culture,

Nok ó:ni yah é:so tehón:nehre
And many people don't care

É'tho aonsahatiweyentéhta'ne.
to reclaim it.

Nó:nen ok nahò:ten tsi niwakon'wé:sen
When something gives me so much joy

Í:kehre onhwentsyakwé:kon akhehró:ri,
I want to share it with the world,

Í:kehre akhé:yehte ní,
I want to awaken the people from their sleep,

Í:kehre ahoti'nikonhrí:yohste, tsi ní:tsi ní:.
I want them to be at peace, as I am.

Nek tsi yotká:te á:yehre tsi yah thé: tha'tektényes.
But often it seems like I'm not making a difference.

Wake'nikonhraksà:tha tsi é:so tehonatohetstén:nis
It makes me feel sad when so many people are missing out

Tsi é:so yonáhsken ronnónha raotirihwà:ke
When so many have had so much stolen from them

É:so niyohserà:ke ká:ron tsi niyó:re wahatinákerate.
Many years even before they were born.

Wakerihwayé:was oh nontyé:ren tsi
I'm curious

Yah tehón:nehre ahatiweyentéhta'ne.
Why they don't want to get involved.

Rotihtherón:ni ken?
Are they afraid?

Yah ken karihón:ni tehonón:ni?
Are they apathetic?

Yah ken tehatirihwayenté:ri? Ratinén:ye ken?
Are they misinformed? Are they proud?

Yah ónhte té:kehre tsi yah tehoti'nikonhrowá:nen,
I don't think they are unintelligent,

Nek tsi tóka' nón:wa,
But maybe,

Nek ne yah tehonateryèn:tare.
They just don't know.

[Visual guide text]

Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen

Naagagaa: Turn it up!



Figure 45: Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Karonhyawake Jeff Doreen Mohawk Kanien'kéha

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ 20+ years of language revitalization and acquisition work
- ✦ Father
- ✦ Master-apprentice methods
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Artistic work with the language, music translations
- ✦ Musician
- ✦ Language teacher
- ✦ Media tools development

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

(“R” represents the voice of Royce. “K” represents the voice of Karonhyawake)

[✦ Starlog Notes]: After greetings and a brief review of the questions, we began our conversation about Karonhyawake’s language journey.

[► PLAY]

R: Could you tell me a little bit about how you started to learn your language?

K: My grandma took an interest in teaching me the language, how to read and write when I was a teenager. She made a tape of herself reading a dictionary. I would listen to that a lot. Then in my early 20s I took a college courses at Tyendinaga, that’s my community, in Mohawk territory. When my son was a baby, I would speak to him in the language. And then um, I put it aside for a bit, but I kind of dabbled in it a little throughout my 30s.

Then I noticed that my grandma was getting older and there was less and less people around that she would speak with. My grandma's name is Ada Doreen. And she used to speak with her sister, Nellie Brant. And that I remember those two were the last one speaking and then when my Aunt Nellie died, I remember it just seemed to get really quiet and there wasn’t a lot of people talking and it's because they say that my grandma was the last first language speaker from Tyendinaga.

So I wanted to make it a real effort to learn it well enough to have conversations with her. So, I took a course at McMaster University with Tom Deer here and then I went to a program to learn it in an adult immersion program at Six Nations Reserve. I worked really hard at that because I wanted to be able to talk with my grandma. So that was in 2007 when I enrolled there. I worked hard at that for a year and then my grandma passed away in November of 2008. So, I had been studying for a year at the immersion school and a few days before she died I had an opportunity to talk with her all in the language. But I used to talk to her on the phone in the language before that. But I remember this one particular time we were

talking and she was really proud of me for that and she looked around at my aunts and uncles and she said, “look, see he’s a real Indian. He speaks Mohawk!” *Laughter*

And I just felt really proud of what I was achieving. And I wanted to keep going in that direction. So yeah, then I did a master apprentice program with a guy from Six Nations. That was really helpful from 2008 through 2010.

In 2007/2008 I went to teacher’s college and I got my teaching certificate, a Bachelor of Education, and became a teacher in 2008. I was teaching in high school and then I went to elementary, then I went back to the immersion school, and just back and forth between those places. And then my son, he went to the immersion school in 2016. And he’s a real success story.

R: I remember when we first met and were talking on the lake at that little playground.

K: Yeah.

R: You said, you have two boys in the program. One of them was part of it before there was a payment to be in the program learning the language. You mentioned that you noticed that there was a difference in the way they kinda felt about the language.

K: Yeah, the one who didn’t get paid went on to be a really good speaker. Yeah, he was driven by his passion to do it, rather than for money. Well, my second boy, I don’t think it was money that changed it. He just had a different focus. That may have helped motivate him to start learning in the beginning, at least.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: We discussed a bit more about different experiences that have motivated each of our own language learning. Both positive and negative experiences are meaningful and have been teaching moments, impacting progress with language learning and interpersonal relationships.

[► PLAY]

R: What would you say are some of the most impactful relationships you’ve had that have gotten you through difficult experiences.

K: My mentor and my son.

R: Would you say that your mentor, that person is family?

K: Do I consider him family?

R: Yeah.

K: Well, he's not blood related, but I call him uncle. He's my teacher. He's older, like in his 70s. He's the one I did the master-apprentice program with. And I'd say my other friend and my son. Those three have really helped me to keep my hope. I'd say my son, he's the one who really helped the most after some difficult experiences.

He went on to be a superior language speaker. He's lived with elders for many years now. He's taught me a lot, in terms of the language, and he's given me hope.

I was just about to give up when he started in the program. Just to see his passion and drive, and his steadiness in the language. Not only did it inspire me, but it just helped me to be grounded and keep going. He said some things to me throughout the years that have inspired me. One thing he told me when he was 14 was, and this was probably maybe two years after I had started into my language journey, I said to him, "I wish I could just wake up one day and I just knew how to speak." And he was 14, and he said, "if that happened, just think about all of the relationships, all those you wouldn't have met. All of the lessons you wouldn't have learned. But because you have this opportunity to learn and there's these opportunities to struggle in learning your language, you're learning all of these lessons." He told me that when he was 14 and it was so wise. Those words were so wise. It's stuck with me to this day and it helps me. There's joy in everything.

There was a guy who really helped him (my son) a lot. He would talk about his attitudes about the language. He would say, "nothing is hard. You need to find the love in the process. Whatever it is in the process of what you are doing in language learning, find that to be something you love. Instead of telling yourself it's 'hard,' just enjoy the process and believe in yourself." Those are some of the things that help me to get through, to stay, um, to stay on track.

Now, we (son and I) talk every day on the phone. He's constantly teaching me words. I have a whole separate book just for words that he's teaching me. He's become a really proficient and successful speaker. And so, now I'm learning from him. He's giving me hope.

R: That's great. That whole experience.

K: And he's gonna be 27 in a couple months.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Finding teachers, mentors, and knowledge keepers throughout this work happens in so many different ways. The process of the student becoming the teacher, our children becoming the teacher, is such a sensitive and dynamic experience. I've been intrigued by his story and know there is so much more that can be learned about teaching in ways that raise other mentors.

[► PLAY]

R: So, during that change over time have you noticed specific aspects of how your relationship with him has shifted?

K: Oh my gosh, yeah. We had a stressful relationship when he was younger. My other kids, I've never had a stressful relationship with, except with him. I have four kids. He's always been a fireball, like a firecracker. He's always just kinda got a little bit of an attitude. *Laughter*

Anyways, he knows it. And we would butt heads so much before. And then when he was learning the language, we were forced to be in the same car for like half an hour drive to get to school and then we were at school all day together 'cause I was his teacher at the immersion program for that year. Because I had took a sabbatical for a year and I worked at the immersion school. So, we were in a car together all for half hour there and another half hour back, and then we were together all day at school. We needed to figure out how to get along!

K & R: *Laughter*

K: So, it really shifted when we both decided that we weren't going to speak English to each other anymore. We said, "how about 90% of the time it's going to be in Mohawk and we both agreed. It really helped us to be more, I think thoughtful of our words. And even just feeling so much connection with the to Earth and to our ancestors as we spoke. That really just gave us a peace and calmness.

And our whole family saw it too. They're like, "wow, these guys are actually getting along. They laugh so much together." Whenever we talk in Mohawk, we laugh so hard. Yeah

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: I asked about some examples of experiences on the opposite spectrum. Like with much of the work involved in LAR, the heart leads and needs to be protected by the relationships formed through the work. Karonhyawake discussed the confusing prevalence of lateral violence that exists alongside even the most heartfelt work. Having positive relationships with his mentors and his son who was going through the same language journey, helped him to move past some difficult experiences.

[► PLAY]

R: How would you describe some experiences that negatively impacted your language work?

K: There was a few people that began chipping away, it felt like they were chipping away at my legs. I don't know how else to explain it. I was on a good pace, sprinting. I had my eyes on the prize and I would get into a good rhythm. And whether it would be things that they said, or when I look back at it, a lot of it was lies...that I wasn't learning it (the language) right or doing it right to succeed. And these were people that I trusted a lot and to hear them talking like that made me question myself and that caused rifts between relationships.

When I look back on it now, I'm surprised about how much it took a toll on my hope. I'm a very hopeful person. That's one of my strengths. I have a lot of endurance. I don't give up easy. My dad taught me to not give up. And so those things that are my strengths, my ability to have such high hopes in myself and my people, I'm surprised how negatively that impacted those things that are actually my strengths. One thing it really impacted was my ability to not make a big deal about making mistakes with the language in front of people. That negativity really caused a huge change in my momentum for the worse.

R: Looking back at it, even if you're still working though some of that negativity now, what were some of the things you've done to move past those difficult experiences or to get to a point where you can even reflect upon it?

K: Time helped. Having someone who knew about the situation, my son, helped. But he became so fluent, so fast, that he didn't experience the same lateral violence that I did. Because I was going slower, this person could cut me down. I was a slow-moving target. I was an easier target. So having my son tell me I needed to believe in myself and tell me that what I'm doing is right.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: There are many types of experiences and contexts that cause tensions and rifts in relationships occurring in language groups. Miscommunication, particularly within the field of LAR, can lead to very damaging experiences. Lateral violence, in the form of vicious criticism, bullying, hateful words, jealousy, belittling, and such, all take a toll on "hope" and momentum. The solutions can be as unique as the contexts of each experience. However, if negative experiences are not being seen as being a form of "lateral violence" there are deeper issues of learned normalcy and acceptance of unhealthy behaviors.

[► PLAY]

R: What's your thoughts of the type of solutions for these negative experiences?

K: I'm taking this course right now called nonviolent communication. It's not a Native run course but I really think it would be helpful for Native people involved in language or any type of leadership to learn how to communicate with a nonviolent communication perspective. The concepts are easy in theory, but harder to practice. People's main needs are to be seen and heard. They want to be understood and we need to ask, "what do you need?" You're trying to help people understand their needs, to communicate with each other. Asking that helps to disarm someone. There's a lot more to it, but I think that's a place to start in helping people get through this lateral violence stuff.

I'm curious when people are doing lateral violence, is it that they're not aware, or do they actually know what they're doing and they want to do it anyway? That's my curiosity. And if they are doing it anyway, did they understand that that's actually what the oppressor wanted

in the first place? That's what colonization is. Part of the goal of colonization is to get the oppressed people to hurt their own people, that way they don't have to do anything anymore. Can't they see that they're just continuing on with what their goal of colonization is. I really get baffled when people continue in lateral violence.

R: From my experience, there are some things that are done unconsciously. I do think there is hope to work through that type of stuff but there has to be honesty.

K: I think a lot of it has to do with power. Oppressed communities feel a sense of powerlessness. And so, they're trying to get the power back in their lives. There are lots people who are doing good things and they're successful.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Our conversation really touched upon the complexities of the field of LAR and how the human experience is complicated by the ongoing colonization in smaller Indigenous communities. Identifying meaningful experiences and how to replicate those for continued growth is a constant question within this work. Creating meaningful memories through language work is a practical way to assist in remembering the language but it is a process that makes the language journey about more than just speaking better.

[► PLAY]

R: Could you tell me more about your process or experience of developing a relationship with your language?

K: My son talks about that. He said, "it's developing a relationship with *your* language. Saying that in English is important because it's *your* language. It's *my* language. It's not *the* language, it's *my* language.

So, a mentor of his told him, "we gotta stop calling this *the* language. I want to learn *my* language and from that point, what do you need to do to develop a relationship with your language?" So I need to think, "how will I foster a positive relationship with my language?"

There's all these different things that you can do to study, but what is positive and meaningful? It's deeper than that, too, right. Because it turns into, not only is this a relationship with my language, but my language is connected to my ancestors, and that's connected to their thoughts. It's connected to their experiences. Then that connects also to what we call the "faces yet to come." We have a word for that, Tahatikonhsontónty. Now, it's a relationship with my past elders and my great grandparents, but also my great grandchildren who haven't yet been born.

Some people will find that really to be a lot of pressure, and it can be a lot of pressure, but then it can also be really joyful too. Regardless of whether it's joyful or pressure, we still need to develop a relationship with that and figure out how to have a relationship with the struggle, success, or failure.

[■ STOP]

Chapter Ten: Anonymous Woman 2, North America

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide and Poetics ✧

[Poetics]

2.

*Everything was brown when i was born
family was a gradient ocean that was too wide to understand
but by age 6
my eyes learned to polarize and measure
i learned the difference between mother and father
was a continent
and 15 points on a chromatic scale
i knew then
i would spend the rest of my life
trying to fit into the craters crumbling between them*

-Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio "No Seed Left Unturned" (2014)

[Visual guide text]

Xuubaari 'aruwa'abaari 'Medicine Plant.'

Ceesha: Those are medicine.

Naagagaa: *grunting*

Ceesha: Those are medicine when harvested in the right way.

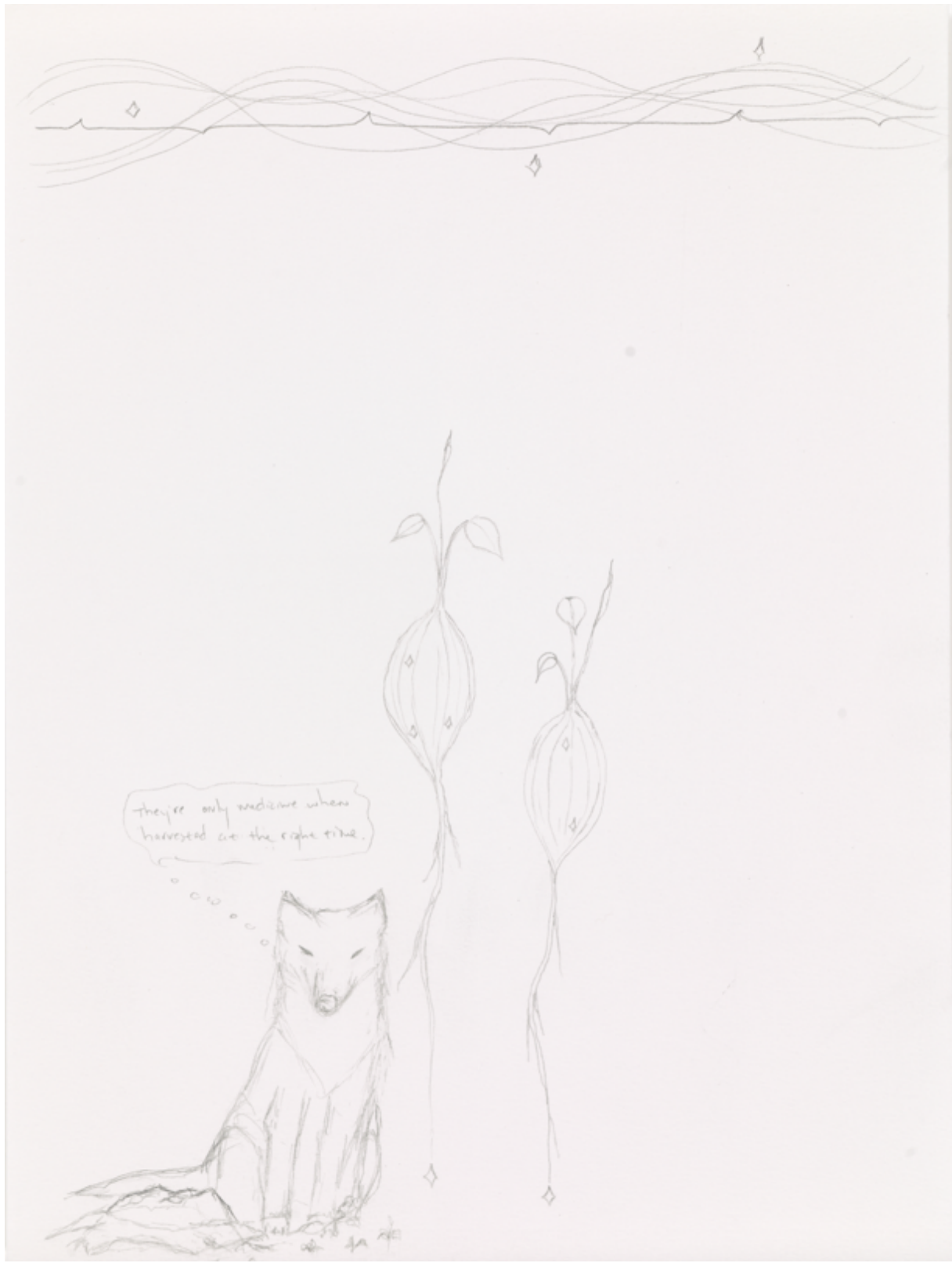


Figure 46: Xuubaari 'aruwa'abaari 'Medicine Plant.' Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Anonymous Indigenous Woman 2, North America

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ 15+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Mother
- ✦ Second language teacher
- ✦ Language department Director
- ✦ Language media development
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Grant writing

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

“R” represents the voice of Royce. “A2” represents the voice of the Woman

[✦ Starlog Notes]: The shift from student to teacher happens in many ways. This process is not always clearly defined or recognized. When entering into a social environment with preexisting relationships, it is very much like being reborn into another family. A person has to *relearn* their own upbringing within that environment. Communication may or may not occur that defines the new relationships and expectations of each person involved. The types of relationships built between the teacher/mentor and the student can aid or complicate the future shifts from student to teacher. As teachers, are we being taught how to best prepare our students? Are our students being taught to be mentors? What knowledge is really being passed on?

I’ve often thought about these questions within the context of harvesting plants and roots, both medicinal and for sustenance. There is the prevalence and immediacy associated with the types of relationships between the teacher and student when learning to identify, harvest, and prepare such plants for consumption and use. I would not trust to learn such knowledge from a teacher, a mentor, who I did not have a positive and consistent relationship with. That relationship is often clearly defined. The process of preparing to harvest, harvesting, and processing of the plants is also discussed and defined, explaining why actions are taking in specific ways. That process of cultivating and maintaining a relationship does happen with language knowledge learning environments, but it is not standard. The lack of this communication and reciprocal relationship can complicate the shift from being a student to a teacher. If words are medicine, then the relationships should also represent a process of medicine exchange.

The following woman has taught me so many wonderful lessons about the journey of becoming a language student and then shifting to being a language teacher and mentor. This shift has not been easy and she has been willing to share her reflections on the type of relationships she experienced with different teachers and how these have caused various experiences within her own language journey.

As mothers, we are very used to multi-tasking. During our conversation, we shifted our discussion multiple times to discuss our children, crafts, hobbies, and our work beyond just learning and teaching the language. I had to tend to my children a couple times and she was shifting between pumping milk and finishing some cultural art projects. The time we shared during this conversation reminded me of how much life happens in-between the language benchmarks and the shifts in students, teachers, cohorts, and program structures. Often, there aren't clear boundaries or separation between the professional LAR work and our personal lives. Social relationships within the speech group can also have blurred boundaries between professional relationships and social/family relationships. Some are very close and personal, while others can be distant. The success that this anonymous woman has had in her language learning and teaching is a point of constant inspiration. I've looked to her to share some very sensitive experiences about progress with language comprehension, shifts in professional roles, and the complexities of shifts in interpersonal relationships within her speech group.

The following conversations have been edited for length, clarity, and removal of any identity markers.

[► PLAY]

R: One of the consistent things that I've found amongst the language journeys of language activists is a high level of endurance and commitment to their work. But many have pushed forward without a clear guide of how to do what they are now doing. They go through a lot of different shifts in methods, program structures, and encounter a lot of different administrative and social issues, and almost all of them say they didn't have any guide to do what they ended up doing or achieving. They've learned and are continuing to learn as they go to *create* the program they are leading, how to navigate through administrative issues, how to build language teams and cohorts. And a lot of these experiences are exhausting. Rewarding. But creates more stress and tensions in relationships.

A: Everything you're saying I am 100% in the same boat with you. Because a lot of people, you know back in our heyday when we are being really successful and doing a lot of moving and shaking, everybody would ask us, "how would you do it? How did you do it? What's your guys' secret?" And I still don't know.

R: Yeah, wow!

A2: *Laughter* It came down to, like, we had a really good group of people that we meshed with each other. And, it's like you said, it's the people. And then when you really get down to the brass tacks of, "okay, well what is the system behind it?" We don't really have the answers.

R: Hmm.

A2: So, I was hoping you were gonna say something different. We're all in solidarity of, like, we don't know exactly how.

R: Yeah, yeah, and that's kind of what I'm investigating or looking into more. What are those dynamics that create the progress? And I'm not exactly at the point of, "this is the solution." Instead, it's more about exploring what those dynamics are, what are the experiences amongst different groups and with of different people who have been at this language work for more than a decade. What are the things that have been done, experienced, that others can learn from?

What I'm learning is there has to be a unified vision shared by the people, the speech group/cohort, that they're going after. And that is not just, "yeah, we all love and respect the language." That is kind of a given. But there is a clear plan.

A2: Yeah, they know what is the plan.

R: A clear process. They may not all agree on how they are getting there, but they are agreeing to participate in the plan and process. And they know the importance of getting there, of achieving the goals. [Edited for length, clarity, and removing specific names]

A2: And isn't it funny that the people that are the most outspoken are the ones who have never been involved? The ones that act like they know the most.

R: Yeah. It's hard knowing what is really going on. That's why I'm speaking with only a small group of language activists that I personally know and who have been doing this work for over a decade.

A2: I had a talk with another language advocate yesterday and we were both encouraging each other because we're also both going through the same problems with our communities. I think we all just get so excited to see each other (other language activists) and we have this camaraderie and relationships 'cause we're, you know, meeting the same like-minded type of people. It's really something that within our own community that we belong to, there's so few of us that we feel kind of alone so we are having to find other people in other tribes to relate to about the good and bad stuff. It's just hard at times to have that within our own community.

I think the problem is that we don't spend enough time together so that we can actually all streamline what we are doing. We only see each other at conferences or quick meetings, but if we were all in the same village for three months we might get somewhere to really figure out how we are doing what we are doing.

Relationship work after the pandemic is gonna be hard. Everybody I've talked to, they've lost several speakers.

R: Yeah.

A2: So many elder speakers lost. It's gonna be really tough talking about this type of work.

R: There definitely is going to be a lot to talk about. With methods, language acquisition, there are a lot of textbooks, there's linguistic stuff, there's shelves and shelves of second language acquisition theories and methods, but I'm still seeing a huge lack of the human nature stuff. The goals for relationships. The structures for dealing with the human experiences, the managing of personalities. Starting from the beginning of this work, there's no guide or structure for how to handle the human experiences, the burnout, the relationships. We are learning that it's just dealt with in one way or another, without really reflecting on how or the best possible way to approach various issues.

A2: Yeah, I don't know how many times that I've burned out. I used to not tell people that. I used to kind of just keep it to myself. But I found that other people are burning out too. And we need to talk each other off the ledges.

I've learned that burnout means that I push harder for newness and to rejuvenate. It's a constant cycle. But there's no guide of how. And I'm not sure how.

[■ STOP]

R: I think we all know, especially those of us doing this work for over a decade, we all know the variety of just odd experiences and negative and positive things that we've gone through to get where we are. To get to the place of success we've experienced.

But there are experiences where it's not about the language anymore. I've really turned to think on what is going on in-between the language learning. Not just the values associated with the language, but the value of each other doing this work.

Where do we start when we're creating our language groups, our cohorts? And what happens when we shift from being a learner to a teacher, or having a larger responsibility to create a program or change a program?

Could you share a little bit about your language journey, how long you've been focused on being a language learner?

A2: Yes, okay. So, I started in high school whenever they offered me classes. So it'll have been 15 years, wow. It'll have been 15 years now. Then I took a summer internship after high school and I've been actively doing immersion pretty heavily for 10 years.

R: During that length of time, could you describe the different types of language activities you've been involved with?

A: Yes. I started out with community classes once a week for about three or four years, and then I entered into an immersion program for four or so. And then I became an instructor for four or so years. And now I've been a director for, I think four years.

R: Wow, it's been four years!?

A2: Yeah!

R: It's gone by so fast!

A2: Oh, I can't tell if it's gone by fast or slow, but being a Director, it's just so different now!

R: And now you're a mom!

A2: Yeah, yeah!

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: In all of that work, could you describe your social experience at those different points in time?

A2: Yeah, yes. So, whenever I started working at the tribe and you know, actively coming around and during language work, I made a really strong connection with two speakers and they became pretty much the biggest grandmother roles in my life.

You know, I wasn't really close to my real paternal, maternal, grandmothers, so they were really the ones that kind of taught me a lot of things about culture. Not just language, but you know how to act and traditions and ceremonies that we have.

Um, I felt. A stronger connection and I started to learn and meet a lot more people. You know, it kind of was like me being thrown into being an adult because I was always like the little kid. That knew some faces of tribal members, but it was when I started working here (in the language program) I was able to talk to them and have relationships with them. I started becoming more known in the community. I really found my identity by starting to work here.

So, becoming a teacher, as the years progressed, people started coming to me for questions about the language or some ceremonial questions. They were wanting help with names, name translations, and it even got to the point where some people would ask me about some of our old stories. About how we run things in ceremonies. And that's one of, I think is at least, one of my biggest flaws is the social aspect of this. I've always felt really uncomfortable with my age and being in a role where I knew things, more than people who are older than me.

I'm still learning how to be comfortable with talking to people, being with elders and telling them stuff when they are the ones asking the questions. It just still feels uncomfortable. I also feel uncomfortable with being a *leader*. With saying, "this is what we should do, this is what I know, and this is what I think we should go forward with." It's hard to put myself out there with my age and appearance. That's something that I definitely need to work on.

I think my mentor, not the elder speakers, but my mentor who learned from the elder speakers first. I think my mentor was really good at that. You know, commanding attention and really, you know, walking the walk, and having a really good leadership role.

R: What were the dynamics of the relationships in your language group, your cohort? Specifically with your mentors and other language learners.

A2: Yeah, the first cohort was a couple elder speakers. I was really close with them. I got really comfortable with them. They were like my grandmothers. We're related down the line, but they were really the ones that I still have a really good relationship with. We care for each other.

My mentor was always the boss, leadership type and took care of us with whatever we needed, and really focused on our well-being. We were really pushed to prioritize the language in our life and to not ease up or anything. It was good to have that strong leadership type of parent figure in the group. What helped, was that it felt like a family.

I was dating another language learner at the time. We had a relationship together during that critical time of first learning to speak the language. I had, you know, like a buddy, and we would have so many opportunities to speak. And we were both competitive. He was going to school for linguistics and he would explain more things to me about that and his previous experiences with growing up around the language. I think that really helped push me towards being comfortable with the language, and we became conversationally fluent within a year. People say that's really fast, but I think it's because we just had so many opportunities to speak together and we just thought it was fun.

Now with this grant we have we're able to hire new learners and I'm really looking at personalities, relationships, and how people carry themselves in life, over anything else. Like you said, the pattern is people. So, I'm looking for certain characteristics and personalities to mesh well together. And yeah, I think having a really safe place to speak the language together was really important in the beginning.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Reflecting on the social environment that created her conversational fluency continues to reveal different clues about how such success was achieved. She's been very vocal, however, about how the experience baffles her because exactly "how" it was done is still unclear. We discussed some of my own experiences and how that momentum keeps getting distracted by human social issues. I'm still looking to other language activists to understand their processes of overcoming such hurdles.

[► PLAY]

A2: This isn't a 9 to 5 job and then you go home and then it's done. It will infiltrate your life. It will infiltrate your sleep, your time with your family, your relationships. And honestly, I didn't know what I was getting into either. I look back on my time and I think it's just so silly of me because I was having a blast. I was just like, this is what work is, we just do whatever our mentor said we need to do. I didn't know that I was going to become a teacher. And honestly, if our mentor had told me back then that you're doing this to become a teacher, I wouldn't have

applied. But luckily I liked it and I was good at it, and then luckily I understood that becoming a teacher is what it takes to keep the language going.

That's one of the big things for the grant we wrote and are using now, is that you are not in this to just be a learner. You're gonna be a teacher.

R: Um hmm. Yeah, I was talking with another language activist, who I've followed his work over the past years, well for like a decade, and he was sharing some of his experiences about this same type of mindset and type of intentions.

I was discussing with him that there is a vein of romanticism with some people who like the idea of learning language and culture, you know the "novice." There is a romanticism that they have because they don't actually know how much effort it actually takes to do intense language learning which consists of integrating cultural teachings, stories, ceremonies, and ways of being. It is work. It does take time and consistent effort. Especially when we're working to be a teacher. We're not always cognizant about that process or steps to becoming the next teacher. The methods are focused on language acquisition and there are so many different types of methods that confuse you and don't necessarily achieve the results you are looking for or that are needed to be a future teacher.

He came back with, he responded that, method wise, a lot of people think that you can just go sit down with an elder and learn the language, learn everything that you need to to be fluent. He said maybe it'll work, but it will take a heck of a lot longer to get to where you need to be and there are gonna be gaps. That's the romantic notion that becomes a problem. The type of progress we need for endangered languages takes a whole lot of more intentions, structure, consistency, and realistically, it's not just sitting around with our elders all day. There is a lot of trial and error happening behind the scenes.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: This is hard information to share, because some of the most meaningful relationships that language activists have are developed out of our time in just that exact same scenario. Having that social time with elders, that is very much like "family time" together sharing stories, meals, and laughter is a huge selling point for getting new learners. Developing a process and structure that creates those experiences while also pushing an intensive learning environment also does something to relationships between the learners and the mentors. We've established that most often, not always, the elders represent a very positive relationship that impacts the language activists for their entire life. What about the relationships with the non-elders in the speech groups, the mentors or the ones who are the driving force pushing the learners to the next achievement levels and benchmarks?

[► PLAY]

A2: Uh hmm. I've told you this before. Even if you tell someone in English, "go sit with this person and sit with them and speak for three hours straight," you can't even get through that

time just doing that. You gotta have intent. Preparation. If the way to become fluent was just to sit and talk then our schools wouldn't have curriculums for the students.

I think the romanticizing about learning the language is all over the place. Most people think we just sit around and talk all day. When I was teaching in the high school I was only teaching two classes a day but that was my full-time job. And there were always people wondering like, "well, you only teach for two hours, so what are you doing the rest of the day?" You know? No, that's on top of my administrative duties. Oh gosh, I'm sorry, I'm just dragging the topic away from your dissertation.

R: No, no. This is our conversation. These are the things that are impactful to relationships, and to the experiences in a person's life. There are all of these layers of responsibilities and other types of work that we don't think about or are trained for when shifts happen. You know, being a language learner, to then being responsible for creating an intensive language program. We could talk forever about the application of language acquisition methods, how to build language curriculum, and that kind of stuff, but even with the best methods, there are huge gaps of knowledge of how the success actually happens and how to socially replicate those environments and relationships that created that success. Or to avoid what caused the tensions and stress. (Rewritten for clarity and multiple issues condensed into a few sentences)

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: At this point in our conversation, we paused to discuss a bit more of our own personal experiences with these shifts.

[► PLAY]

A2: Yeah, yeah. I don't, I mean, I wish I did know (how her language cohort became conversationally fluent very quickly). Back in the day, because we got asked that a lot. What was it? What were you guys doing. I would be like, "I was just having fun with, you know, my grandmas and my mentor, and my boyfriend. I didn't know it was hard at that time.

R: Looking back on the work that you've done, what are some of the most important impactful relationships that you can identify or would like to share about that kept you going.

A2: Oh, definitely the speakers. It's all about them. I liked going to language classes before and I liked learning language. I knew I picked it up easily. But actually working with them and sitting down and getting to talk to them and know them, and understanding that they were one of maybe five or so left (who spoke the language), that really hit home and I realized really quickly that this was very important. So that was the most meaningful relationships.

Although, when one of my grandmas (who was an elder speaker) passed away, that was really scary. I kind of made a promise to my other grandma that I wasn't going anywhere and I

wasn't going to leave the program or stop doing it. My biggest thing is that I didn't want her to worry about the language when she was close to passing away.

A little before my grandma passed away, our group was separating. Another learner had left a few years previously. My boyfriend and I were no longer together and he had left. So it was just me, our mentor, and soon another intern.

My thing that carried me on through the burnouts and stuff at that time was knowing that MA (master-apprentice) wasn't going to work with only one of the elder speakers in our group left, but I didn't want my remaining grandma to be scared during the time she had left with us, that the language was going to go away.

R: Oh gosh.

Beyond the relationship with your remaining grandma, the speaker you've learned from, are there any other speakers in your group that your relationship has shifted with?

A2: Yeah, my mentor was always just such a steadfast character and was always the one that everyone, even outside of our group, looked to. It was very comforting to have my mentor as the leader. You know, there was a good amount of strictness that was kept in our group by our mentor. My boyfriend and I sometimes liked to tease our mentor because of the strictness. Gosh, we were horrible for the teasing, but our mentor was so serious and dedicated to the language and would get worked up about the grammar things, or learning certain answers for why a phrase was used in such a way by the speakers. Our mentor's life was dedicated to the language work and I know our mentor sacrificed a lot of things for it.

I didn't think that our mentor's leadership position, the administrative stuff, was really that hard until I had to do the work. I didn't understand why things were so difficult until my mentor left. And that shift was hurtful, you know. I was upset that my mentor was gone and I was left. I didn't understand how someone was so dedicated could do that because I didn't know all the work that my mentor was having to do. Now, I also have to step back and think about all the problems, you know, that you and I have talked about, the burnout, the apathy, the misconceptions and romanticizing. That probably got to my mentor, as well. How do you carry on? Maybe that was too much or maybe there was something more impactful happening, you know, leading up to my mentor leaving.

Because of those experiences, I guess you can say that we don't have a relationship anymore like we used to, or that we have very minimal contact now.

R: I'm really sorry to hear that.

A2: Oh, no, that's okay. I was really upset for a while because things happened in a way that I wasn't alright with or how I would have wanted things to happen, but as I'm getting older and now that I'm having to do more of what my mentor was responsible for, I see more of how people really saw my mentor as being just the language person. Even though my mentor was known by a lot of people, so much of my mentor's life was private. I hardly know a lot about my mentor's personal life outside of our language work. I think that made me really not think about that my mentor had a whole other life and personality that wasn't shared with me.

R: Hmm. You know, I've thought about, for a number of years, about what is that interpersonal dynamic in your group. What happens when the workday is over? How do you all socialize together outside of the language sessions, or at work? I've really thought about how your lives, and with other groups, how their lives are intertwined, but still separate.

A2: Yeah. I don't think my mentor was being secretive. I just always assumed that my mentor's life was so invested in the planning that my mentor didn't really have a life. But I was in my early 20s thinking like that. But my mentor never gave off any vibes of, like, "don't get to know me" or "don't get close to me," that's just how it was while we were at work. I also knew that while we weren't at work, there would be no contact between us learners and our mentor.

Having that extreme relationship where we're all around each other constantly to help with the language work, our personalities were all so different but it just really somehow worked out. Well until we all started to break apart and there were hard experiences during that time.

R: Yeah, a lot of my work now is on self-reflection, looking at what has happened and under what types of pressure do people end up doing what they do. How do we build towards teamwork and work through those experiences together or end up just growing apart or leaving? How do teams, like athletes, push so hard towards goals together and go through such stressful situations, but continue to have strong positive group dynamics? How can that be done with language teams?

A2: How do other groups do that? How do sport teams do that? How do social movements stay together? I don't understand that. I don't know if this is the correct kind of wording, but maybe it takes a sociopath to kind of start that movement!

R & A2: *Laughter*

R: Oh wow! Yeah, there is definitely a certain type of person that gets movements going. Who can keep people on track. Sometimes it's a person you either really love or you really hate. The person is a mover and shaker, putting in so much effort and endurance to do what they do. But is that actually sustainable. Is what they do and achieve replicable?

A2: My big thing that I'm really good at is dreaming big, but I don't have the best follow through for how to make each piece a reality. And so, I had a person working with me who was the exact opposite of me. She really helped me to see the different details and needs. That's why I'm looking for diverse people to be part of the program. I don't want all of them to be like me.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: I ended this portion of the conversation by discussing how important it was to actually come to that realization. Acknowledging how diverse people can be with their skills and personalities, as well as work ethics and intentions. Who do we envision being part of our language group, our team?

Realistically, who do we want to spend 8-10 hours a day with? Who do we want the people to be that we can speak with, relate to, create and vibe with for the next decades of our lives? If the language group ends up being the people we spend most of our time with, how impactful are we in each other's lives? Are we bringing the best versions of ourselves to the group?

Thinking about this idea of "the best version of ourselves" also brings up the issue of realistic sustainability. There are expiration dates on elite performance capabilities. In what ways are language group members growing together in their personal lives, as well as in their professional language lives? How can group members be cognizant of these relationship forms and processes, or is that just too personal for group members? Does such relationship goals exist? Does their personal and professional future include the creation of a functioning and sustainably healthy speech community? If so, what steps are being taken to recognize, define, and create that into reality?

These conversations have reminded me of simple details that can be lost or are out of view when we're sprinting towards language acquisition goals. There is no knowing how personal details may manifest in the future. Again, you can't help but be changed by your language journey and this change happens in profound ways. If an open and honest relationship does not exist between the group members, when will the discussions occur amongst the group members about their personal and collective journeys to becoming elder language knowledge keepers?

My conversation with Anonymous Woman 2 touched upon the growth in her language journey through the relationship she had with her boyfriend, group members, mentor, and elder speakers. She also shared an important issue of relationships ending. How are other language groups experiencing these types of relationship shifts as group members grow throughout their lives, from youth to young adults, older adults and some that are now *the remaining elder speakers*?

**Chapter Eleven: The Sunray Family,
Randi (Kiowa and Ponca) and Cedric (Mowa Choctaw)**

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual Guide Text]

Page 1: Maadigudá ‘Family/Those in the house.’ Sometimes we need to *remake* what family means.

Ceesha: Maa’arugiráshi ‘to be loved.’

Naagagaa: Giráshi ‘love.’

Ceesha: Xuubaari’ giráshi ‘medicine love.’

Ceesha & Naagagaa: Memememememe ‘Zzzzzzzzz.’

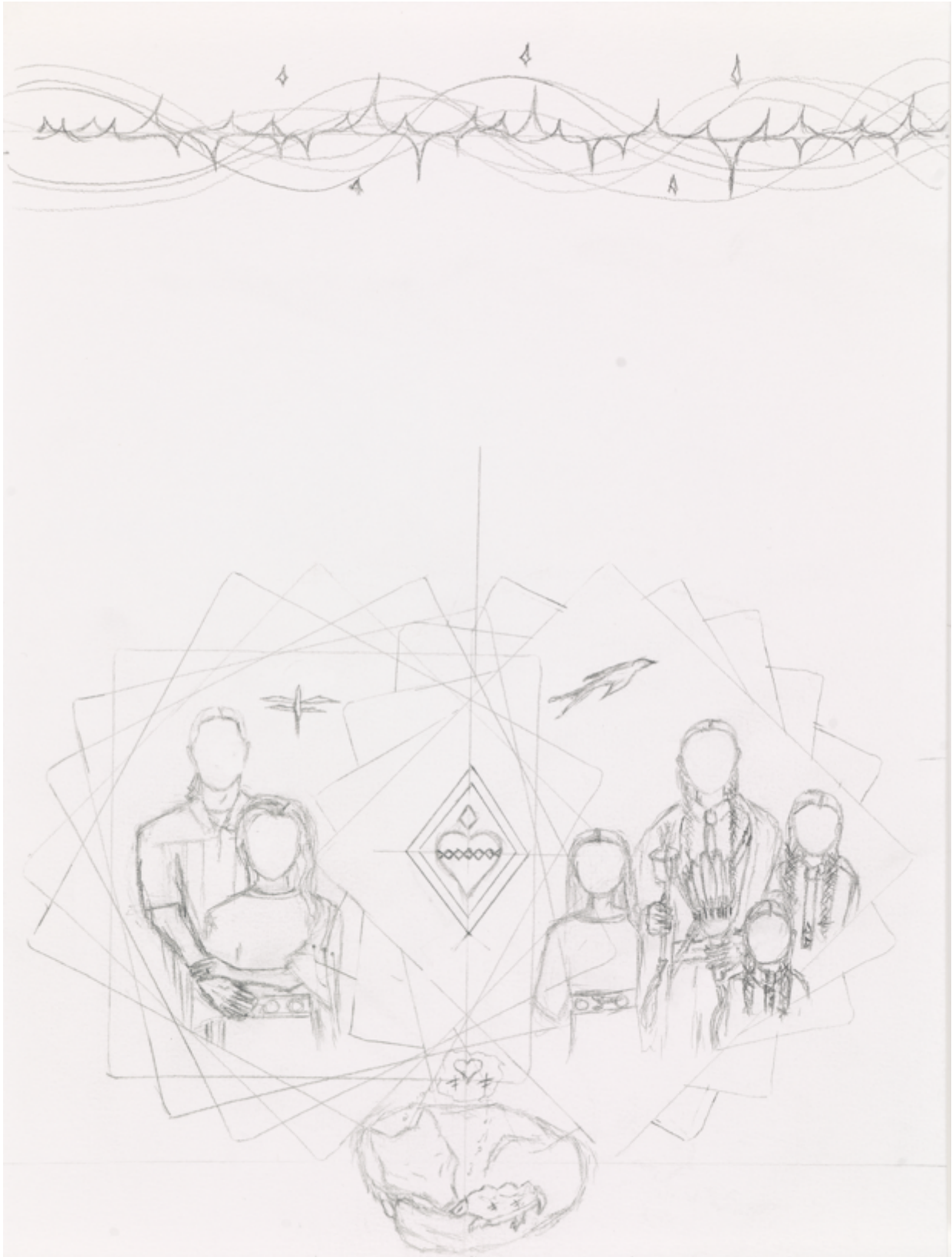


Figure 47: Maadigudá 'Family/Those in the house.' Sometimes we need to *remake* what family means. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with the Sunray Family

Randi Sunray (Kiowa and Ponca) and Cedric Sunray (MOWA Choctaw)

Recap of LAR work:

- 20+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- Parents
- Second language teachers and advocates
- Development of language nest
- Veteran (Randi)
- Grant writing
- Curriculum development
- Language documentation and preservation
- Sports and fitness advocates

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

“R” represents the voice of Royce. “RS” represents the voice of Randi and “C” represents the voice of Cedric.

[♦ Starlog Notes]: There are some relationships you encounter in your life that create their own light. That is the relationship that I have with the Sunray family. While I know many language activists who are married or are partners, I’ve chosen to include only one conversation with a married couple who represent some very unique dynamics. Each have different upbringings, they are from different tribes and speak different languages, but have embarked on an intentional journey together to honor each of their languages and cultures.

Indigenous language activists are often faced with difficult situations and choices, in regards to, marriage and partners. Many have expressed that they couldn’t be with someone who was not part of their own tribe or committed to honoring their own language learning and journey, if they are not already pursuing such a life together. While this is not the case for every Indigenous person, for those from smaller ancestral language communities there is the reality that you are related to most of the same tribal members and intimate relationships end up being restricted to people outside of your own direct language groups.

After initial greetings and reminiscing about our work and involvement together, we discussed the interview questions and focused on issues related to relationship wellness and navigating the complexities of partners being from different tribal communities with different languages. I was forward in acknowledging the impact of the social environment created by the Sunray family through their language programs and work. My children and I have been able to experience a wealth of community and family because of these language activities in their Kiowa Kids programs, language nest, and other community activities.

The purpose of these narratives is not to provide detailed information about each person’s or family’s journey to wellness, nor to classify the vitality or wellness of their language groups. Instead, these are glimpses into impactful experiences that have shaped, influenced, and defined the ability of an individual and their family to have consistent engagement in their language acquisition and revitalization efforts.

[► PLAY]

R: I would not have the relationship I do with you guys if you had been doing Kiowa Kids and you told me your kids can't be involved because we're not Kiowa.

C: Yeah.

R: Kiowa Kids was one of the few language groups where my children could continue to be with other native children, even though, we were not of that tribe. That's what I gravitated towards. That's what I wanted, a space where my kids could just be with other native kids in an environment of learning the language and playing and having positive experiences. I wouldn't have stuck around if it wasn't that type of experience.

We, my kids and I, absolutely know the impact that such positive environments have had on us individually and as a family. These are experiences that will last throughout our lifetimes. As a family, you and Randi have worked to create an environment of wellness as a family, while also committing time and energy to language work.

How did you and your wife begin to navigate through being from different tribal communities and with multiple different languages? Was it in your mind to proactively address how you would keep learning your languages and teach your children the languages?

C: How did we navigate using both languages in the home? That's what you're asking?

R: Yeah.

C: I don't think we really had a conversation, did we?

RS: No, I didn't...

C: Do you remember?

RS: Well, for me, probably the only reason why I would have even ventured into trying to talk Kiowa is because of Cedric. Had he not been so, I guess, passionate about language, Choctaw language, or language in general, I probably wouldn't have took a strong interest. Even though it was important to me.

You know, I had dated a Kiowa and another guy but they were assimilated. Not all of them, but some were not as connected culturally.

When I met Cedric he was all about his culture, which I was the same way about my own tribe. I always went to Gourd Clan.

C: Yeah, my wife was always cultural.

RS: But, as far as the language piece of it, I took it in college and I was trying to learn some stuff from my grandma and my mom. I'd visit with her because she knows a lot. But there was never

a conversation about it. He (Cedric) really encouraged it (language learning). I think the key piece of why it was two languages, is because he was willing to learn my language.

R: Hmm.

RS: And most people aren't like that. I think they're very kind of focused on their stuff, their own language and cultures. But I don't think we would have both languages had Cedric not learned my language.

And you know, we tease him because he don't have that Kiowa pronunciation all the time.

RS, R, & C: *Laughter*

RS: But, he knows a lot and he's created an opportunity for our kids to know a lot. I do not speak it as much as I should, and even my boys are correcting me now. I'm not saying the words when I should but I'm doing that more with my boys.

I really think it was probably more of Cedric being who he is that encouraged us speaking both our languages. But, you know, I was also willing to learn Choctaw, so it was kind of mutual.

C: Yeah, that's what I was gonna jump in and add but I didn't want to cut off my wife.

When I met my wife, she was very cultural. Her mom is very, very cultural. I mean the very second date her mom gifted me an eagle feather.

RS: *Laughter* Gaw!!

R: *Laughter* She roped you in right away!

RS: But I was telling her how much I really liked him!

R: That's an old trick! She married you off right then and there!

RS, R, & C: *Laughter*

C: It was just very easy to, you know, learn the language from there on because I was with someone who's family is already very cultural and invested in Kiowa culture. My wife's mother is a war mother. My wife's brother was a song keeper. He probably knew over 120 songs. He was also highly invested in the Ponca language and community classes prior to when I came around.

My wife had been invested in the community dances and she comes from a fluent speaking family, so it wasn't even like a conscious decision where we sat down and said this is what we were gonna do. It was just a given.

RS: It was already part of our way of life. I guess we just found each other and supported that way of life.

C: But this is the hard part that no one wants to hear. Taking the steps to learn the language was kind of easy. The same way my wife and I we don't have a conversation about who is doing the dishes, we just don't think about those things, they just organically happen. We don't have a list or a plan. We're just always, we've always been supportive of each other.

RS: Cedric is more of, he likes things in order. *Laughter* He likes doing dishes more than me.

RS, R, & C: *Laughter*

C: My wife's strengths tend to be my weaknesses. Yeah, just things like that.

R: But you've learned this by going through it, though.

C: Yeah, yeah. By the time we met, we were 26, 27 years old. We had already made mistakes, you know what I'm saying. We were already figuring it out. It's hard when you're young and you get with somebody. We were already figuring our lives out so it made it easier. And my wife says, when people come to her and have ideas in their heads about us having a "perfect marriage." And my wife says, "no, we have a healthy marriage."

And there's a difference.

You know, and I think with language revitalization or using your language in your home, obviously, if you have a healthy marriage, it makes it easier.

R: Yeah.

C: You know, there are already so many obstacles that you have to overcome already and trying to do that, learn and speak the language, and if you're already having conflicts in your marriage or relationships, then that just isn't going to happen.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: What are some of the most important impactful relationships that you have had in your wife's family that have motivated or sustained the language work you do as a family?

C: We have numerous kids, so of course we want to impact our kids in the most positive way we can. In language, we knew it is a good foundational reality for Indigenous kids. Knowing who they are is important and language is one way to do that.

My wife's family are speakers. My wife's mom is a speaker. Her grandparents were fluent. Her dad's side of the family, her Ponca grandma was a fluent speaker. Her dad was raised in an all Ponca speaking household.

So, do we want to be the generation that walks away from it? No pressure, right?

Laughter

My wife's brother was a big influence. He was a song keeper, all in the Ponca language. So, even though, we haven't been directly invested in Ponca, my wife's brother really gravitated towards his dad's Ponca culture and my wife gravitated towards her mom's Kiowa culture and language.

My wife's brother and her were joined at the hip, super close. He's passed away a few years now. We were real close and he was a good influence. He really loved his language and culture. He sat at the drum as a head singer. Those are things that I've never really been involved in. I was more interested in the language, that's my focus.

But the language for me wasn't a pursuit of identity, I was raised in a mixed language community in Key West. The Cuban kids I grew up with, they spoke their own dialect of Spanish. All the Bohemian kids I grew up with, we all went to festivals like Goombay and knew everything about the ways of fishing and netting, and everything to do with cultural aspects of the conch shell. That was normal to me growing up. When I left the island, the mainland of the United States was a completely different world than the one I grew up in.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: During our conversation, Randi had to step out. Cedric continued to discuss more of the questions with me.

[► PLAY]

R: Could you describe some of the most impactful relationships you've experienced within your own home community and the ones in your wife's community or family?

C: Yeah, so, the first thing, in my own tribal community is the freedom to do the work (language). I had no one looking over my shoulder and being critical. Which I know it's hard to believe. But I just didn't have it. It was just like they saw this young guy who's a tribal member who loves the community the way our own people love our community and he wants to try to work with his language, and so we're just gonna give him reign to go out there and put it together and do everything he can.

Now of course my aunt, Loretta, you know, she was the one that's been teaching the language in the community since 1965, right. She's one of my relatives but she's not even from our tribe, but she is of our tribe now because they met, Uncle Galison and her met when they were at Bacone Indian school in Muskogee, Oklahoma. She's a Cherokee from Oklahoma. By the time she was 19 she was living in our community, and she really pushed things along with her husband. Being connected to them, you know was a big deal.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Long-term relationships. These seem to almost be something of the past, that our elders and their elders were able to achieve and maintain. The “long-term” aspect of this work is to understand the wellness aspect of this work to foster and maintain positive long-term relationships for consistent language communities. Personal relationships, such as a partnership, a marriage, are part of the complexities of creating language communities with families and parents. As a parent, I’ve made choices to be a single parent in order to maintain emotional and physical wellness for my children and myself. Raising the next generation of language speakers in the most simplistic terms, requires each person to be a living example of wellness and the best possible choices to maintain that wellness. Being a good person, a healthy person, is a lifelong task. This most often translates into our abilities to create a positive social environment for ourselves and other language learners and teachers.

[► PLAY]

C: Everyone else was just so encouraging who had language knowledge. They were just like, “here, here is a bunch of stuff I’ve written down from my family.” That’s basically what it was. Because they could see that I had the capacity to develop all of it into something cohesive. I think that’s something people had been waiting on for someone to develop it into something that could be disseminate to the community.

That was the first thing that I did was creating these booklets with an accompanying cd with them. We mass produced them. There was like only 36 hundred people in my tribe, so every family got one for the most part.

It was the right kind of curriculum at that time. This was after I gained some experience and knowledge. It was the right kind, meaning that it really hit the basic, basic stuff that we all utilize in our lives. [Summarized] Those experiences influences some of the learners in the programs. My niece, who was part of that program, is now employed at the cultural center and museum.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

C: It’s just cool to see the growth. I’ve been nothing but supported in my own tribal community but I don’t live in my community. I’ve spent a lot of time in my community, but I’ve never permanently relocated there. That is helpful. When people see you on a day-to-day basis, they get tired of you. *Laughter*

They do. I see it all the time in the programs I’ve worked with where people are tired with each other.

R: Yeah, I think that is something that is not in the forefront of our minds, but it’s a phenomenon that people experience. More people seem to participate in the intense weekend language sessions or the brief summer language programs where they come home to their tribal communities and there is a lot of high energy activities. People are encouraging about

these visits, but something changes when the same people decide to move permanently back home. That initial positive energy dissipates. Those high points don't consistently last through long-term work in language activities.

C: That's the whole thing with dating, right? The dating part is great, it's the other part afterwards that's difficult. *Laughter*

R: You don't quite understand why that is happening. I certainly experienced that. Coming home for the summer. Volunteering for workshops and projects. There was overwhelming support during those years I was an intern and volunteer. The moment I took a long term paying job doing the same work, that's when I first started to be treated like I "took" something from other community members. My relationship with some people changed. There were both positive changes, and also very negative changes.

C: That is one thing I haven't done. I've never taken money from my tribe for this language work. It's easy to not be criticized when you're not receiving a paycheck or anything financially in return for your work. No one can say, "oh, he's just trying to get money from us." Again, that's my privilege that I haven't had to take money from my tribe because I have other income.

Me and my wife, we have been able to contribute to both of our tribes through programs and projects without directly working for our tribes. That's probably why we've escaped that criticism from our own tribes. We're not taking from them financially.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Yes, this can be said of many professions. The complexities of these situations with language programs are further complicated because language acquisition can only be achieved over long-term participation and practice. Social relationships can become hyper-sensitive and desensitized over long-term periods. People either decide to just accept issues and personalities or they distance themselves from each other.

A few points have resonated with me from my conversation with the Sunrays. While they have a wealth of value for their cultures and the work they do with their languages, they are aware of the aspects of their lives that impacts their journeys. Financial support is very impactful to their ability to do the work they have done.

Yet, positive energy also impacts the same ability or motivation for time commitment and involvement in the same work. Positive environments reinforce a person's will to stay and maintain relationships involved in LAR work. Long-lasting relationships are needed to build communities of speakers. Having examples of healthy relationships to reflect upon and learn from is one way to pursue awareness and engage in a process of unlearning and *relearning* to create positive healthy relationships and social environments. More research is needed to identify existing language programs that are inclusive of methods that directly address the needs to create and maintain long-term healthy fluent families and communities, not just individuals.

Chapter Twelve: Ryan DeCaire, Kanien'kehá:ka Mohawk

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Page 1: Awa'óoshee 'to plant seeds' is to envision and work for a good future.

Ceesha: *gnaw* *gnaw*

Naagagaa: Mabi cagic 'day good' EVER!!

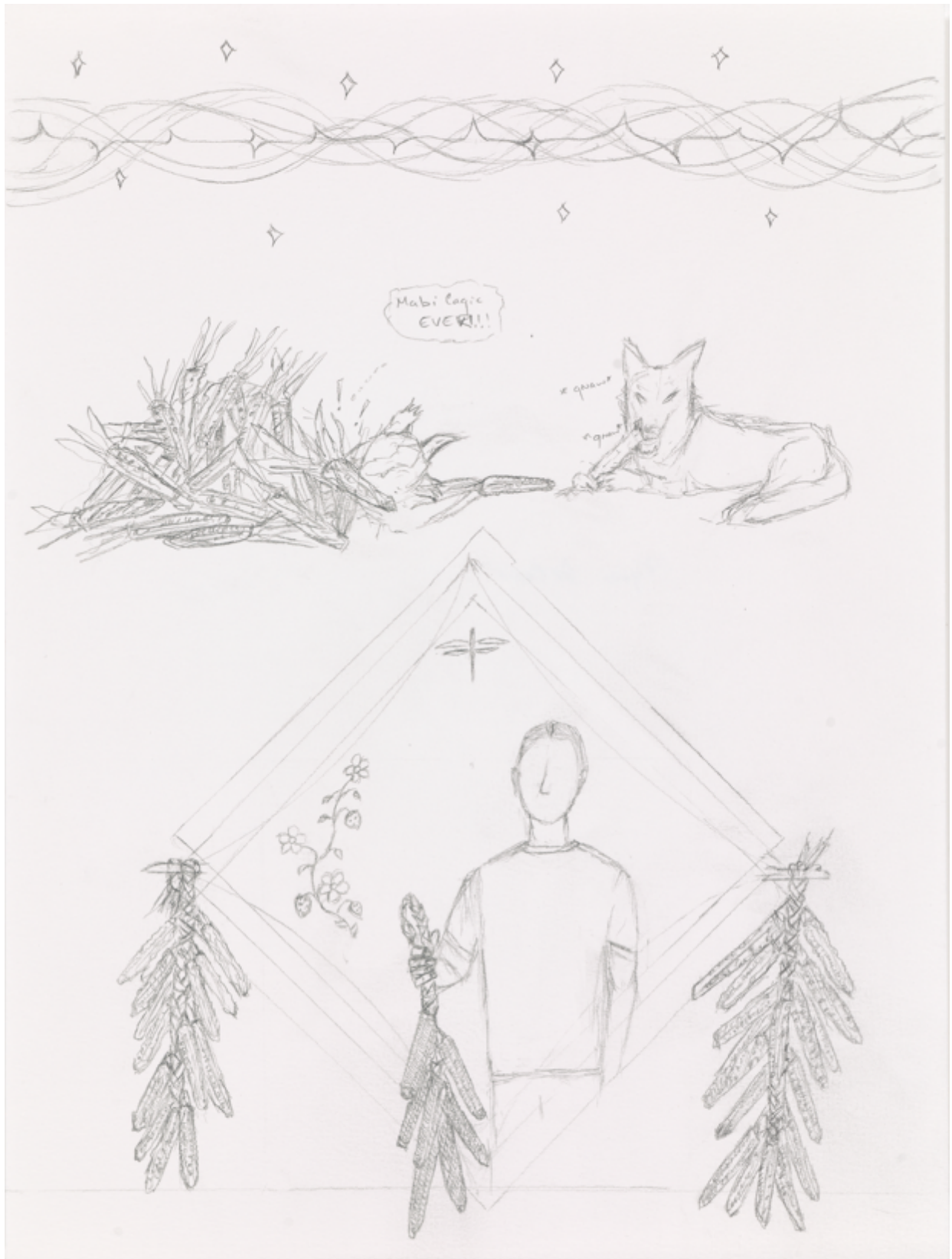


Figure 48: Awa'óoshee 'to plant seeds' is to envision and work for a good future. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Ryan DeCaire

Kanien'kehá:ka, Mohawk

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ 15+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Intensive adult language immersion
- ✦ Language teacher
- ✦ Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Centre for Indigenous Studies at the University of Toronto
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Farmer and horticulturalist
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Grant writing
- ✦ Ph.D. Candidate in Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization Program at the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

("R" represents the voice of Royce. "RD" represents the voice of Ryan DeCaire)

[✦ Starlog Notes]: Initial greetings were said and a discussion about everyday lives and families. Ryan had reviewed the questions and we chose to focus on a more sequential order of questions about the development of his language journey. The following narrative is in sequential order and is only about 30 minutes of a nearly two-hour conversation.

[► PLAY]

R: Is Mohawk the main language you've been focused on and for how long?

RD: How can you tell when you start, you know? So, I was born and raised in a Mohawk community called Wáhta. It's a mohawk reserve with a small community. And like anybody who grows up on a reservation. You hear it (the language) and you kinda wonder why people say "hello" and "goodbye," and a few other things, but that's about it, you know. My grandparents spoke like many people. There wasn't nothing special about my involvement and I didn't go through an epiphany or anything like that.

There was just a time where I realized that, hey, I wanna connect to these old people. You know. I want to spend time with them and get to know their life experiences through their first language. Right, so at one point, you know, I was a young man, probably I guess 18 something around there, and I started visiting the old people more consistently. Recording them. I didn't speak anything. So maybe that's the beginning of my language work great when I started visiting with them with the purpose of trying to record them and trying to be involved.

Then I took it seriously and started learning it and at some point, whenever I became a decent speaker, then I lived with the old people. These two older ladies in their 80s and 90s. I

lived with them for a number of years. And basically, like you, just spending my time with old people all the time.

R & RD: *Laughter*

RD: Ever since then, I've been working, you know, to run an adult immersion program called Onkwawén:na Kentyóhkwa in Six Nations. I think it's the first adult immersion program in the world for this language at Six Nations.

I'm there and a Prof. at the University of Toronto in Linguistics and Indigenous Studies. But those two foci are different. One is specifically focused on creating speakers in the community that will have the capacity to restore intergenerational transmission by bringing the language back in the home. Targeting adults, recognizing that intergenerational transmission has been broken and when it has been broken for the most part, you can't focus on children without focusing on adults because children are going to speak if the people around them don't speak.

So, you need to create teachers and you need to create parents. More importantly, you need to create environments. That's kind of why I've been involved with the adult pieces. Saying, yeah, if we really think the children are the future because of our situation. Then really, that's the adult center that is the future in order to make that happen for them.

And you know, I believe that firmly because people often will put the burden on the kids and be like, "yeah, I'll send them off to immersion and then they'll become speakers one day and I won't have to do anything about it.

Really, anybody that has that attitude realizes it doesn't really work out too well.

R: Uh-hmm.

RG: At the University of Toronto as a Prof., I'm more focused on language realization theory. Talking about how to revitalize languages and to create good neighbors. Most of my students there are non-native and interested in this issue. The target there isn't creating speakers, necessarily, right.

So that's my long way of looking at it. Yeah, I'm 33 now, so maybe I've been in it 15 years, give or take.

R: Yeah, alright.

RD: Although, you know, I think just being born in the community I was born into. Everybody is, even if they don't realize it.

And there's been ups and downs along the way, just like you've described. You know, sometimes you feel great and gung-ho, right. And other times you're like screw this, I'm peacing out! Why!? I love these people, but I can't stand these people.

R & RD: *Laughter*

RD: And then you come back and then you work hard again. Like any relationship, like any marriage, I guess. *Laughter*

You know, you understand that. You get fed up and wonder why nobody is trying this hard or something else. But you can't leave your people. We've got a responsibility for this language. That's how I feel about it. It always guides me.

In the language there is a word that describes that everything is given a responsibility to maintain life. We're given responsibilities too. And that's to maintain the language, you know.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: At the beginning of our conversation, we spoke about very personal issues were going through. These conversations were also times that the other person and I could catch up on our work, our experiences, express our frustrations and inspirations. Explore and reflect on the questions about why we keep doing the work we're doing. We are each living with a weight of responsibilities of being mentors and teachers.

[► PLAY]

RD: I don't do it because of what's at stake, though. I've never done it with that reason where you think, "oh, there's people, everyone is dying, there's not many speakers left. If we lose the language, it will lead to the depletion of our way of thinking and living within their particular environment, which is going to contribute to the loss on a global scale of how human beings think." Which is true. That's so important. It's a reason to do it, but it's never been the reason why I do it. It's just because that's who I am, you know.

I want to connect to the community. I want to connect to my people. At the end of the day, that's really what guides me.

One thing that compels me is, yeah we better document those speakers. We better spend time with them today 'cause they're not gonna be around for long. That's true, but it's not going to maintain my real motivation overtime. It might kind of spark some interest and push me to work harder, a little bit. But, end of the day, you gotta do it 'cause that's who you are and it's a beautiful language and so forth.

R: Hmm. Do you have kids yet with your partner?

RD: That's still on the plans. She's Mohawk, too. Um, we got a dog. It speaks Mohawk.

R & RD: *Laughter*

RD: Eventually when we have kids, we'll work our hardest to have them be bilingual or multilingual speaking children. We won't just focus on Mohawk, we have a family of languages. Iroquoian languages. Mohawk, Haudenasaune, Oneida, Onanadaga, Seneca, Tuscarora. Historically we all spoke those languages. So, it's a goal of mine to at least speak a few of them.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: This is the only part of the conversation that I deviated from the sequence of questions. I had forgotten in our initial discussion to clarify if he prefers to use a different title. His explanation touched upon the responsibility that comes with a title, as well as how it can be confining.

[► PLAY]

R: In my dissertation, I'm using the term "language activist." Is there another way that you describe yourself?

RD: I've never described myself as an "activist." Not to say that's not a good way of describing it. I don't like to give myself a label, that regard, because I don't want people to think it's up to the pros to do this work.

R: Hmm.

RD: People often are like, "oh, we gotta wait for the linguist or the super speaker that created the language." At the end of the day, a language survives when people speak it. You don't have to have a skill to learn a language. We all learn languages quite easily. If everybody took on a little bit of the responsibility, it'd be a whole lot easier. That's for sure.

It (the language) has to be spoken, not studied. You revitalize a language by speaking it, not talking about it.

So, I don't know, I guess teach, student, practitioner, maybe? I don't wake up in the morning and think, I'm going to be an activist for the language. I wake and go, this is important, this is the way I want to live my life.

RD: If I think about an activist, I picture maybe protesting the government for language rights or for funding. Although I am involved at the periphery in those types of things because I think they're important.

My focus at the end of the day, is trying to imagine, "well, let's say we had no money and there's no laws to garner interest or protect the language through policy. What can we do still?" At the end of the day, we still have our mouths and we still have our communities, and we can still speak. Nobody's gonna tell us what we can and cannot do in our own houses. So how do you work in the best way that is going to ensure that people can feel empowered to do that without any support?

I'm always thinking about that, you know. 'Cause residential schools, boarding schools that people went through and yet some of these communities still have quite a few speakers. How'd they do that? Back then languages were outlawed, and they still spoke it. They went through way harder times than me.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: I've experienced that it's hard to find people who are motivated and who take the time to uphold those responsibilities. We're seeing the outcomes of assimilation. The ways in which it manifests in our society and our community.

We glaze over the issues of language endangerment that are influenced by our peoples abilities to be "good neighbors." You know, or just good to each other. Unless it's already engrained in you, those actions are not something people make sure that is happening while we're teaching language methods.

RD: One thing I'll often say is. *Exhale* That the problems in our Native communities is that people go to jail, our people are victims of spousal abuse, diabetes, being overweight, unhealthy, so on and so forth. And there's all these band-aid solutions. Like maybe social work. You gotta talk about the issues.

That's why I often say that we need more language practitioners and less social workers 'Cause language learning is really how we're trying to reconnect our people, right. If you want get down to the root causes and fixing our challenges, I think language is a great avenue. It might not be the only thing we need to do, but it's certainly one of them.

R: Yeah, yeah. And with all of that said, over that length of time that you've been intentionally involved in language acquisition, what are some of the most impactful relationship experiences that you've had?

RD: What do you mean relationship? How do you define that?

R: So relationship, here, is anything like a mentor-apprentice relationship, to family relationships, to administrative relationship that have supported your language work.

RD: Um, well, I've never been in mentor-apprenticeship thing. I've just spent time with people and visiting old people. That's been great 'cause that's connected me to how things were once in the community and giving me that knowledge to pass on to future generations. Not just the language, it's being around them and hearing their stories and then feeling connected and happy to pass their knowledge on.

You can see what those old people, as you've noticed, they all they want do is share. At least the ones that wanna share, that's all they want to do and they feel so happy that there's young people actually interested in what they have to know.

But also, my life changed when I really got involved with the language in the sense that, the only people I have hang out with now are Mohawk speakers. They're my only friends now and that's because I always want to speak Mohawk. Right. So, your life changes are not regard.

Some people will call in a sacrifice. I don't think so. Why would you call it a sacrifice? You know I'm missing out on anything. It's better to be able to have an opportunity to speak your language and learn that. Heck, it's really nice. I think that's probably the big one (impactful

relationship), too. You know, my life, in a way, gets shaped around the fact that I'm always looking for Mohawk speakers.

Whether it would be choosing my partner who wants to speak Mohawk, great. If she didn't want to speak Mohawk, I wouldn't want to be with her. *Laughter*

R: Hmm.

RD: That sounds pretty rough, but it's true. That's how it is for me and that's how it is for her, too.

R: Yeah.

RD: Right, 'cause we kind of want to Mohawk speaking kids.

And I shouldn't say that all my friends are Mohawk speakers, but maybe 95% of them right? I'm just really focused on garnering those relationships with people who speak it. In a way, I'm often friends with people who don't even share the same interests, other than speaking the language. That's not the only thing that you can have interests in. There's what food you eat and the things your kids do or what you enjoy doing?

Sometimes I hang out with people that I wouldn't even listen to their kind of music or eat their kind of food. They're not my kind of people, but we're still good friends *laughter*. Because who else you gonna speak the language to?

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Within a few minutes of this discussion of the most impactful relationships, Ryan has described key issues that consistently exist amongst language groups. They are brought together for the language, it's the glue holding them together. Many of the group members don't always share personal interests beyond their passions for the language. If there are not shared interests, activities that each person participates in, of course there would be a lack of time spent together outside of the language sessions or workplace.

[► PLAY]

RD: I found that's (language speaker relationships) maybe been beneficial to me, as well. Otherwise, I'd probably just hung out more with my own kind, so to speak.

R & RD: *Laughter*

R: So, what is your own kind then?

RD: Like, if everybody spoke Mohawk, then I could pick and choose, right? That's really all I mean. Now you can't pick and choose, right, in order to take advantage of the opportunities you have to speak the language.

Heck, there's even people I speak to who I'm not supposed like because they did something bad to my Grandfather or something. Well, who cares? Let's leave that. Because at the end of the day, the language is important and if we don't focus on it now, it's going to be gone, so who cares about that? Let's let those little grievances pass, get over it and let's speak the language. I'm pretty sure that if it wasn't for the language, maybe I could have been just as bad as everybody else and have a chip on my shoulder and not have tried to heal some relationships in that regard.

R: Yes.

What else are you involved in besides the language activities? Obviously, we all have our own lives where we intentionally are engaged with the language, but that's not all we do. Language is constant, but there's more we are involved in.

RD: Originally, I'm a farmer. Raising cattle, sheep, and pigs. Market gardening. I've always been into food production. Specifically focused on how we as Haudenosaunee have grown food since way back in the day. So I've always been interested in that and cultivating heritage crops. So, I've developed community food initiatives in my community called Tsi Tewaienthoi:tha' "Where We Plant Together." We grow food together. It's not really like a community garden, but the whole community comes together to share their knowledge and plant together, and then harvest that and have potlucks throughout the year. To share in this food that we grew together.

So that's one of the big things that I'm into. Growing food and being on the land. Usually I'm often doing that. I'm doing language or spending time in the garden or out of the bush. I like to go to ceremonies. I like to cook. I like to watch movies.

R & RD: *Laughter*

R: Yeah, all of stuff!

RD: I like to do carpentry. I like to build baskets. I like to do it all, as much as I can. *Laughter*

R: How much would you say, just for your sanity, is that you gotta do those things. That it can't just be the language.

RD: Like I said earlier, the language shouldn't be your only identity because that leads to burnout. Especially when you realize that not everybody else is doing that too.

R: Hmm.

RD: We should be the opposite of hoping that a few people become crazy language super activists, super speakers. It's where everybody should be all engaged in it.

I don't know how to answer that. I have to do other things. If I was only doing language work, I'd go insane. There's so much work to do, right. It's never ending. This work never ends.

You know, I do my best to work on creating speakers and just become a better speaker myself every day.

But you realize that there is just an unsurmountable amount of work to do for one individual. You can't do it all. You have to bring it back a bit, make sure you're eating good food, drinking enough water in the day. Having some fun outside. That kind of stuff. People often forget that.

People keep saying, what's a good strategy for learning language. Well, the first thing is look after yourself. Get good food. Get good exercise. Drink enough water in the day so you can *feel good*. And people often will leave those kind of things out of it.

R: Yeah, when I look at the different types of methods, you know, the intense language learning settings, to get conversational were up in 2000 hours.

RD: Yeah.

R: Just conversational. To being able to bridge beyond that, we're looking at 4000 hours. It becomes two years, three years of intense work. Everyone has their own number for what they are capable of to do that. So, that type of environment for learning the language can be very high stress.

RD: Oh heck yeah!

R: And people are sensitive 'cause we're humans, and we've been through stuff and we carry unseen baggage. But that amount of time intensity, it doesn't pair well with or match with the number of tasks and types of work to build relationships or maintain the relationships. Because if I'm spending that much time just learning the language with a few select people, realistically, I'm not going to want to also spend more time with the people if I don't have a good relationship with them.

Looking at the work that you've done are there ideal situations for you to keep up the work you're doing? Are there red flags you try to avoid in your work and environment, like I'm not going to allow that person to behave that way?

RD: Well, within my work, which is specifically with adult immersion, basically 8:30 to 3:30 every day, students are in the classroom, fully immersed for two academic years. Equaling just over 2000 hours of in-class contact with the language. And we've noticed that if you want to create speakers who have a capacity to bring it into the home and create emerging environments in the school, you basically need about that much contact hours within a specific environment.

There's other avenues to become a speaker you know you could just visit elders. That's going to take you a lot longer. We've noticed that it may be five times the length. It's (immersion) has been beneficial to the community because it's actually created some proficiency among the individuals. But, in order to be successful and language learning or in language revitalization, you don't just need speakers, right? Me speaking over and over again to the wall isn't going to do anything. I need to speak to people.

So, you need enough hours of contact hours to at least become a speaker. Two, you need to do it within a culturally relevant setting. It needs to be relevant to your life. Then three, you need to cultivate a community of speakers. So just like you said, I think sometimes to the contrary of what you said, though, is that sometimes we'll have students that start and they don't even know each other or maybe they don't like each other that much. At the end of it (the 2 years), that cohort becomes the community. They are people who they can rely on to speak their language with. Even though they're really working hard on the language every day, and they have the opportunity to do that, and it works to help build this community amongst them.

The problem with our program and with what we do, is that we're only focused on their life during those two years at the school. We're working on a third year. It'll be up and running soon, hopefully, if we get the funding. But when they've graduated and they move on to life, which is usually a job and bills, and they get caught up in that, that community that we tried to create kind of starts to break down because other things in life are getting in the way.

And that's one thing, to answer your question, that I see is our challenges. We're not not doing enough to engage these students in the community to use what they've learned. To pass it on, you know, within the community. To create more domains of usage in the community. To make it more alive outside of the school where students go on and do more with it (the language). Or rather, in school, to create environments where it's going to encourage them to use it more once they finally graduate.

We haven't looked at it (after graduation) as our responsibility, either. But, we're starting to realize that if we're creating speakers, what does it matter if they become speakers and then two years later, they've forgotten most of it because they never used it when they were done. Of course, you can't control what people do with their lives, if they never use it when they are done.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes]: Creating speakers through intense learning situations can result comprehension being achieved very quickly, but it also creates a habit of learning based on intense learning and usage environments. Outside of those environments, are habits being formed to continue language use in everyday activities amongst our everyday friends and families?

[► PLAY]

RD: My big thing to say, is that if you are developing a program of the same nature to get people to become speakers, a speaker isn't enough. Even though, you do need speakers, it's not enough if you don't cultivate a community of users.

I think that's the hardest thing, right? It's easy to say, just like you've described. When people have chips on their shoulders and there's all this lateral violence and baggage, and people don't want to share and going through a lot of abuse, it's hard to cultivate community, right?

That's why I always say, focus on the language first. Nobody will have an excuse about that, because most people, if you say, "is the language important," 99% of them will say, "yes."

✧ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ✧

[Visual guide text]

Intergenerational Roots. *Returning* to our roots: unlearning and *re*learning

[✧ Starlog Notes]: When we lose ourselves, how do we return again? When we lose our loved ones, how do we keep a space open for their return or for the returning of their children's children's return?



Figure 49: *Returning to our roots: unlearning and relearning*. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

Chapter Thirteen: Reflecting on Indigenous Life Stages of Awareness, Unlearning, and Relearning

The interconnectivity of interpersonal relationships are layered within a lifetime of experiences, learned teachings through upbringing/life stages, and emotional and mental well-being which influences personal choices, values, and intentions. Each person involved in language acquisition and revitalization (LAR) groups eventually comes to learn about each other and the emotional layers we carry, but this learning and sharing process does not necessarily occur through structured, clear, or easy experiences. The previous Anonymous Woman 2's experiences demonstrated how fragile even the strongest interpersonal relationships can be while a person is growing from a learner to a speaker and teacher. Doreen described the process he went through to overcome lateral violence amongst his peers and language group members, and how he struggled to unlearn the negative experiences and prioritize positive relationships with his family learning and teaching each other Mohawk. The Sunray family shared how their relationship began after they both experienced shifts in their own lives that brought them to emotional and mental maturity that helped them prioritize a healthy partnership and family relationships. DeCaire shared his language journey from being a student to a teacher and what he has learned and chosen to prioritize in his life and language journey. It is important to reflect on the dynamic impacts and influences to the fragility and endurance of interpersonal relationships amongst speech group members. Prioritizing awareness of positive relationships and knowledge of how traditional life stages have been impacted by colonization and contemporary social threats is influential in a person's ability to create and maintain healthy relationships. Additionally, understanding how traditional knowledge exchanges between elder mentors and language activists create long-term positive relationships experiences are necessity in the process

Prioritizing Awareness of Positive Life Stages for Language Activists

The language activist narratives are lifting a veil on the intimate details of various lived experiences occurring within LAR journeys. Their experiences demonstrate processes of unlearning and *re*learning relationship health and well-being. Their narratives offer comparative examples to help inform a process of self-reflection for others embarking on their own language journeys and wellness maintenance. Each of the language activists have expressed that their most impactful, influential, and positive LAR relationships are or have been with their elder speakers. These relationships embody greater levels of respect and structured social rules between the younger learners and the elders. Being aware of these specific parameters associated with maintaining positive relationships with our elders, lends to a process of identifying the relationship types being created, maintained, and prioritized within our own peer groups. What is known about the relationship dynamics between elder language speakers and younger language activists? How are such complex positive relationships with “respected elders” not easily replicated amongst peer groups or younger generations?

Colonization and assimilation have resulted in generations of Indigenous people who have a lack of access to life stage knowledge, mentors, ceremonies, and consistent direct examples of relationship holism and well-being. Throughout the last century, various Indigenous groups have pursued a revitalization of traditional teachings and knowledge sharing to heal and redirect multi-generational families and individuals. Maria Campbell, in Kim Anderson’s (2011) book, *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine*, described a movement of awakening by Indigenous peoples in the 1960s to revive sacred educational processes and knowledge. The “Aboriginal healing movement” was led by elders traveling the country sharing their cultural and spiritual teachings, “their stories taught us to decolonize

ourselves and reclaim our communities...because the old people and their stories brought us a sense of safety and gave us courage” (xviii). This movement of awakening has occurred simultaneously across numerous Indigenous communities.

One such example is during the 1960s in Aotearoa (New Zealand). Rallied by the elders, younger activists pushed for a reawakening of their communities to recognize the web of colonization fracturing their ability to take hold of their futures through a reinvigoration of their traditional knowledge and how it empowers their people. Hana O'Regan (2001) discussed in her book, *Ko Tahu, Ko Au: Kāi Tahu Tribal Identity*, a process occurring in Aotearoa where traditions of her families and tribes were being re-interpreted, modified, or let-go-of to meet the needs of the people and the changing social environment in meaningful ways. O'Regan quotes her father Tipene O'Regan, stating that, “we have a right, inherent in ourselves to build and rebuild our traditions” (77). Because of colonization and assimilation, specific knowledge about wellness and holism learned at various life stages has been changed, tainted, and/or is missing integral teachings. As Indigenous people it is our inherent right to pursue such knowledge and modify it to assist in our own life stage journeys. For language activists who are aware of and prioritize this knowledge of life stages, learning our ancestral languages is a form of a life stage ceremony. Meaning, that more than just the language is being learned. Cultural and traditional ways of being are learned alongside the language. This process and culturally customized steps are often left out of language acquisition materials. Respected elder language speaker infuse such teachings within their language knowledge exchange. Developing language curriculum must engage a process of *relearning* of life stage knowledge while there are still some of the remaining respected elders who are language and cultural knowledge keepers.

I'm very direct in distinguishing between the title of "elder" and people who have survived to old age but are not seen as "respected elders." This distinction is very important to the relationships that are being discussed by the language activists who work with some of the last remaining first language elder speakers. The positive relationships they are describing are with "respected elders." The responsibility that elders and older mentors have is being role models who are intentionally engaging a positive practice of traditional forms of knowledge exchange. Anderson (2011) describes the roles of elders being multi-faceted, but not every "older" person is an elder, meaning that not every person who has lived to an old age has gone through all the life stage ceremonies and holds a "mastery of relatedness" knowledge. "This mastery of relatedness came from having lived a good life and having honored all of the responsibilities associated with the earlier stages. Life stage ceremonies helped an individual to establish and maintain these good relations with human, plant, and animal life, as well as spirit life" (Anderson 2011, 126). The elder speaker may or may not embody this knowledge. Learning this about the teachers is a difficult task but one that is already occurring within language revitalization work, as described by Anonymous Woman 1 in the previous section. Certain actions were taken to identify respected elder fluent speakers to participate in the language groups because of the ways in which they live in a good way, how they are participating in a traditional form of knowledge exchange. sharing share their traditional knowledge.

When an elder fluent speaker is also a keeper of life stage knowledge, they most often have methods that guide the ways in which they share specific teachings through storytelling, cultural activities, language teachings, and ceremonial activities. This traditional knowledge exchange is an artform, a learned skill from the elder's own lived experiences and life stages. The positive relationships we have with respected elders provide a lived experience in health and

wellness that can be a guide in the creation and maintenance of other positive relationships. Anderson (2011) provides the example of “mino-pimatisi-win” an Anishinaabe term that describes “holistic health and wellness, including physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual states of being” (7). The teaching of this term connects to knowledge about a deeper interrelationship between the individual, partners, family, and the collective community through a responsibility to maintain health and well-being (Anderson 2011). The life stage teachings and lived experiences provide examples of holism, wellness, and healthy positive relationships. Without these experiences or examples to learn from, there is an increased tolerance and desensitization to unhealthy relationships and lateral violence. Additionally, a lack of awareness and openness amongst language groups can lead to interpersonal relationship dynamics disrupting these life stage teachings.

For example, the previous Anonymous Woman 2 shared that when she looked back upon the ending of her relationship with her partner, it impacted her entire language group. Her relationship was part of her and the group’s language journey. She and the group members are still working to understand and come to terms with the ending of an intimate relationship and the changes this caused for the group dynamics, and the professional and personal relationships they had. This occurred even despite her description of the group’s phenomenal language comprehension and conversational fluency success. It occurred even though she expressed an overwhelming appreciation and respect for her elder language teachers and her language group members. Being aware of the impacts interpersonal relationship dynamics can have on group structures, momentum, wellness, and longevity can assist language activists and speech groups assess and plan for complex shifts and changes. How are language activists learning to understand, approach, disengage, and/or resolve such sensitive issues?

The merging and diverging of relationships can send ripples of change over brief periods of time or be impactful for multiple generations to come. Such encounters and experiences can be unseen currents coursing through the social fibers of a community, a family, and an individual. Language work often leads to sensitive knowledge sharing that can be emotionally stressful and/or debilitating to the progress of a language program. It can also be empowering and healing when engaged through a structured process of truth-telling. Traditionally, the natural process of being taught to speak was woven with knowledge about the ways to communicate with different age groups, kin, cultural social groups (clans, societies, and various meaningful roles), as well as social mannerisms, expressions, forms of respect, humor, and all that is in-between. These lessons and the knowledge learned through life stage ceremonies and experiences were part of the “life cycle continuum” (Anderson 2011). Through each stage, relationships were being forged and crafted, while lessons were taught to instruct the person how to maintain and sustain the various relationship types. The interrelatedness of relationships within a family and the community, as well as culturally specific ways of being, were traditionally learned through each person’s upbringing.

These teachings included teachings about the act of re-interpreting, creating, and modifying traditions, roles, and relationships in meaningful ways to address shifts in the lives and environments (social, natural, and spiritual) of the people. Meaning, that the knowledge gifted through each life stage shifted and adapted with the changing times and experiences. Endangered alongside the language are the art and skills that encourage empowerment and fluidity with the teachings. Colonization, assimilation, and intergenerational trauma have disrupted all facets of traditional life stage educations. The educational and social environment of language learning is a key space to reflect upon the upbringing, values, holism and well-being of

everyone within the language group. Yet, there must be a greater awareness, intention, and kindness involved in this process. The utilization of the framework of life stages is a way to begin a journey of awareness, unlearning, and critical *re*learning, particularly with sensitive issues that have developed out of the lack of wellness and healthy relationship models in Indigenous communities.

Finding Mentors, Healing, and Empowerment through Indigenous Life Stage Ceremonies

The extreme causes of contemporary language endangerment and lack of motivation by tribal members to learn the languages that I've witnessed are rooted in manifestations of intergenerational trauma, lateral violence, and domestic violence. The statistic that 4 out of 5 Indigenous women experience violence in their lifetime (Association on American Indian Affairs 2021) means that these encounters are occurring in the home. They are not just perpetuated by strangers or outsiders. Re-victimization and experiences of post-traumatic stress disorders are happening within Indigenous homes and communities. Even though my own upbringing with my elders gifted me ceremony and tradition, it's only by ceremony and unrelenting kindness from respected mentors that I have been able to heal from the domestic violence I was exposed to in my youth and first intimate relationships. I'm a fourth generation boarding school survivor. I am also a fourth-generation domestic violence survivor. I feel it is vastly important to share the ways in which language activists are mentoring each other beyond the manifestations of intergenerational traumas originating from colonization but fueled by contemporary family and community dysfunctions.

Language endangerment may be inherited, but threats to language survival and vitality are caused by contemporary actions and choices. These actions are occurring every day within language speech communities and families. There are no statistics that I can find which support

the truth-telling by the language activists I've had conversations with and those that I have embarked on language journeys with. Through positive mentorship relationships occurring between language teachers and learners, there is a revival of wellness and the tradition of positive mentorship. In its simplest forms, acts of kindness, love, and respect between mentors and mentees are reshaping the lives of language activists and their families. Having personally experienced and witnessed positive and healthy mentorship relationships, has provided me with an understanding and awareness that this form of life stage ceremonies have the power to plant seeds of love, respect, and kindness in a person. These seeds are medicines. They are the pieces that begin to go to work on a person, *reshaping* and *remaking* them. How can this awareness and experience be replicated into a structured process and sustained by language activists amongst their language group peers?

Learning from the language activists' narratives shared with me, along with the years of LAR work I've participated in, there is more often negative relationships and experiences amongst the language group and community peers. These negative experiences impact the group's ability to create and maintain long-term positive and productive relationships. Learning from elder mentors prioritizes the knowledge that each person has a responsibility to maintain the relationship and respect. Life stage ceremonies are foundational teachings that reveal and reaffirm these responsibilities and simultaneously heal and empower. Remembering that "once an elder had become a master of these relations, he or she had responsibilities to cycle this power back into the younger generations, to keep the life force and spirit moving" (Anderson 2011, 126). Each respected elder has lived a long life and they have made choices to participate in this cycle of power. This act of a "power exchange" happens in many ways, but it is fueled by love and kindness, and laced with responsibilities. Many successful language activists have

experienced this “power exchange” and are active practitioners of this life stage ceremony. There is still much to learn about how this practice can support long-term positive relationships within LAR groups when language activists and other group members are faced with extreme causes of contemporary language endangerment. Describing the existence of these experiences is very different than living them, and then choosing to pursue ways to heal in order to continue a personal journey in LAR work.

I remember being amongst a group of elder women, some of the last language speakers, and they were politely skirting around avoiding working with one of the oldest remaining male speakers, who was well into his 90s. On the surface it was confusing why the last remaining speakers would not work together. They had known each other for their entire lives, and all agreed on the importance and immediacy of saving our language. The pressure felt from the level of endangerment of our language and our own documentation and preservation goals and timelines blinded us to seeing signs of stress amongst the elder fluent language speakers. So we kept inviting all of the speakers to every language session. Eventually, some of us younger women were pulled aside and were told that the problem wasn’t with the language work or with us. It wasn’t about gender dynamics, either. The truth they shared continues to impact my actions and choices today.

The truth they shared also reaffirmed my understanding of how the contemporary extreme causes of language endangerment impact multiple generations. The elder women explained that they would not work with this man because in their youth, he had repeatedly raped their sister. For the elder women, that man’s language, the specific words he knew and his knowledge, it could die with him. As humans, there are some social experiences that set a course for the future that cannot be changed. Maybe an outside linguist could document his language

knowledge. Maybe those in his family will document his experiences. For the women in the group, we left that work alone. We must not forget that such experiences impact all ages and genders. Such experiences within Indigenous communities are rarely spoken of publicly or resolved publicly. Amongst our group of learners, we were not prepared to address this issue within our language work or the relationship healing that would be needed. Even though many of us were very aware of the prevalence of these extreme situations and experiences within our own community, we were not emotionally or educationally equipped to handle the knowledge shared with us by our beloved elder mentors.

Traditionally, the response to such violence would have been dealt with in a very different way. The theft of traditional teachings to resolve such issues have been stolen from generations of Indigenous people. There has been a generational loss of empowerment to deal with such experiences. A few of us in the group had experienced similar trauma and were not in a place to even respond to this knowledge, let alone pursue actions or ceremonies that might foster healing of the trauma caused by this old man. The surviving elder women were still being victimized by the older man and his extended family because there was no justice or repercussions within the community by those who knew of the violence. I continue to pray for their healing and my own.

The complexities of the social and personal life of language speakers and learners is not incredibly unique within our communities, yet the future of our language(s) rests upon our abilities to learn, *remake*, modify, and utilize culturally informed knowledge to navigate and address complex layers of known and unknown social dynamics. I cannot write this enough, what are we actually revitalizing and for what future? Often, these social experiences are not directly about the language, but the life of the language is inevitably impacted. As the Sunray family shared, they have learned to intentionally prioritize healthy relationships in their lives.

This is a lived example and experience they are creating for their children. How are language activists being taught and teaching the same prioritization for health? How is the language group and social environment being created to allow the lived experience of healthy relationships? Within this context, questions relating to establishing clear definitions of culturally specific processes of knowledge exchange can be expanded through the awareness of basic human needs for holism, wellness, and healthy positive relationships and social environments.

In my own life, I've held tight to the tethers of my language and culture, as well as the knowledge passed to me from my ancestors who prayed for our family line to survive and thrive *in a good way*. This knowledge empowers me. The truth telling by my elders also has empowered me to learn from their examples. Thriving *in a good way* is part of our rights, the same as our rights to learn the languages and cultures. Learning from empowered mentors who I have positive relationships with has reinforced my own choices to pursue a life without domestic violence and educating myself about lateral violence and toxic relationships. LAR journeys are a process of healing. Truth telling is a powerful medicine but must be combined with positive intentions and actions. The following is a poetic piece titled *Tradition Left These* (Freeman 2012) published by the *Feminist Wire*. It is my reflection on the complexities of colonized traditions and the "traditionalists" who try to normalize violent relationships.

Critique of tradition happens in the tongue and cheek.
It happens while the shadows tend to a bruised back,
while shivers sing melodies coaxing the sun into rising
and breaths count the moments until the traditionalist sleeps.

So simple it might seem when days drift in ease,
with the sway of fringe and feathers held high
and laughter quickens our hearts and smiles weren't used to cover a lie.

Slowly it builds,
this voice rusted and tethered to heartstrings
weathered in salt and grit.

Tender now are the memories of quivering hands,
left alone to comfort the first born and colic.

Tradition left these,
where sleepless nights smelled of a sweet
desert no longer dry.

Tradition left these,
even with eyes wide
in sacrament and drumming lullaby.

Tradition left these,
with our addictions to blame it all
on the remnants of conquest.

Tradition left these,
when silence condones
the violent acts of traditionalists.

Relational Learning in Context

Experiencing examples of positive mentorship relationships with respected elder language speakers and with other like-minded language activists creates hope. It reveals an awareness about what is possible for positive healthy relationships. These experiences empower and inspire language activists along their LAR journeys. They encourage a responsibility to continue the knowledge exchange, to pay it forward. Prioritizing the documentation and knowledge exchange of the lived experiences of language activists over an explication of theoretical motif samples, is empowering a process of unlearning and *relearning* what is actually occurring within the LAR journeys of Indigenous practitioners. One day all language activists will hopefully grow to be the next generation of respected elder mentors. That can only be done through a life lived *in a good way*. This growth must be based in actions that prioritize positive wellness for themselves, their families, and community.

This is the gift that each language activist is sharing through their truth telling narratives. Their stories are hope for a better future with each other and our languages and cultures. Their stories are medicine, but only if we cultivate the healing through our own actions. My work with them and the examples they continue to share through their own language work are sources of inspiration and guidance across the world. Positive and productive mentorship has the power to reinvigorate the spirits of language activists. I've witnessed this first-hand and have worked to replicate workshops, trainings, and gatherings that have created positive environments for mentorship amongst language activists. I've experienced the negative and toxic side of this work, as well, but I actively disengage from those environments and prioritize positive mentorships and endeavors amongst my elders, peers, and the youth. This work is life changing and can be sustained with awareness and intentions.

The following section, Part IV, presents personal narratives from three Māori language activists who are part of three unique generations in Te Penekiretanga o Te Reo, "The Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language." Together, they represent mentor and mentee relationships that have been created to reinforce the refinement and specialization of their Māori language comprehension and usage. They actively work towards creating positive and productive language communities and families. They also continuously seek out intercultural language mentorships and knowledge exchanges to increase their awareness of other Indigenous language programs and group experiences.

**PART IV: BRINGING OUR LANGUAGES TOGETHER: SHARING LANGAUGE
REVITALIZATION WITH TE PANEKIRETANGA O TE REO “INSTITUTE OF
EXCELLENCE IN THE MĀORI LANGUAGE”**

PART IV INTRODUCTION: THE GIFTING OF SEEDS

CHAPTER 14: SIR TĪMOTI KĀRETU, TUHOE, NGĀTI KAHUNGUNU (MĀORI)

- ✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide
- ✧ A Conversation with Sir Tīmoti Kāretu

CHAPTER 15: DR. HANA O'REGAN, NGĀI TAHU (MĀORI)

- ✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide
- ✧ A Conversation with Dr. Hana O'Regan

CHAPTER 16: HĒMI KELLY, NGĀTI MANIAPOTO, NGĀTI TAHU-NGĀTI WHĀOA
(MĀORI)

- ✧ Meaning Making Poetics and Visual Guide
- ✧ Narrative

CHAPTER 17: TAKING ROOT

Introduction: The Gifting of Seeds

“No Māori ceremony is complete without haka. It is as fundamental to our rites of passage as the language and is the reason why this book was contemplated. More importantly though it is my paean of praise and gratitude to my mentors who have passed on, and to my mentors still living. Tēnā rā koutou katoa. To the many no longer with us I say,

‘Ngaro noa aku tau i te huakanga ata
Te whakarewatanga mai i te tara ki Maumahara
Pākinikini ai te mamae
Māringiringi ai tew ai i te kamo
I te kai kino a aroha
Kei aku puna o te kī, kei taku tahuna-ā-tara
Te haruru tonu nei ā koutou kupu
Te haruru tonu nei ō koutou tapuwae
I muri nei
Taiaha hā! Taiaha hā!

*Gone are my loved ones at break of day
As it comes over the summit of Maumahara
Pain gnaws away within,
Tears flow unrestrained
Because of the emotion I feel
My orators, composers without peer
You my assembly of chiefs
Your words still resound
Your footsteps are still heard
Long after you have gone
Taiaha hā! Taiaha hā!’*

To the generations to come I say,
‘Nei rā ō puipuiaki, ō tongarerewa
Rauhītia! Maimoatia!
Engari kei noho koe
Ka tuku kia mate!

*Yours is an illustrious heritage
Cherish it, nurture it
But never ever
Let it die!’*

Tihē mauri ora!”
(Kāretu 1993, pp. 13-14, *Haka! The Dance of a Noble People*)

I've read the above quote numerous times over the years. Sir Tīmoti Kāretu's (1993) powerful words in the introduction to his book *Haka!: The Dance of a Noble People* weaves so many layers of meaningful knowledge together. His acknowledgement for his mentors and his reflection on the gifts they've bestowed upon him through his lived experiences of their mentorship is followed by his understanding of his responsibility to carry such gifts of knowledge forward to his own students. His words speak to my heart and weigh heavy on my mind. They make me long for my own elders and mentors who have made their journeys home. I also lament the loss of those beautiful interpersonal relationships. Such guidance, love, and honest leadership can be rarities, and I'm overwhelmingly blessed to have been mentored and loved by them. Through those relationships and experiences, I am able to understand and relate to the types of profound respect Kāretu speaks of in regard to his own mentors. His words challenge us to reflect on what we know about the art of impactful and positive Indigenous relationship making. How do such relationships with mentors transcend space and time, and have the power to inspire and feed our hearts, minds, and souls in ways that reinforce their teachings through our own actions, conscience, and standards?

Kāretu (1993) further reflects on his mentors, such as John Te Rangiāni Waniwa Rangihau, and the influence he has had upon his own journey to becoming a mentor. He states, "memories come flooding back as I recite each name and recall the circumstances under which we argued, debated, cajoled, wheedled. I doubt that I had anything to offer them but the riches they gave me are incalculable...It is in remembrance of them, and for the sake of haka, that one persists and perseveres" (13). These such relationships themselves are the gifting of seeds and through the intergenerational exchange of reciprocal knowledge they sprout and weave deep roots along our journeys. We draw upon these roots as medicine to inform and guide our actions.

They heal and inspire us in ways we may not fully understand but open our hearts and minds to their puha ‘power’ we must. Kāretu adds that the “language will continue to be the difficult issue for most of the young performers but for haka to be meaningful and to survive the young performer must know what is being said, how to interpret what is being said and how to imbue that interpretation with passion and panache. Not to do so, is to do haka and our ancestors an injustice” (13). Again, in reflecting on his words I can envision my own knowledge of the meaningful steps of language acquisition and revitalization and the overwhelming interconnectivity it has with my cultural practices, ways of being, mentors, children, ancestors, lands, plants, animals, constellations, and the past and future. Yet, how are the same forms of interconnectivity, which are such powerful interpersonal relationships, created amongst adult learners and teachers who are peers?

Interconnectivity of Indigenous Adult Language Learners

Amongst peers in Indigenous adult language learning groups, there continues to be a lack of clarity of the unique culturally specific meaningful steps needed to replicate the social experiences occurring between mentor and mentee which grow into long-term reciprocal relationships as they are working together for language acquisition, revitalization, and reclamation. This has been expressed by the language activists I’ve had conversations with and has been a consistent topic at intertribal language revitalization workshops and gatherings. Unpacking what creates interpersonal relationships that weather the storms and embody ancestral teachings in tandem with contemporary social needs is part of a process of Indigenizing language acquisition methodologies. In the dozens of Indigenous language programs for adult learners that I’ve been part of, consulted with, visited, surveyed, and researched, the instructions and teachings of how to be friends, colleagues, good relatives, advocates, and equally valued

members of the team are not clearly part of the foundational curriculum, epistemological pillars, or knowledge sets.

There is a common reminder of mutual respect and human resource guidelines, but much of the craft of positive relationship making is left up to interpretation which fuels miscommunication. Such team building relationship teachings and instructions for adult learners within and outside of the language learning environments are elusive. Yet, peer-to-peer comraderies do exist and thrive. Whether developing through mutual need, shared world views, grand pursuits, or guided and instilled by mentors, like-minded people recognize each other and pursue powerful and inspiring social relationships. Unfortunately, even amongst the most successful language acquisition programs, there continues to be social disruptions and a lack of long-term consistent comradery amongst adult peers, as expressed in the previous language activist conversations. The strongest relationships are between mentor and mentee, direct family members and/or partners and their children. Making sense of these processes is a journey I am continuing to embark on. It is also one that numerous language activists I've had conversations with are reflecting upon and pursuing an understanding of and questioning what are their own unique culturally based teachings and techniques to create positive and impactful relationships? To not pursue a greater understanding and practice of building positive interpersonal relationships cognizant of wellness and holism unique to our cultural identities is also an injustice to our ancestors and the future communities we can create.

Learning from other long-term Indigenous language mentors and cohorts about relationship making values and actions to create positive, supportive, and successful language group dynamics is a gifting of incalculable seeds. There is an outpouring of kindness, expertise, and insight into methods to counter myths, stereotypes, and romanticism about the work and life

of being a language activist, champion, warrior, and practitioner. The following conversations are with a founding member and two separate cohort members of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo “The Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language” in Aotearoa. Sir Tīmoti Kāretu, Dr. Hana O’Regan, and Hēmi Kelly share deeply moving experiences and practical approaches to various discussion points about the most meaningful relationships in their language journeys and the contextualization of kinship knowledge in their work. While they’ve reflected on the same questions I’ve provided to the rest of the language activists, they have added distinct interpretations of each question and differing ways to conceptualize actions and reactions to challenges facing the acquisition, revitalization, and reclamation of te reo Māori. Following the conversations, is an additional chapter detailing my journey meeting the mentors and cohorts in Te Panekiretanga and organizing the 2014 Bringing Our Languages Together gathering in Oklahoma with participants and sponsors from over 23 Tribal Nations.

Chapter Fourteen: Sir Dr. Tīmoti Kāretu, Māori Tuhoe, Ngāti Kahungunu

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Page 1: Sir Dr. Tīmoti Kāretu.

Ceesha: Exemplar mentors.

Naagagaa: *grunting*

Ceesha: Exemplar mentees.



Figure 50: Sir Dr. Tīmoti Kāretu. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Sir Tīmoti Kāretu Tuhoe, Ngāti Kahungunu (Māori)

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ First language speaker
- ✦ 90+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Intensive adult language immersion
- ✦ Language, culture, and traditional knowledge keeper
- ✦ Māori Language Commissioner
- ✦ Executive Director of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust
- ✦ Founding member and mentor of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo Māori “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language” alongside Dr. Te Wharehuia Milroy and Sir William Te Rangiua Pou Temara
- ✦ Knight of the New Zealand Order of Merit
- ✦ Curriculum development and examination
- ✦ Language documentation and preservation
- ✦ Language and educational policy development
- ✦ Chairperson of Aotearoa Traditional Māori Performing Arts Festival Committee and Te Māngai Pāho
- ✦ Author and composer

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity only.

“R” represents the voice of Royce. “T” represents the voice of Tīmoti.

[✦ Starlog Notes:] It took some time to schedule our meeting via zoom, but with the technological assistance of Jeremy Tātere MacLeod, Tīmoti and I were able to have a few hours to catch up and discuss different topics about our language revitalization journeys. The interview questions that I had provided to each of the language activists were also provided to Tīmoti, but with a couple added focuses. His long life of experiences stretches across time periods unknown to all other language activists included here. His life as a young student and growth and achievements of becoming a successful and impactful mentor and leader amongst his people, meant I could ask him to reflect on some of the other consistent themes being pointed out by the younger language activists.

Additionally, his reflections on the purpose and importance of the structure and educational culture established for each cohort in Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo “Institute of Excellence in Māori” was imperative to the work at hand. Particularly because his students have become exemplary models, inspiring some of the language activists to see and experience additional possibilities for their own language acquisition and revitalization journeys. Each person I’ve visited with over the years continues to reflect upon their participation at the gatherings with Tīmoti and his students. I’ve also seen how those initial experiences are reflected upon in different ways throughout the years as each person is growing and going through more life stages and progressing in their own LAR work.

Some reflect upon the gatherings and the stories that were shared with them differently after they've encountered new social experiences throughout the years. I was eager to reflect upon such changes with Tīmoti, and to learn a bit more about key experiences he felt were necessary for progress in the work he has been part of over nearly a century of life.

[► PLAY]

R: Alright, where were we? Yes, again, some of the main continuities I've seen in people doing language revitalization work is a high level of endurance, tenacity, and consistency in their commitment to the work over time.

T: All of those, yes.

R: Methodologies shift and change so much that there's no one type of methodology that guarantees success.

T: Yeah. And hunger. You need to throw hunger in there, Royce. Then I think you got them all.

R: Yes. Alright, so with your work, your life, could we revisit how long you've been at this, working in language revitalization?

T: I returned to Zealand in late 1969 from formerly being there for almost 10 years. What had happened was, I got a note from a dear friend of mine. Who was not Māori, but was a very fluent speaker and had been a teacher for some years of the language.

And she said to me, "what the hell are you doing in London with your language command? Come home." You see.

R: *Chuckle* Hmm.

T: And at the time, I was loving Europe. Europe was my, you know, I thought I had got home at long last. The civilization, culture, and all those other things. Yes.

Then suddenly, I got this long note from her saying, "look you need to come back. The people with your command and your interests are so few. So, come back."

I thought about it seriously and then I did come back and mourned my parents, who had both died while I was away.

R: Ohhh. Hmmm.

T: Custom demanded that I come back and mourn my parents, who both died while I was away in London. All my family had said, "don't come back, just, you know, you can weep for them when you come back," and that's what happened, in Māori custom.

And so, I paid my respects to my parents and got involved because of this dear friend of mine. She was well known as a good teacher, but she was worried about her accent. And to me, she didn't have an accent that was noticeable. It wasn't apparent when you were talking to her.

But you put her on broadcasting or something like that, and it just accentuated it. She was Scot from Scotland but had been living in New Zealand for a long time. She was really a very good speaker.

And she'd been teaching in quite a remote Māori community when Māori was the only language. So, she survived by learning the language, and of course, she had learned from native speakers. Her command was really quite broad and really quite impressive.

Because of her, I thought, alright, let's get on with this. And that's what happened. I've been involved really since 1970 when I was appointed to the University of Waikato to start the Māori Department there. And I was there until 1987 when I became the first Māori Language Commissioner. I got fed up with that, not because of the subject, but because of the nonsense that goes on politically. Then we started Te Panekiretanga.

Prior to going to London, I was a secondary, a high school teacher. I was trained to be a high school teacher. I only ever wanted to teach, you see. I did that for two years because in New Zealand, at that time, if you are teaching, you must do two years in a country school. Otherwise, your salary would not go up in the first nine years. It also guaranteed that the country schools would get staff...But I was young and ambitious, and all those other nonsense things.

T & R: *Laughing*

T: So, I went from there to London and became a teacher again. I've been hitting this ball ever since 1970, against the same wall, and it has been ricocheting ever since.

R: Uh-hmm.

T: I also came back to be with my own elders. They said to me, "look, you've been away too long. You're sounding like a foreigner," da, da, da, da.

We got very involved with all the elders' meetings where they were getting concerned about, not the loss of language then, the language was still very strong in my tribal area at that time, but tribal custom, tribal behavior, Māori behavior, and those sorts of things. Everybody was going off to schools and cities, and so they were coming back with all these mad ideas which the elders did not approve of.

So, I got involved in all that and I've been actively involved since the 1970s to the present day. That's the burden I have on my shoulders.

They've (his students in Te Panekiretanga) all been through the same thing. I hold my head high because of them. Because, in a way, they are my reflection. They have my hunger. They have my commitment. They have my sense of purpose. And I think that's all that you and I can do, is to build that within their generation. It's up to them to follow it through. I've been lucky really that these kids have all committed themselves to it, and now their own children are speaking.

R: Yes.

T: Hana's (O'Regan) tribe (Ngāi Tahu), as I think I've said to you, their loss was more devastating than anybody else's. They've come back with a vengeance over the last 25, 30 years. So, I admire them very much, that tribe. They are my, when I talk about "exemplars," they are the one.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: I've chosen to use the term "language activist" in my dissertation, but there are also other terms like language champion, warrior, and practitioner. What do you describe yourself as?

T: Activists I suppose, but not in the sense of, well, when students in 1979 at the University of Auckland, young Māori students that had no language, but they rebelled against engineering students at the University who were doing the haka as a parody. The young Māori students of the time just took it to them (The Haka Party Incident). That saw a whole change, where young Māori at the University, who were academically sound but had no cultural knowledge or language, suddenly wanted to do something about it. That was also the beginning of the turn-around.

In fact, the petitions submitted to Parliament in 1972, were submitted by a woman who had no language at all, and her cry was that "I want my children to speak the language I never had." This huge petition was submitted to Parliament for the language to be taught in all the schools. They were the ones that turned-the-tide.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] The Māori Language Petition was submitted to Parliament on September 14th, 1972 with over 30,000 signatures requesting the active recognition of te reo Māori.

[► PLAY]

T: As I've said to you once before, we're lucky we got one language for the whole country. We're not as divided as you might be because of the language. There's so many of them (tribal nations) in small communities all over your Country.

R: Yes, even though we still go through a lot of the same social issues.

T: Yes, yes.

R: Of course, because of colonialism we all seem to share those same social issues.

T: And you know, you're only 1% and we have 17% That's another distinctive advantage on our part. (Indigenous population compared to the Country's total population in the United States and in Aotearoa).

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

R: Over the length of time that you've been working in these different areas of language revitalization, what are some of the strongest beneficial relationships that you've had while doing this work?

T: I was lucky that most of the elders, most of the best-known people in most of the tribes, I got to know in my life and I managed to work with them without any problems. We were of a generation where we were all native speakers. A generation where the language was the first language of everybody. And they were sort of icons of their own tribes. If you went to them, then you got the tribal support, you see.

I think I was saying to you, that the route for me was song and dance. And that's so strong and alive here in New Zealand, you know. Song and dance are really one of the methods or means of drawing people to the culture...and letting the language go to the younger generation.

Because, unlike some cultures, we need to have a text. Whereas in some cultures, you can just dance to the beat of the drum, like our relations in Tahiti, you can just sway your hips to the beat of the drum. There are other forms of the songs where you need a text, but for everything that we do, we need a text. We can't dance silently. That's not us. We like to be heard. *Laughter*

R: Yeah. *Chuckle*

T: Because the language is so prime to us. It's good to be representing all the things we do, from the first call that the woman makes to the last call when she says, "farewell to the dead," all the intervening things between that are all levels of the language are judged by people...These are the things that the culture requires.

In this day and age, I think that will probably still become stronger with this generation as they become more proficient in the language, and prolific as well, of course.

So, my luck of the draw was, number one, the elders of my own tribe, to get their support. And number two, support from the icons of other tribes, all of them in the same fields of language retention, maintenance, revitalization, and song and dance. All those things, where language was absolutely essential. That was my luck. That was my really good fortune.

Yeah, so I think we all need champions. And as I said you, my champion was the Pākehā lady who I told you about, who said to me, "come back from London." In her own way, she saw something that I never saw. To me, it was just everyday living. You know, you grow up in the culture and that's just how things are.

I think, through the eyes of students who have been around me all these years, I can see that, their view of life, of the Māori world, is much more broader than that of their parents or grandparents, even their great-grandparents in some cases.

And I will die happy, Royce, when the time comes, knowing that I've left some fighters behind. And I think that's all we can ask for. That I leave fighters behind and more warriors to command and take on the battle.

R: Yes!

The relationship you have with your students, could you describe what some of the things are that you look for in a student, in an apprentice? And then what are some of the red flags that make you think, "hmm, maybe the student is not ready at this time."

T: *Exhale* See, we were spoiled with Te Panekiretanga. We only took kids who were already formed. So that, they were mainly products of kura kaupapa, total-immersion schools (Māori language immersion schools). But even with all the faults and mistakes in the language and so on, they had a reasonable command (of the language) that you could work on.

So that was lucky, it made their journey easier. They also came committed, you see. We wouldn't take them otherwise.

And our number one requirement was, if you can't take criticism, this is no place for you.

R: Uh-hmm.

T: We can be thin skinned and we can be over sensitive to our own detriment, in a way. So, I think that you need to lay that down in front of them in the very beginning. If you can't take criticism, then this is not the place for you.

R: Yes.

T: And then presenting them with iconic models (mentors). With Te Panekiretanga, there were three of us. One is a master of oratory (Sir Pou Temara). Another one is a master of tradition (Dr. Te Wharehuia Milroy), and myself with the language. The only problem was, and I think some people saw this, is we were all from the same tribe. But then it was my initiative, and I got the people that I knew who were competent in their fields by my definition. And that's how it worked until we lost one of them (Dr. Te Wharehuia Milroy passed away in May of 2019). That really made us look at the whole philosophy again.

We lost one, and he was probably the most popular of the three of us. Much as I hate to say that in front of a student here (Jeremy), I have to admit he was more popular.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Jeremy's response was unclear on the recording. Timoti and him spoke briefly about this.

[► PLAY]

T: He (Jeremy) can't say anything else because he's in my house. I'll throw him out!

T & R: *Laughter*

T: They (the students) were lucky. They were exposed to three experts in their own fields. If you remember Pania (Papa) and Leon (Blake) from our trips?

R: Yes.

T: They sort of became my right-hand men. Now, we're about to launch a new degree that I want them to take over. We'll launch it with them, and once they're on their way, then I'll just leave them to it. (Master Degree through Te Wānanga o Aotearoa)

I've enjoyed the last months, you will know, Royce, doing nothing.

T & R: *Laughing*

T: Sort of being waited on and taken here and there. I've enjoyed it. And I thought to myself, "now, why do I need to work, really?"

R: You've been pampered. They've ruined you!

T & R: *Laughter*

T: Yes! Long overdue, thank you!

So, we're going to launch this and see how it goes. It's in one of the Māori tertiary institutions. It's an all Māori degree in Māori, about the Māori language. Which is a language degree about the language. We're not going to let all those peripheral things intrude, like dance or whatever, this is the language.

Otherwise, the peripheral things could take over. I don't know if that's true in your situations over there, but those "easier" things are what people go for. The nitty-gritty is the language and its demands. If you're wanting rectitude, excitement, and dynamism, all those things that go with language, then you have to commit to the philosophy and that whole ideal of learning the language.

But you also need the models! You *need the models!*

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] After a discussion about some of the other language revitalization programs we've each collaborated with over the last decade, I pointed out that there are so many

different social experiences within this work, that long-term outcomes are unpredictable. Even when a person's parents are language champions, their children may not choose to take up that work and instead gravitate away from maintaining or increasing their language comprehension.

[► PLAY]

T: All of us are worried about the peripheral being the distraction and the essential. Or becoming the victim of that peripheral seduction.

R: Yeah, it is a big issue and there are questions I still have about that. There's no clear guide, no clear answer, or...

T: There is no clear answer, that's true.

R: ...coursework or anything that clearly outlines what you experience doing this work. Not just in your classroom or workshops, but what you experience over the course of your life doing this work. And we're not prepared for certain experiences, especially when we lose our mentors or speakers. The loss of that relationship makes us want to stop.

T: Yeah, yeah. You can't afford to do that, I'm afraid. We all have to keep on fighting, no matter what. No matter how bored I am with all these kids, like Jeremy here!

T & R: *Laughing*

T: You gotta keep on doing it, you can't stop doing it because while maybe they're okay, there might be others who are dithering, and you hope that you might be able to win another one over. While they're doing a lot of the fighting themselves, by exemplifying what they've achieved through their own lives and pursuits, you still need somebody outside of their little world to crack a whip.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Timoti reinforces the importance of having a model or models who are outside of a person's group, "their little world," but who is honest with their advising. Honest constructive criticism is difficult to provide and receive. Not everyone holds social prestige from being an expert or respected elder, which opens people's minds to hear and acknowledge constructive criticism.

[► PLAY]

R: Sometimes it seems that it's easier to take that criticism from someone you don't see every day in your home or in your community. With all of the groups that I've worked with, it's hard seeing when people are not being open to the process of constructive criticism that is needed.

T: I think you have to be nasty, really. And I do that quite well.

R: *Laughing*

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] I was giggling about the choice of his words. “Nasty” as in shamelessly critical, to the point that people hold themselves to a higher standard so that they don’t falter and are criticized by their beloved mentor.

[► PLAY]

T: But you have to be, that’s how strong you have to be if it matters to you. Nasty, with a tinge of humanity, but nasty none-the-less. *Laughter*

R: It seems to be a generational thing. Many people under 70 tend to have a difficult time with criticism. And if someone is trying to take up that role to provide criticism that is right and needed to steer them back on track, there is a push back by most people within the same language group. Many have been assimilated to the point that they don't know that's the way it's supposed to be, there is supposed to be that person who provides productive criticism.

T: Yes, but the person who is cracking the whip, he or she has to exemplify what they are talking about, to be the living example of that. Otherwise, kids are going to say, “why the heck should I bother?”

R: We’re losing those people.

T: You can create a new generation of those, as long as they appreciate what you are doing.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Again, it is very important to have a model, a “living example,” to learn from and those are not just elders. Yet, there should be a clear understanding of why that person is the model and how do the students work towards becoming an exemplary model themselves. Are those personality traits and skills of the model acknowledged and understood? Why does a person have the *prestige* that commands attention and encourages the acceptance of their criticism? If not acceptance, at least a pause and reflection on what has been said by the model.

[► PLAY]

T: Another problem in your country, Royce, is the level of competency of the teachers. How well do they know the language? Do they have a body of knowledge to pass on? How will they

pass it on? How accurate is it when they do pass it on? These are also issues that are part of the package...They need their exemplars to be good.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Previously in our conversation, I stated that, “the environment to reach conversational fluency can be very stressful. Upwards of 4000 hours (Manatowa-Bailey and Janine Pease) of intense study and practice is what it takes to be conversationally fluent. That level of intensity does create a stressful environment.” I continue to wonder how the stressful environment is managed by various programs and group members when they are faced with additional criticism.

[► PLAY]

T: There needs to be a constant exposure. And I think once you've got them committed themselves, the language will thrive...There's no need to crack a whip because they do that automatically.

R: Most of my work is focused on second language adult learners. Many tend to be set in their ways.

T: Most of the students like Jeremy, they're all second language learners. They're not native speakers, but it's because of their commitment to and who they want to be, which is why they've made it. So, let's not belittle second language learners because that's where we all get our learners from.

This language survives because of second language learners, not because of native speakers. Let me reassure you on that one. The second language learners are the salvation of this language. I would say that publicly to anybody. If it weren't for the second language learners, this language would be in a completely different state.

What we've got to make sure, is that second language learners are exposed to good exemplars.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] What types of relationships need to be established between peers which would encourage openness and acceptance of structured criticism? What work needs to be done to develop productive and beneficial relationships that infuse energy towards the goals for language acquisition and revitalization? How can we be taught and learn to have higher levels of respect for defined roles amongst our peers? Defined roles, means that we look to each other for specific guidance as models and ways of being.

Timoti's statements reaffirmed the necessity of having exemplary models of people that the students see and learn from, but this raised a number of other logistically social questions.

How is this growth into becoming respected elder models done amongst peers? What are the specific structures or life stages that progress a person towards being a model example and how does that impact the social structures and interpersonal relationships amongst the group or cohort? How can social environments be crafted so that the cohort is comfortable enough amongst each other to build familial respectful relationships, but also with the knowledge and encouragement that they must support or take up more formal roles expected of exemplar models.

I've wondered what could be learned from the dynamics and structures of the different types of gatherings and activities at the marae (communal and sacred meeting ground) and in the wharehūi (meeting house) that Timoti has mentioned are part of their institute's requirements. Also, what could be gleaned from this part of Te Panekiretanga structure and the ways the three mentors worked together. We began discussing the social structure established at the wharehūi and the closeness that develops between the group members during their time in the institute.

[► PLAY]

R: Close living quarters in traditional households created stronger social relationships amongst our extended families. We don't see a lot of that practice today among our families and certainly not among many of the language groups.

How important are those experiences where you are all (the mentors and the student cohorts) in the same lodge, living in the same room for extended amounts of time?

T: Yes, Panekiretanga was like that. That was part of the whole deal because there's an etiquette inside the house as well as outside the house. A lot of them (the students) have grown up in communities where a lot of those things are lost. We were bringing them back and saying, "this is the right thing to do."

The house is organized accordingly, the people who have come the greatest distance are the most important people in the house. They have the most comfortable place because they've come the greatest distance.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] There are very detailed descriptions of the organization and order of each house when there are visitors and different types of events. Timoti did provide some of these details, but for the sake of transcription length provided here, I've focused on the following points as they reinforce the necessity of models and the responsibilities that comes with earning that level of prestige. Additionally, there is a shared responsibility of roles and tasks that are reinforced by the structure and order at the marae and in the wharehūi. This knowledge about roles and responsibilities are invaluable in understanding how the social structure functions for respect and familiarity amongst community members and the cohorts.

[► PLAY]

T: There are essential peripherals at the Marae. You have to look after people, feed people, attend to people, and the welcoming ceremony to be as generous as you can in terms of the respect you display. They (the visitors) had to be the same coming into your territory, too. It goes both ways.

Since those customs are still very strongly alive here, that's what we sort of missed when we went to other Indian communities (during their trips to North America) and there was no formalities in the way that we have here. That's what a lot of the kids found quite difficult to sort of live with...There's formal things on the marae. Your chanters, your callers, your orators, they had to be the cream of the crop because the tribal reputation rests on their shoulders, you see.

R: The same can be said for the type of work that you (as language activists) do once you decide you're going to stick with language. Revitalization, for some people, puts the weight and pressure to be that, the elite athlete. To be the Jack of all trades, doing everything. If that's not that person's place to be in all of those roles...

T: There's no such person.

R: Yeah.

T: There's no such person, Royce, I can tell you. You know, with Panekiretanga...those different things (traditions, oratory knowledge and such) need to be taught by people who are skilled in the field. That's how Panekiretanga was so lucky, really. We had masters of all those things to teach our kids...and not to be arrogant. Do not, do not. That was our number one preaching thing, no matter how good you are.

R: Forming the group to share the load of teaching and mentoring, how did that come about?

T: We decided what each's competency was. It was essentially for the language...then Wharehuia (Milroy) and I got Pou (Temara) to come in, and he's the orator. I mean, we could all orate, but he's really the master orator. So, Wharehuia for the culture and traditions, a lot of depth of the cultural origins and so on. You get legends, but there are aspects within those that are quite often omitted when they were told as fairytales, myths, and those kinds of things in a book. Quite often the serious details are left out.

The language part was always going to be me, that was decided at the beginning. Wharehuia was going to do the traditions, and Pou was going to do the oratory. And together, we would do more general things that we would share among us, like cultural behavior, cultural inappropriateness, and such. Quite often, if they (the students) had come through immersion school they would have learned the basics of all of those because those schools go visiting each other and they have to go formally, and so those kids already know how to behave in a formal situation. It's just how good they are, and we tidy up the act, extend the language. Putting the icing on the cake in a way.

T and R: *Laughing*

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] The teachings and responsibility of each mentor is much more than this. Utilizing their expertise, they developed a process that required that each student must be invited to be part of Te Panekiretanga. Meaning, they met certain criteria for pre-existing language comprehension and some of the personal characteristics we've previously discussed, commitment, hunger, and consistency.

[► PLAY]

R: When we think about reciprocal relationships, there is never a one-way street of giving. Meaning, that you don't just receive this knowledge for your own betterment. What are the expectations of the students to give back?

T: That they are committed as we are. Their sense of commitment is our sense of commitment. That their sense of belief is our sense of belief. Our sense of helping others out becomes their philosophy of life in terms of the language.

Some of them will be good at it. Not a lot of them will be good at teaching the language to others. They will be good exponents of it, but they will not be good teachers of it. And you accept that.

Of all the girls that came through the cohorts, we ended up with about 10 girls who became competent callers out of two-hundred and something girls. Because the language required is quite a different level of language...it (knowledge of the language) has to allude to whatever event and they have to know on the spot. You can't learn something before you go because it may not be appropriate, you see. You get to the marae, you size up the situation and then call accordingly. That requires a good sense of language and a good command of language.

The same is with the orators, too. You cannot know your speech before you get to the marae. You have to wait until you get there, see what the situation is, listen to what the hosts have to say, and then you respond accordingly. It has to be virtually spontaneous based on the situation as you find it when you get there.

But your command and your level of language should be up there, and you just adapt it to suit the situation. And if they've (the students) have done that, then I feel that we've done our job properly. We've done our job well if they can do that. And we've tried them out doing that before they get out of the place (the institute). And if not, we say to them, you know, well you probably shouldn't be doing that. You should probably go to the back and peel potatoes for the rest of your life. *Laughing*

T and R: *Laughing*

R: Oh, no!

T: Mind you, that's a very important position. The cooks are the number one important position. The front and the cooks, they are essential! Without the cooks, you've got no body to feed your guests. So, they are extremely important.

R: Would you say that there are expectations that the students are part of this community, and that they also participate with their own community groups?

T: Yes. In most cases, they've come from their communities and then they go back to their communities. All of us have what they call *tūrangawaewae*, which is the place that I have primarily the right to stand. Everyone has that and they just need to decide. If they come from two tribes, then they can decide which one they prefer or they can operate in both of them. But it depends on their elders, whether they can operate in both. In most cases, the elders will let you operate in all...but you need to know the genealogies to why that is so. And there's a pecking order, too, of course. That's determined by your birth.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Tīmoti talked at length about the particular types of family relations and "pecking" orders that exist among extended families. These orders determined social roles, responsibilities, and restrictions for each person. While we are born into a universe of pre-existing relationships and social and cultural structures, there are many ways we learn to help each other through our social roles and expertise.

While we were laughing about our conversation, there are greater points about a balance of roles. Within Te Panekiretanga, as it is at the marae and in the house, there are known responsibilities and standards of behaviors and treatment towards each other. Each person is expected to uphold these, no matter their role or tasks.

The prestige and meaningfulness of such spaces and of the mentors signal a set of responses and behaviors from each person, both formal and informal. These elements are defined and taught throughout each person's life, educations, and life stages.

[♦ Starlog Notes:] There were so many amazing and inspirational moments during the gatherings in 2014 and 2015. I wanted to revisit these with Tīmoti. A primary goal of the gatherings and workshops that I had focused on was to create spaces that language acquisition methods and techniques would be exchanged. I still believed that somewhere there existed a magical language acquisition method that could be distilled from the conversations over those days of sharing amongst the groups.

I still had much to learn and experience. The first occurred on day one, when I began to see that the schedule was not going to go as planned and my role was to help transition the groups between each space, and to sit back and have an open mind. Not everyone who attended the gatherings were open to the same thing.

A few participants did show they were upset that the scheduled structured language acquisition workshop was shifting to human experiences at different points along their

language journeys. One person left abruptly with an exchange of harsh words. To me, that experience signified that there was something deeper going on. This work was more than finding the “right” methodology. For those of us who were open to the experience and social exchange, we continue to grow and reflect on the stories shared at those gatherings.

[► PLAY]

R: What is the purpose of the cohort’s traveling together for those two weeks and what does that do to create relationships amongst the students?

T: For us, it’s necessary for them going, number one. And number two, is to go to see what other cultures are doing and to appreciate either what we have or don’t have, but to go and just sort of say, “ah, now we can do that or something similar to that, or don’t do that,” like we did with one place that we went to.

For us, I think they *need* to go see other people to realize how fortunate they are, or in other cases, how unfortunate they might be. But you don’t know that until you go and see another culture.

I hate to think that the groups we’ve visited in the States consider us to be arrogant, because one of the rules is that there is no English spoken amongst ourselves on these trips. That’s the whole point. So, we get off the bus and everyone is jabbering away in Māori, and I thought to myself, “hmm, they’re probably thinking, ‘gosh, look at this snooty lot!’”

T & R: *Laughing*

R: No, no. Not at all! I think envious, absolutely wishing we talked just as well, just as much.

T: I would like to think so...but that’s not beyond any other tribe’s possibility. Everybody can do that. It’s just a matter of application, of wanting to do so. It’s just a matter of somebody cracking the whip and being as I am, you see.

R: You know, when we arranged for that gathering in 2014, there were some language teaching methods demonstrated, but the lasting meaningful memories that are still shared with me today by people who attended, reaffirm that it wasn’t the techniques for learning the language, it’s the social relationships that were impactful.

T: Yes, their absolutely essential in any language learning process. Because you need the people to be around you, to meet with, to exchange ideas with—using the language and covering from all the smuttiest to the elevated. If you can understand the punchline of a smutty joke, then your language is on the way.

T & R: *Laughing*

R: Yes, it’s a requirement when you are in your language group, that in order for you to stay in your language group, you have to be working with the language. But there doesn’t seem to be a

requirement to stay in that language group, that you need to contribute wellness and healthiness.

T: Now that's probably true.

R: There's no guide or written instructions, but we "assume" it is.

T: No, there isn't. I think each tribe, or each individual, has to make their own decision. We've come from an angle where the language is extremely important for us, that's why it has such a strong power in the way that we do things here. It may not work for the people in your case, but it's an avenue that has worked here.

But remember, people come committed. And I think if people are completely committed to the whole idea and the proposition, that number one, the language needs to survive. Number two, in order to survive it needs to be spoken. Number three, it needs to be in an environment where it's socially acceptable. Where you don't have to apologize for it all the time and worry about the nodding heads that don't like the language they keep hearing.

R: Speaking from experience, I was very shocked when I entered into a social environment where my previous assumptions didn't prove true, that having goals for the language and a drive would be enough to keep pushing us forward, to overcome the negative social issues. It didn't. And that is absolutely devastating to experience.

T: There are places that can be such soulless places and hopeless, unless they're tuned into the *whole* idea, then it's going to be hard.

There was a tutor (in a particular tribal group we met), I thought was the most hopeless tutor. We asked him why he wasn't teaching immersion...I thought to myself, he's the sort of person who should not be doing that and he's the one who has the language at their fingertips, you see.

R: Hmm.

T: And I think, sometimes, it's better to come in with ideas, not just of the language, but all the ideas of how you can make it happen, that's also a requirement. Quite often, native speakers, like myself, can't see the wood from the trees. Now why is that so difficult?

T & R: *Laughing*

T: Sometimes, someone has minimal language, but is the architect that you *need* and they can be a very good architect and the language people just sort of go along with the idea. You need a language person sufficiently strong to be able to influence people.

But a good architect is better than a fluent speaker who is arrogant and horrible because nobody will come to him or her. Whereas a good architect who sets things up well and knows what can be done, is much better.

R: Yes.

T: And that leads to better things and better things. Because he or she has *vision*, you see. He or she has *vision*. Which is quite important.

R: Yes.

[■ STOP]

[► PLAY]

T: Anyway, my love, what else is there that we can do for you?

R: I think I only had one other question in my notes. It would be a waste to not hear from you, with everything that you have done, when you hit the point of burnout, whether over worked or whatever is causing it, what have you done to get back at it?

T: I've got a little covey of people around me. Sort of, slowly but surely, they're there when I need them. The days of burnout for me are long past. I'm burning a new fire, Royce. A new fire burns within, and I think it's because we've seen the fruits of our labors. I've seen the fruits of our labors and the fruits of our labors are positive ones. It's not a Māori thing to do, but you can sort of pat yourself on the back and say, "well done." We are here.

I'm surrounded by these kids like Jeremy and these ones who are now in their 30s and 40s and they are the new leaders, really. In their own tribes, you know...I've been lucky, really. I've been lucky with the kids that surround me and I've also been lucky with my co-workers at Te Panekiretanga. We all got on so well. And the kids who came to us have managed to keep their bonds quite strong, even though they don't see each other on a regular basis.

It's really quite nice to just be on the periphery listening to the way they are happy to see each other again...and enjoying each other's company through the medium of Māori. Which makes it nice and all worthwhile.

R: Yes, yes. You know, each of the one's I've spoken to, like Hana (O'Regan) and Hēmi (Kelly) and others during the trips, they each have talked about the environment created where they are able to stay in the language as long as they do. They've said, they only get to experience that while amongst your group.

T: Yeah, that's true. They get back to their tribes and in their own tribes, their generation is not Māori speaking, quite often.

R: Hmm.

T: They are lone man bands in a lot of ways. It's not until they get together that they can enjoy their community one more time. I think that the fact that they do, is a mark of their own commitment...and they immediately don't speak English to each other.

My wish is that for your people there, to have something similar.

R: Yeah.

T: That would be my wish for all of you.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] From the first time I met Timoti, I've spoken honestly and openly about my own experiences. He and his students have been guiding stars along my journey. During our conversation Timoti remarked on how he and his comrades at Te Panekiretanga continue to have negative words and names thrown at them by Māori and non-Māori people. Timoti said he's been called the Nazi of the Māori language. To which I was astounded but not shocked, as even the best of us undergoes a litany of criticism no matter our successes. An article by Te Ao: Maori News was published on the 20th of January, 2022, titled, "'We were called the Nazis of te reo Māori' – Sir Pou Temara pays a price for excellence." Sir Pou Temara stated that, "'We were called the Nazis of the Māori language. We make no apologies for that. Language has got to be perfect...Criticism came from others who didn't like to use the word elite. They felt it was elitism...Elite in our terms was a good principle. It was a good term. It means excellent. It means we're not going to take rubbish. It means that we are not going to be satisfied with anything less than excellence and all our students inspired to excellence.'"

Language work is life work. Challenging and rewarding. Amongst the hustle, we can't forget to look to the stars and reflect on where we've been, are, and our trajectory to what is beyond. We must have the "*vision*" along with endurance and hunger to pursue language acquisition and revitalization in all parts of our lives. With so few fluent language speakers in some Indigenous communities, we must cast our net wider and look to exemplary models who inspire and empower our souls, hearts, and minds. Drawing upon inspiration and good medicine beyond our direct ancestral language work and language groups is a way to mitigate the loss of speakers, role models, and self-reflections while we work to be the new models and helping to inspire others.

If you feel you are faltering along your language journey, seek out experiences that build your confidence. It may not even be associated directly with language revitalization, but it is a rejuvenation of your spirit, self-esteem, and self-worth. I seek out the land, family, art, photography, writing, poetry, music, beadwork, cooking and feasting (obviously too much feasting), being a better mother, relative, and a better person. I'm highly critical of my language abilities and work which lowers my confidence and self-value at times. But I feel confidence through my other skills and experiences. I've learned to use that confidence as a guide to reflect on my feelings and work with my own languages. I bring that spark back to my language work, difficult as it may be. I, at times, have to force myself to have that type of empowerment and confidence in my language work. I have to convince myself, trick myself, and build myself up that I have a right to my ancestral languages even if at times I feel hopelessly lonely and that

I'm no one's favorite daughter or granddaughter. As the Nepali climber shared in his 2021 documentary *14 Peaks: Nothing Is Impossible*, "Giving up is not in the blood Sir. It's no in the blood." Language acquisition, revitalization, and reclamation is the "Project Possible" for language activists. Like-minded mentors, confidants, comrades, and friends are our teams that we need to get from one peak to the next. Each with unique skills, perspectives, and capabilities, we must learn to lean on each other, oscillating between their tethers of support as our journeys and work shifts. We can't succeed as a singularity. Put time and effort into making relationships that build you up, aid your path, and provide a network of supporters and mentors.

Chapter Fifteen: Dr. Hana O'Regan, Ngāi Tahu (Māori)

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Dr. Hana O'Regan.

Naagagaa: I got this.

Ceesha: Good kids.



Figure 51: Dr. Hana O'Regan. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Dr. Hana O'Regan Ngāi Tahu (Māori)

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ 40+ years of language learning and revitalization experience
- ✦ Mother and partner
- ✦ Immersion language learning and teaching
- ✦ Local and national language policy initiatives
- ✦ Author and composer
- ✦ Language acquisition and revitalization consultation work
- ✦ Doctor of Philosophy, Te Ara Poutama, Culture and Society
- ✦ B.A. in Māori Studies and Political Science, Victoria University
- ✦ Post Graduate Diploma of Arts in Māori Studies at Otago University
- ✦ Master of Arts, Maori Studies, Otago University. Publication of thesis, *Ko Tahu, Ko Au: Kāi Tahu Tribal Identity* (2001)
- ✦ Graduate of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo Māori “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language”
- ✦ Advocacy for Māori language teaching, policy development, education, and community equity
- ✦ Tumu Whakarae (Chief Executive Officer) of CORE Education
- ✦ Dean of Te Puna Wānaka and the Director of Māori and Pasifika Studies at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology
- ✦ Māori Language Commissioner
- ✦ Ngāi Tahu Māori language teacher and advisor

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity only.

“R” represents the voice of Royce. “H” represents the voice of the Hana.

[✦ Starlog Notes:] Hana has written a number of works which chronicle her Māori language journey since she was a young girl. Her writings discuss a number of pinnacle experiences that have inspired her language revitalization work. While we discussed this background, I’ve chosen to provide the following portions of our conversations about her collaborations with Timoti Kāretu and Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo Māori, as well as her experiences with different types of meaningful relationships and her language group’s identification of “resilience strategies.”

In 1995, while working as a lecturer at Otago University and completing her master’s degree, Hana was part of a small cohort of language teachers in her Ngāi Tahu community who began to work on a long-term language strategy. Her participation in Te Kura Reo o Waimārama, (initially week-long immersion programs for Māori language teachers spearheaded by Timoti Kāretu) brought her into a cohort of Māori mentors and peers who became resources and support systems.

Hana has been part expanded this initial language planning into a 25-year strategy called *Kotahi Mano Kāika, Kotahi Mano Wawata* “One Thousand Homes, One Thousand Aspirations” (KMK 2021). The strategy was launched in 2000 and focuses on an intergenerational knowledge

transmission within the home. In addition to her involvement with her local tribal language efforts, she is part of the national Māori movement and shares her knowledge through training and teaching other groups across Aotearoa.

The following conversation is focused on her personal background and involvement in the first language revitalization strategies for her tribe and a reflection on the types of interpersonal relationships and networks that have supported and empowered her to maintain her progress along her language journey.

[► PLAY]

R: Ok, let's start off with a little refresher for me. What was the status of your language when you were first beginning your language journey?

H: Within my tribe, within my family, we had 120 years from the last native language speaker to the next generation. So, 120 years of language loss.

R: Wow!

H: So, my grandmother was born in 1900 and her parents were both fluent, but they didn't raise their children speaking Māori and so the language stopped in my family...and my children were born in 2000? I'm meant to know this...

H & R: *Laughing*

H: In 2003 and 2004. And even though my father was a second language speaker and got to a certain level, he didn't raise us with it. So, I was the only one that developed fluency in my family, and I was the first to then raise my children with Māori as their first language. My eldest daughter is the first one since my grandmother in 1900.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Hana shared some stories about her youth and how she first became intrigued with her Māori language. She has written a much more detailed retelling of this in her chapter titled "My Language Story," in the book *Bringing Our Language Home: Language Revitalization for Families* (Hinton 2013), in her book *Ko Tahu, Ko Au: Kāi Tahu Tribal Identity* (2001), and her doctoral thesis (2016) *Te tīmatāka mai o te waiatātaka mai o te reo*.

[► PLAY]

R: How did you begin working on the language strategy?

H: A group of seven of us, five from down there (Ngāi Tahu) and two people from the North Island, were asked to come down and help us pull together to develop a language strategy. This would have been in 1995 when we developed our tribal language strategy. So, since that time, I have been part of that foundation group and an advisor and a teacher on our language programs within the tribe.

Basically, from the time when I started my undergraduate degree, in my second year I started tutoring the language. I've been in language teaching since then. There's never been a time that I haven't taught either formally, through institutions or through our community initiatives, through our tribal language strategy initiatives, or my own local marae and hapū, which is our village community and sub-tribes that I've been going back and running language classes and history classes in, and our composition, waiata or song compositions.

I've been doing this continuously since I was 19 or 20. But actively involved in the language revitalization, that would have started when I was learning with the group that we had pulled together. We learned about Joshua Fishman. That was the first time I ever heard about him.

R: Yeah.

H: And we learned about language planning. So, we started going through Fishman's work and figuring out what we needed to do and what we could do. And from then, that really stair-cased me into a whole range of other stuff. I started formally, I think at the end of that first year of lecturing when I was 21, maybe 22, I went to the first of what's called Te Kura Reo with Tīmoti Kāretu. They were run by the Māori Language Commission and there were four run during the year, during holidays, for proficient speakers of the language from all over the country.

They were targeted primarily at teachers and broadcasters, people who were working as language broadcasters. And generally, you have about 140 people who get together under some of the best language exponents in the country, like Tīmoti. Just the most incredible teachers and for a week we would be in immersion learning environments!

The first one, which is very memorable, was probably when I was 21 or 22. I carried on going to them on the North Island until I had my children and then it was a bit more difficult. But we started running them and Tīmoti ended up coming down and running one of the four a year within our tribe. Which was great. It wasn't just for our tribe, it was for our area, and that's been going on for over twenty years now.

R: Wow!

H: So yeah, once a year, and that's next week. I'm teaching on them now. We graduated to be one of the teachers. Pānia (Papa), Leon (Blake), and all those guys are teachers as well. I haven't written the papers for that next week, so that's another thing to do this weekend.

H & R: *Laughing*

H: Yeah, so that (Te Kura Reo) also connected us with other people who are in this language revitalization world. Then in 2000, I got a job working at our tribal organization and co-managing our language unit, our language arm, and that linked me into our Ministry of Education. We had the opportunity to be a partner with other tribes, other people who were developing language plans, and a couple of times a year we would get together with them.

So, they started connecting me with a network of other people and language revitalization happening at the tribal level. Then I also got appointed to the Māori Language Commission...for six years, so that also took me into other places with language revitalization.

Then in 2004, was Te Panekiretanga, “the Institute of Excellence in Te Reo Māori.” That’s Timoti, Wharehuia, and Pou Temara’s initiative they set up...I was in the first cohort. My baby was just born on the first hui (“gathering”).

That then, after a few years, took us into a whole other level of revitalization connections around the world where we met you and others. We started travelling and connecting with other Indigenous cultures through that network.

R: Yes.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] There is a strong multifaceted network of skilled and knowledgeable people that Hana is acknowledging. There is also an undercurrent of shared drive and commitment to form connections and maintain those across space and time through various endeavors that are not just language acquisition activities. I was intrigued by the variety of work Hana was discussing and the amount of exchanges with people outside of her own community language group.

[► PLAY]

R: Alright, so in all of this work that you've done, can you think of a couple examples of very important impactful relationships that you've developed and experienced, that have aided the work that you do?

H: So, when you're talking about relationships, it can be at any level? Like you're talking, it could be mentors, it could be peers...

R: Yeah.

H: My mind tends to go straight to those that have mentored and inspired me, and the role that they've played in my own confidence, in stretching me and developing me, and how I feel about the language.

So, I've got two kinds of...

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Hana was interrupted briefly at this point in our conversation. An employee of the hotel she had checked into was bringing some items to the room not knowing she had checked in early. While relistening to this part of the recording, I noticed there was a quick exchange of greetings in the Māori language between Hana and the woman. There seemed to be a seamless transition between the use of English and Māori words and phrases between the two. This has struck a chord in me. Such a simple exchange, but incredibly meaningful that the Māori language continued to be used even in that awkward situation between strangers.

[► PLAY]

H: Sorry, right, there would be two categories and then probably a third. So, the most impactful you know, the first category are the mentors. The second are the peers, those that are your comrades in the fight, that you share similar experiences with. The third would be the next level of inspiration, which is the younger generation. The relationship sustained there...and it reminds you of why you need to make the effort and why you need to do what you need to do.

So those are the three groups and they all have a different kind of impact.

R: Could you describe some of the details of each of those types of relationships?

H: Alright, so let me start with the mentors then. So, the type of relationship is one where it is a language model. People who are exponents of the language and who not only have things to share and impart but are absolutely giving and generous with what they have to share and impart. That type of relationship becomes almost familial. In fact, all of them end up being familial even though they don't need to be familial, you don't need to be related to these people (the mentors). It's the type of relationship where you link because of the common cores.

What I've found is, even though my language mentors haven't been from within my own tribe, generally the most impactful ones haven't, that the sense of connection and the fact that what they've done for me and what they do for my family, and do for my tribe, is beyond the call of duty almost, you know, this is beyond.

How much that they give of themselves to nurture that's passion and commitment and love for the language and others, makes that sense of commitment and dedication to them even greater. It really strengthens that they don't have any obligation to do it, but they do it.

So, that kind of relationship becomes, like I said, almost familial. My children refer to some of these ones as their grandfathers. In our Māori language terms, they all call them poūa. So Tīmoti's one example. Wharehuia was another. My children refer to them as Poūa Wharehuia. Poūa Tīmoti. Like "grand-dad" Tīmoti, "grand-dad" Wharehuia. Tīmoti named my son when he was born and the connections are really significant.

So, I think of them as "Papa," as our mothers and fathers, aunties and uncles, but it's an incredibly strong connection, and I think the fact that it's a chosen connection...

R: Hmm. *Chosen*

H: It's not one of the family that you got lumped with anyway. It's a *chosen* connection. It makes it so much more stronger, so much stronger. Saying that, then the sense of obligation to do right by them is huge. That sense needing to do right by what they've given, is really strong,

So that's what I would say in terms of those exponents of the language, the givers of the language, the inspirers of the language. They're not just mentors, they are teachers. But within a tribe like mine where we didn't have really a generation of native language speakers left, they became our surrogates. They adopted us and brought us under their wings. So that really did become familiar in its bond.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Such a powerful statement describing that you choose each other. The responsibility grows from that continuous choice and exchange of support, trust, and love. These bonds become stronger as each person reciprocates the intergenerational knowledge exchange and is responsible and respectful of that process and bringing that knowledge forward to new generations and peers. It's also consistent presence in each other's lives. Even across distances and over time, they return to each other and maintain communication and support in-between those times they are together.

[► PLAY]

H: The other one, in terms of the other group with your peers, there's an incredible sense of belonging. Incredible sense of belonging to a common cause, belonging to a fight. Belonging to people that get you and understand you. And for me as a fair (complexion) person within the Māori world and speaking a different dialect for most people, I'm only one of a few people that speak our dialect I've learned it as a second language, you know, I kind of stood out like a sore thumb anyway. My language friends have been a really powerful connector and have supported my confidence and validity within the wider Māori world because of how they've accepted me.

Sometimes I've have to pinch myself because just thinking, you know, these really, really cool people are actually my friends.

H & R: *Laughing*

H: And it's so humbling, as well, again, how giving they are, how supportive they are. And I wonder about that camaraderie that people have when they're in the trenches of war. Then they've come through really challenging situations and they've shared those experiences with others, and no one else can really understand.

You hear that no one else can understand what they've gone through. It could be through a traumatic event, it could be through a natural disaster, and people bond. They bond incredibly in those situations. I kind of think that's the same kind of bond with my friends who are part of our language revitalization journey. So, that would be the kind of impactful relationship with them.

Impacts, in terms of giving their support when it gets really hard, when you wanna give up. It's usually the place that I laugh the most. I get support when I'm struggling with things and can't come up with a word or don't know how to say something, like I've got experts on tech. But it's also even my children say that I laugh differently when I'm with those people.

R: Yeah. *Yeah*.

H: It's like bright belly gut laughing.

R: *Laughing*

H: And it's a beautiful thing to refresh and refill.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] The years can go by so fast. There is so much work, tasks, and benchmarks within those years. Reflecting upon those years and seeing those bright moments along the journey helps put the longevity and multifaceted nature of language work in perspective. It also provides an opportunity to reinforce the needs to practice self-care, to “refresh and refill.”

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Hana's doctoral dissertation (2016), *Te tīmatāka mai o te waiatātaka mai o te reo*, details her language journey within the context of her own tribe, “the Kāi Tahu people of the South Island of New Zealand” and addresses questions about new approaches to assessment, intergenerational identity connections to the past, present, and future, and the complexities of language revitalization strategies.

[► PLAY]

H: So, we've had our 21st birthday of our tribe's language strategy, you know the one that I was part of the group that I started with at the beginning. We're 21 years from the time that we launched the strategy. It took us a few years to get the tribe to agree to it. We had to put up papers and try to get the tribe to support our language strategy. So, it was launched in 2000...and mandated by our tribe.

We've now got a generation of our babies who have come through being raised with Māori as their first language...It's not a huge group, but we got a generation who have been part of that Kaupapa, part of that initiative and strategy.

They are the other impactful relationships. All of us who are in that (group) we only ever speak Māori to those children. Even if we switch into English with our mates and our peers, we never speak English to those children who are part of that Kaupapa.

That's hard sometimes, you know. Now, when Leon (Blake) decided to translate Harry Potter...

H & R: *Laughing*

H: The language that they're speaking is 5 times greater than mine. You know, it's a real challenge to try and keep up with them, because of course these guys are our nieces and nephews and I'm struggling as my language growth hasn't kept up...One of our babies who is 18 now, in the National Exams for extension Māori language, there's these extension classes for those who have been raised in Māori, and he got the top mark in the who country!

Which is pretty mind blowing to go from where we were, where we had the worst language stats in the country to that.

R: Wow, congratulations!

H: So, yeah, that's why I say those relationships are impactful because when I'm with these young ones, I can't let the guard down. I need to keep fighting and pushing. It's impactful because it's still a struggle. You know, my children have started trying to speak English to me. They speak English a lot amongst themselves and it's impactful because I know the dangers of how quickly a majority language can take over a minority language even if it's your first tongue.

I'm always mindful and alert, probably paranoid, anxious, and all those other things as well, having panic attacks, about, you know, what's going to happen? I have moments where I'm like, thank God, when I hear them argue in the language or something. But It's impactful because it continues to inspire and it makes me think more intergenerationally around what I need to do for my grandchildren, for my great grandchildren.

And I think they're really generous, too. They must know that their language is better than ours.

H & R: *Laughing*

H: But they're still respectful and generous and understanding and humble. That's why I would say it's an important and impactful relationship.

R: Yeah, yeah. I definitely think there's a certain type of person, you know, a mindset, where you want that younger generation to excel beyond what you know, or maybe what you're capable of. Many of us, we started out of the starting gate late, just by default, and having people with knowledge and skills who have the mindset to almost work themselves out of a job because they give and give and give.

Yeah, that's a very special type of person to be able to be that way, to help a person achieve more, to mentor a greater generation.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Mentorship and the gifting of knowledge, tools, and truth telling of lived experiences to other people on a language acquisition and revitalization journey is a life stage. Hana is often called upon to help guide and inform other burgeoning language activists. This is

possible because she opens herself up to share her experiences. Through her personal connections and professional careers, she maintains a process of mentorship and intergenerational knowledge exchange.

[► PLAY]

R: What work are you doing right now, that you're focused on?

H: So, it's a bit ad hoc. I still do a lot of speaking. Last week I was actually here in Rotorua speaking to the Māori Kura ā-Iwi, which are tribally linked secondary immersion schools. They had their national conference here last week in Rotorua, so I was speaking to them on language revitalization in the home.

Earlier on in the year I went to the top of the South Island and ran a workshop on language revitalization in families and in the village. I go back to my marae and run workshops. So far this year, I've run two weekend programs on language and more creative expression, song composition, and those kind of things within my own village.

I write still...In my day job, I've just started at a new organization where we're involved in professional learning and development for teachers, and also the development of resources for education. But then we've got a big arm within that to support Māori language: Māori language resources and pedagogy; and teaching in immersion schools and bilingual schools; and also promoting Māori language capability across everyone. So that's my business side at the moment, but I still work at the tribal level and I still teach on our tribal immersion programs.

R: So much! You do so much!

H: None of that is the day job, really...For four years I worked at Te Rūnanga as co-manager of the language unit at Ngāi Tahu, and that was my full focus. It's not the case now. I just do whatever I can.

I've been doing some other stuff for a little while, but still maintaining all those other connections and then of course still linked in with them. I'm on that program with Pānia for the Kotahi Rau Pukapuka, so I've been doing a little bit of work with them. Kotahi Rau Pukapuka is a trust that's been set up to translate and produce 100 books in the Māori language.

R: Oh wow!

H: So, we're the ones who have done a couple translations of Maya Angelo poems...I'm doing another book under that kaupapa, under that initiative, of our tribal language stories.

R: That's really exciting! It's incredible how much you get to do. In some of my language communities, we still don't have an official writing system yet. In one language group, there are about seven different writing systems being used simultaneously in the school classes, language programs and groups, and in the creation of language materials and resources. Each one represents another family's or person's accent and ways of speaking.

H: See, we don't have that level of complexity. We're so lucky that we've got one writing system and a few minor dialect differences, but not much. So, that does help a lot.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Even though we were deep into a very positive discussion at this point in our conversation, I was reminded of some of the difficult situations that Hana had described in her other writings. It was important to reflect on how positive lived experiences have been impactful to her ability to overcome negativity and adversity along her language journey. These experiences and lessons have empowered her to develop strategic methods to combat "myths" about minority language learning and use. Hana discussed at length some of the strategies to be proactive in deconstructing the myths and negativity that whittles away at your confidence and can defeat your long-term goals. Similar strategies are available on the Ngāi Tahu KMK website (<http://www.kmk.maori.nz/home>) and in Hana's 2016 doctoral thesis *Te tīmataka mai o te waiatataka mai o te reo*.

[► PLAY]

R: Could you shed some light on experiences or things that you've seen where you think, that's a red flag? We don't want to encourage that type of relationship. We don't want to encourage that type of learning environment or we've seen that it doesn't help us maintain good positive relationships. Are there some of those experiences that you could talk about?

H: So the negative ones?

R: Yeah, yeah, the opposite side. Even if you've learned from them.

H: So, I guess I wouldn't think of them as having relationships with me, but more kind of experiences and what I've seen. There are definitely, I think, within language revitalization, within the language world, you're gonna get the full myriad. The full range of good people, bad people.

Just because you speak the language doesn't mean you're nice. Doesn't mean you've got the best intentions. You're gonna find people who are driven by ego. And you're gonna find gatekeepers. You're gonna find people that want to hold other people's language back because it might make them look, (pause) it might take away their position. And so, I have absolutely been in situations where I've come across all of the above...I've had people who will try and keep you down and not want to give you the opportunities to learn the language because it might be seen to debase their position or status.

And I think that's one of the reasons why I love my mentors. Those most impactful are those that have been so giving but also they're absolutely not threatened in any way. They want to let the young ones have voice. They want to put them in situations where our protocols wouldn't usually put them so they get the chance while they're alive to correct them, to help them, so they can carry on those traditions.

I've been in the opposite of that where that jealousy comes through and people were trying to bring you down and are nasty because of some reason. I mean, you get that no matter in any kind of world, but it pisses me off more in the Māori language world because we don't have time for this! We don't have time for this carry on!

You know, it's not just having time, there's too few of us to pull each other down. Come on, pull your heads up. Wait until everyone's speaking in the language then you can have your fights!

Because it's nasty and it can be hurtful, and it's like a real grief when you see somebody turn away from the language because of those negative relationships. And there's a grief when you think that's a real opportunity lost in a time that we cannot afford to lose opportunities...I've come across those negative relationships a lot and what we have to do is try to stay humble but also put on some resilient strategies for our families, for our kids.

We have to tell them, we have to actually say, "people are gonna treat you like this, this is some of the things you might hear. Be prepared. Here's some comebacks. Here's what you can throw back at them." But also try to create a bit of empathy, "they're like that because they're jealous and that's not a nice place to be and don't waste too much of your time speaking about them."

So yeah, I've come across a lot. I've had people attack my dialect. I've had people who don't know me, but because I have a public profile as well, I've had trolls and people saying I don't even have a right to speak Māori because I'm not Māori enough.

R: Uh hmm. You've said, "resilient strategies." I think that's the first time I've heard that said in this context. I've talked with a lot of people about combating negative issues, but I haven't heard it described in such a way. I've always thought about the questions, if there are methods or specific things that you do to make your core group stronger...

H: Yeah, so I do talk about resilient strategies but I also draw on, well, you got to think what's going to inspire somebody? What's going to give them that extra bit of strength when the going gets tough. I do this at a local level. I try to do it with my children. I do it when I teach. And you got to think, when the going gets hard, what makes them push through?

For me personally, it's legacy. I have a real commitment to the legacy of what my ancestors went through and what they did, and the fights that they fought so that I could be here today. That our language and culture could have at least a shot into the future. And I can't let that go. I can't give up. When I leave this world and I meet my ancestors, I'm going to have to front up to them.

I've actually had this conversation this week...One of the strategies I have is to say, on the daily, what have I done for my language today? Also, when I'm face to face with my ancestors, am I going to be able to say, I did my best.

One of the things I do is I tell our people about that story, about the history that connects the language of the now into the legacy of resilience in the past. Two things, one is to feel that obligation, but to be incredibly proud of the fact that we have this legacy of resilience. That when things have been tough, our people have persevered. We have persisted. We have existed in a time that everything has been done to kill the language, to exterminate the culture, to wipe out the people. Where our lands are gone. Our resources are gone. Our children are

dying of malnourishment. Where we have had systems that have effectively kept us out of the economy, education, and health. We can say, by all rights we shouldn't be here and my gosh, we are! How amazing!

So, when you start to tell the history that has created the space that we're in now, you see a reaction. When I was at my marae, at my village, last week when I was teaching about the history of one of our ancestors, a guy by the name of Matiaha Tiramōrehu. He started our treaty claim against the Crown in 1849 and that fight went for 150 years of an unbroken petition against the Crown. Generation after generation fighting, and my father (Sir Tipene O'Regan) was the last to fight it and it was settled under my dad's leadership.

I talked about this man (Tiramōrehu) and I was teaching the people the things he was writing in his diary at the time which is heart breaking stuff about the impoverishment, the fights that they were doing, and the fact that his wife committed suicide. And I'm telling them this, and I'm trying to make them connected with that legacy of history and resilience because you can turn that into the now, saying you need to be proud that this is our ancestor. This is what he did. There's a reason why he became a prolific writer and wrote everything down making sure the future generations would have access to this incredible knowledge. And he wrote down our creation stories and our histories. He wrote poetry.

R: Wow!! I love that. Thank you! Maacagiraac!

H: Yeah, he saw into the future. So, I can then turn to these people now who are only starting their language journey and say, we are part of this legacy. How amazing to have this richness! But so that they can also see at times where our people are impoverished and got drug issues and all these other things, that there's something else that we can hang onto...So getting the tools to build that resilience, making sure they're informed so that they know what they're doing is right. They shouldn't have to defend it, but this prepares our people with the best possible defenses...That's exciting and that's one of the strategies that we've used as well.

R: That's fantastic! I really love how you're explaining that. Even while being in small tribal communities, you can still experience negativities and such things from your own community members. You're not always informed about what you may experience and you're not always taught strategies to combat those when doing language work. The shared experiences across endangered language groups, regardless of how vibrant the language is and how many speakers are left, there's things that we continue to learn from each other.

H: I would say, you know, for those people that feel defeated, there's power in naming the attacks...This is why we did what we did within our tribe. We proactively identified what we knew to be the biggest criticisms and we proactively deliberately set out to debase them...so that you take away the power of the fear that comes along with the attacks.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Hana and I talked for over two hours in this conversation. The transcription here is only around 40 minutes of our discussion. I've chosen to transcribe these portions here to show a process of reflection on both the positive and negative experiences and how speaking of these is empowering. It's powerful to name and define what aids your wellness and success, as well as what threatens it and feeds fear. Depending on the types of interpersonal relationships, miscommunication can create ill received criticism, risking exposure to lateral suppression. Critical criticism can be beneficial and challenge you to achieve more, but only if each person is aware of this process and communication is open and free flowing.

Hana's language journey and the relationships she has experienced has inspired her to set boundaries for the types of language work she is involved with. She prioritizes cultivating positive and productive learning environments and social experiences through her language acquisition and revitalization efforts. Through her efforts and the teams she contributes to and leads, she has made access to the language a reality for all groups of learners. I too, pinch myself, checking if this is real, that I've come to know her amongst all the people in the world and this beautiful rock star has my heart, is my comrade, mentor, and friend. When I feel hopeless and lost amongst the trials and challenges, that bright light from her reminds me I'm a good person, I have value, and I have a purpose and responsibility I can't abandon.

Chapter Sixteen: Hēmi Kelly, Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Tahu-Ngāti Whāoa (Māori)

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Navigating towards the future.

Storywork

Rehua (Antares or Betelgeuse/Sirius). The brightest star, Māori lunar month of the new year, eldest child of Rangi and Papa, born from lighting and has remained in the heavens not to descend to earth (Te Aka Māori Dictionary 2021).

Matariki 'New Year' (Pleiades). Nine stars of Matariki (Alcyone) constellation, the male and female stars balance each other (Matamua 2017).



Figure 52: Hēmi Kelly. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

A Conversation with Hēmi Kelly Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Tahu-Ngāti Whāoa

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ 20+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Participant and teacher in intensive adult language immersion classes
- ✦ Language teacher and lecturer in te reo Māori at Auckland University of Technology
- ✦ Graduate of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo Māori “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language”
- ✦ Curriculum development
- ✦ Māori literary translations
- ✦ Author of *A Māori Phrase a Day* (2020) and *A Maori Word a Day* (2018)
- ✦ Co-translator for the Māori language version of Lorde’s *Te Ao Mārama* album (2021)
- ✦ “A Māori Phrase a Day” social media content creator
- ✦ Language documentation, preservation, and translation
- ✦ Māori language planning and revitalization initiatives

The following conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

“R” represents the voice of Royce. “HK” represents the voice of Hēmi.

[✦ Starlog Notes:] It was important for me to have a conversation with Hēmi in addition to both Hana and Tīmoti because he is part of a later cohort than Hana. Hēmi is very much a student of both Tīmoti and Hana and represents a younger generation of respected and active language teachers and exemplars. He also represents a type of a “second-generation” cohort. Meaning, while the main mentors of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo modified aspects of their curriculum with each cohort, the structure of the program was established, refined, and proven successful from the first few cohorts that Hana and others were part of. It was not Hēmi’s responsibility to develop the initial program but he is an integral part of the family of students and mentors who are empowered to put into action their visions and teachings for the revitalization of te reo Māori. His work as a multifaceted teacher of the language actively involves him with different groups of language learners and fluent speakers in a multiplicity of ways. He represents a living continuum of an intergenerational knowledge exchange and the responsibility of extending that knowledge beyond the classroom and his own language speech communities.

Hēmi was part of the initial Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo cohort who visited Oklahoma for the 2014 Bringing Our Languages Together gathering. While I’ve talked at length with Tīmoti and Hana over the years about more personal issues impacting language loss and social relationships, I did not have the same in-depth conversations with Hēmi at the gathering or in the years after that. I’m thankful he was willing to spend a few hours reminiscing about the gathering and discussing some of his current projects.

I've admired and been inspired by Hēmi's work for a very long time. I respect his perspective and language journey. I feel it is important to include a longer portion of our conversation because it expands on the initial interview questions while also reflecting on additional conversation points that I've had with all the other language activists in the previous sections. His openness to reflect on the questions during our conversation helped me to see the previous conversations with the other language activists in a new light.

[► PLAY]

R: Alright, so just a quick reintroduction again from you. Your main language focus is Māori. Have you worked to revitalize any other languages besides Māori?

HK: No, no. Māori is my main language focus. Just that.

R: Okay. What's your length of time and capacity or type of work that you've done with the language?

HK: I started studying the language, formally, when I was 13. Before that, anything I learned or knew would've just been by exposure to the language. So, I've been learning since I was 13, that doesn't stop. When I was in my early 20s, I started working as a teacher assistant at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, helping out in class, and I did that for two years. Then I moved on to being a teacher after that, which has been about seven/eight years. So, teaching for around 10 or working in a classroom for around 10...always teaching and learning for half my life.

Laughter Yeah.

R: Yeah. Alright. At what point did you decide that you wanted to be a teacher. What motivated that?

HK: When I was a teenager I was really interested in the language...I was discovering who I was as a person, as a Māori person, and so language was kind of a central focus in that.

I think at one point I came to this realization that I wanted to help other people who were Māori but didn't have or know their language. Because in knowing my language and learning my language, I came to *know as a Māori person*, fully. So, I think somewhere in my teens I kind of made that decision, maybe unconsciously. But I just got into teaching just by chance, because having the language we've always got a shortage of teachers.

And so, I started working firstly in a Kōhanga Reo, in a full-immersion preschool, because I was wanting money. *chuckle* I wanted to work on the side while I was doing my studying and that was kind of an easy, kind of fall-into option...I thought it was, because I was like, "I've got the language. I can go work in a Kōhanga Reo" and found out that it's not that easy working with kids and babies.

HK & R: *Laughing*

R: Yeah!

HK: So, while it was a great experience for me, it also made it clear to me that, yes, I'd like to be a teacher, but I'd like to maybe be working with people my own age or older. So, that wasn't the space for me.

Then I kind of, not fell-into, but I got a job as a teacher aide and working in a classroom for two years watching other people teach and learning about...the different ways of teaching 'cause I was watching a lot of different teachers as I was a teacher aide.

Yeah, that really inspired me to want to do that.

R: How much about the language do you think you teach? Well, you teach the language, but in addition to that, what else do you teach? Timoti talks about mannerisms, and you know, it's not just comprehension of the language, but it's also a whole way of being.

HK: If I think back to my first-year classes, and this year I'm teaching second-years, but I've put all different levels of it in. Say for the first-years, I'm teaching an introduction to the language. It's kind of the basics, giving them that foundation so that they can start to learn more. But you can't help but teach customs and protocols along the way, and it's not even tied into the curriculum, it just, it can't be ignored.

For example, in the very basics of the language you teach those different introductions, and one is asking someone where they're from. And so, explaining that in Māori, the question in English is very different than in Māori. It's asking where their ancestors are from. You're not asking someone where they live...You're giving the person insight into a Māori way of thinking, a Māori way of being, a Māori way of seeing the world, and what comes with that are all the different mannerisms and aspects of the culture as well.

R: Uh-hmm. When you start teaching, is there a certain time period that you either openly define what your relationship is between you and the students or your colleagues, or is that already known within your work as a teacher? You know, this is the teacher, this is how we're supposed to behave. For some people that's almost very much common sense after childhood, and with some it's not, and you have to kind of be retaught how to be.

HK: I think for me it's always been common sense. It's never been defined or explained explicitly. It just is. Working with adults, I think it would be different than working with children or teenagers. You might have to kind of define that relationship, not explicitly, but let it be known that you are the teacher and they are the student, and that is the relationship.

With adults, it just kind of is. There's a respect on both sides for each other and for the time that you're putting in and for the time that they're putting in. I'm also working with people who are a lot older than me. So, yeah, there's just this mutual respect and you're aware of what's the relationship.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] I've often questioned how language "work" is conceptualized by different people who have a paid job(s) or careers within the fields of endangered Indigenous language acquisition and revitalization. How does a person distinguish between their language "work" occupying a different social sphere than the rest of their life and social interactions? There are realistic requirements that a person needs to have other language speakers to socialize with outside of work. At what point does that process happen, where the language use shifts from "work" to an everyday social life?

[► PLAY]

R: Alright. Sometimes I think "work" and "life" become blended. At some point, after doing the work for a couple years, it really is just our life. This is just our life, this is what we do, it's no longer "work." But was there a point where you recognized that it was no longer just work you wanted to do, but that this was a focus in your life and that it was a passion you had?

HK: Hmm. Yeah, yeah there was. I think the further you go in, speaking for myself, the more it became my life was when the people I surrounded myself with were others who were learning or we're already speakers or teachers, or that was their life. And so, I started to surround myself with those people and overtime it just became my life.

If you look around and everyone in my life speaks Māori or works with the language in some capacity or has children who are going to a full immersion school, well that's not everyone in my life, but compared to say, before I got into the language, before I started, you know, really actively learning the language, it was a natural progression. Yeah.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] It is important to understand that there are other language speakers, a community of speakers that Hēmi became introduced to through his language work. There were other *like-minded* people who he could socialize with in the language. Thinking about this, I'm faced with questions about my own communities and who can I socialize with in the language while not in a "work" environment? What has been done to create that social community, friendships, and family amongst speakers and learners to make this a possibility?

[► PLAY]

R: Alright, and then out of all the experiences you've had, can you think of a couple that were incredibly impactful and important to the type of relationships that you sought out or continue to seek out for working with the language?

HK: Yeah, I think the first one that comes to mind is connecting with my marae, with my hapū, my subtribe on an intimate level. Earlier, we would kind of go to our marae very rarely, for a funeral here and there. It was the language that really helped me, what I was saying before,

discover who I am as a Māori person. And what I mean by that, is who I am as a Māori Ngāti Maniapoto person of that tribe.

Again, that goes hand-in-hand with the kind of work and living in the space. You have nothing to stand on, you have no credentials, you have no authority, if you don't have a connection with your people. You know, no one will ever say that, but I believe that is true when you are out there in the world.

For example, what I do you know, I'm out here in Auckland working on social media and all this, I'm not only me. I'm Hēmi Kelly of Ngāti Maniapoto. So, if people back home were to say, "who is this guy, you know, we've never seen him," I cannot promote myself as that without having that connection to my people and their endorsement and their support. That's a relationship that's happened over time. Me and my Mum started going back to the marae when I was about 16. She got involved more with the committee of the marae and helping out with things there and I started to get to know my uncles and aunties and elders of the marae. From that young age, they started to take me under their wing and teach me things. And I don't know, they saw the potential in me in different areas...and they passed on their knowledge to me in some way. Now as a 32-year-old, I can confidently go out into the world and do what I do knowing where I come from and knowing that I have the support of my people.

So, I think that is a really important impactful relationship for me and I think in a Māori setting, in general. Yeah, you look at Hana, you look at the ones in the group (Te Panekiretanga), and I think everyone in the group has that relationship, that connection with their people, their home people

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] These relationships are integral to building an internal confidence which reinforces a person's belief in their own language authority and prestige. In my own life and communities, I struggle with the loss of the elders who I've grown up with, who are the ones who know me. I've failed at socializing more with my own peers. I'm awkward and introverted, but I also have found it hard to relate to people my own age. I've always felt that I was born a little old lady. With the loss of my elders, my connections to my community, comedic as it may be, I'm faced with the challenge of, how do I have peers who are friends and involved with language work when most new learners are so much younger than me? I have friends, they're just in other communities, I swear.

[♦ Starlog Notes:] I asked Hēmi questions about the opposite side of the spectrum of experiences he's had. More negative ones and some he would regard as counterproductive to positive relationship making. He didn't have responses immediately to these questions, but after discussing "relationship making" as a "social behavior," he provided the following responses.

[► PLAY]

R: Would you say there are certain types of behaviors required for maintaining a good or positive relationship, and is there also behavior that you wouldn't want to encourage or participate in?

HK: I think this kind of behavior still exists within ourselves, that we don't value the language. Not everyone, but I think it's a systematic issue that we still don't see value in our language. I think it's really changing. It has changed a lot, but there's still a large proportion of our population who don't value our language the way they value other things.

Um, we don't have enough teachers. And so, someone who is Māori and has a leadership role in education but doesn't speak Māori, will be a little bit out of touch sometimes. The person will be like, we've got a student here who thinks they can speak Māori, maybe they can come in and teach the beginner's class. And I'm like, yeah, that's an awesome opportunity for this student who does speak the language, but this student is not a teacher and has no experience in dealing with 60 adult humans, you know, in one space.

For me, I think, where that person is looking at giving this other speaker an opportunity, which I see is a good thing, but they're not seeing the value in the language and then teaching the language. The expectations or standards he/she should uphold with that should be the same as, say a science paper, where he/she can go, "well this student's got some knowledge of science, why don't we have them teach the class." Right? I don't think that would happen. You know.

So yeah, that's some of the behavior that I think I don't like, that we still need to change. Yeah, I don't know if that relates, but...

R: No, no, it definitely does and I see that quite a bit, especially where we have so few resources with speakers.

HK: Yeah.

R: We're trying to find a way to utilize speakers who absolutely don't want to teach children or even teach, but they have a wealth of knowledge. So, trying to pair them with someone they mesh well with becomes a unique task to continue to document their knowledge and try to, you know, pull things out of them. Their knowledge is really valuable, but I wouldn't put them in a position to teach a class. Patience and skill wise, that's just not their thing.

HK: No, that's right. Yeah, just because you're learning the language it doesn't mean you want to teach, as well. It doesn't mean you want to teach at all.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] I've experienced these same types of issues in numerous different language programs. The roles and responsibilities of learners, speakers, teachers, advocates, and administrators can be complicated by the lack of value and clarity of language goals and understanding of what it realistically takes to achieve benchmarks and consistent progress. While many Indigenous people have a deep belief and support for the importance of language

and culture being revitalized, a person who simply vocalizes such but is not committed to learning and teaching the language, should not be placed in charge of directing language acquisition and revitalization programs. An administrative and/or a political appointed person who does not commit to the time and work required for successful language acquisition for themselves will be out of touch with the value and understanding of what it takes to become a language speaker and teacher. Instead, if administrative management is lacking in the active language groups, a team based approach should be created to utilize that person's skills. That person, lacking actual successful language practitioner skills, should not be placed in a position where they are controlling the development of a program which requires actual language practitioners with the vision and knowledge to spearhead such work.

A person's lack of experience, commitment, and values for successful language acquisition methods can misguide the entire group's intentions, actions, and outcomes. Such an appointee can also negatively impact the group's social dynamics if they are not leading by action through a hands-on practice and involvement in the actual language acquisition and revitalization work. Positive advocates are a necessity, but long-term impact to create and sustain a community of speakers requires those leading the charge to also be committed to being a speaker and leading by action. Comradery through shared experiences and language use and communication is a key requirement for long-term interpersonal relationships.

[► PLAY]

HK: I think going back to the impactful, important relationships, just one other thing to mention is, and being a teacher, for me, it's really important to have people to talk to at my level, outside of my work, because teaching takes up so much of your time and your energy. Really, you know, taking your time and being patient, and slowing down, that can get tiring sometimes.

And you just want to have a conversation in te reo with someone at your level. So, if I didn't have that, I think I would burnout. I would lose that passion and motivation to keep on doing what I'm doing because you are always speaking slowly and patiently and waiting very patiently for a reply.

I need to have that out with the people at my level, whether that's Tīmoti and elders like him who I would regard as mentors or, you know, people at my age, my generation, who I would regard as friends. That's really important for me.

R: Alright, and then, outside of teaching the language, in what ways do you interact and use the language with family and with those around you.

HK: Um, not so much with my family, there's only a couple of speakers. Actually, there's only one, my first cousin. But with friends, you know, the people that I've come to know over time through work or through our learning together. In Auckland, it's big but we know who each other are. We have our friends who speak te reo and that's when I get an opportunity to use the language outside of work.

R: How much throughout your week each day do you spend completely in Māori?

HK: This is one reason why I love going on our trips overseas with Timoti, is because it's the only time *ever* that we stay in te reo Māori for that length of time. You know, we go overseas for two to three weeks, and that does not happen in New Zealand. You can't go two to three weeks just speaking Māori. But when you're overseas in another country traveling with a group of 30 you can quite easily do that, apart from when you need to go and order a drink or something.

R: Or when you're with someone like me!

HK & R: *Laughing*

R: But I liked it though, 'cause you know, you guys would just keep talking in Māori and then there would be a couple people standing next to me who would lean in and translate real quick what I wouldn't get from gestures and teasing.

HK: Yeah, yeah. And that doesn't happen here really, you know. We do get together from time to time. The longest period would probably be a week when we do those full immersion schools that are like four- or five-day long courses. And I haven't been to one for a while because when you kind of reach a certain level of proficiency, you start to step away from those things. I mean, learning continues, but you stop doing that intensive learning. And so, yeah, I think it's very irregular, like in a whole week there will be a little bit te reo here, here, here, and here. You know, it's never a period where I'm in te reo for a long time. Unfortunately.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] It is also very important to note that the questions I'm asking in these interviews with the language activists are very heavy and complex. The specific wording of each question sometimes needed to be explained with examples so that I was clearly communicating my understanding of the question or concept to the person. Some concepts for each question were discussed in relation to the person's individual experiences and language groups.

When conceptualizing and reflecting upon various questions about group dynamics, social relationships, and language learning, these concepts may need to be unpacked more and examples provided to come to an understanding of each concept or experience. I've had to do this multiple time with each language activist and I've shifted the ways I verbalize my own understanding of these by providing details of my own experiences. I've left some more intimate details of our conversations out of the transcripts here.

The following is an example of how we discussed differences in our own understandings of these concepts and how they could be better understood and unpacked. During many of the conversations, certain concepts discussed in this way would spark ideas or alternate ways of looking at various issues. These were magical moments revealing how even long-term language activists continue to benefit from the practice of reflection and discussion of experiences.

[► PLAY]

R: Ok, so, the social environment. When you are learning the language and teaching the language, what are some of the key methods used to create that social environment that helps maintain, foster, and sustain relationships?

HK: Sorry, can you ask that again?

R: Have you noticed with other teachers or with yourself, certain things that you've done to create the environment where social interactions start to develop strong relationships?

The relationships that you have with Tīmoti's group, and how that was developed. I think that's different than when you take a semester long language course or when people do weekend courses.

HK: Yeah. Yeah, I think that is a key example of that, where you've kind of set up a space, a group that the commitment is being made and you're quite aware of what that is, of speaking Māori to each other. It's not even explicitly explained, but you just go about it. I haven't been involved with that or encountered that outside of the space with Tīmoti and Te Panekiretanga, that school we all attended. That is the prime key example of it.

And so, some of my friends that live here, being from Te Panekiretanga as well, that expectation is there again when we see each other. We always converse in Māori and because we want to, as well.

At work, you're just making me think I need to create something like that or we need to work to get there because with the teachers at work there's a team of probably about eight of us that teach Māori at different levels. But in the same faculty and too often we speak English to each other outside of the class in the corridors. We might say "hello, how's it going" in Māori and then we just switch to English. And I'm just really starting to think about it now. *Laughter* I'm like, "oh my God! That's not right." So, something needs to happen, something needs to be (pause), what do you suggest?

R: Hmm.

HK: Hmm, I don't know. Like a shift in our minds where we commit to speaking Māori to each other.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] The social experience created through language learning groups is incredibly powerful. While some interactions have not been explicitly spelled out for each member, the repetition of being in an environment which establishes a normalization of specific conducive behavior has reshaped how cohort members interact with each other. As Hana has described about her reasoning for speaking only in Māori to her children, their presence together signals the priority of te reo Māori use between them. Caringly crafted and shared are the social teachings and ways of being Māori that accompany the use of the language.

Simply explained, Timoti, Wharehuia, and Pou, have created a family amongst their cohort members. Each cohort member experiences a repetition of social behaviors amongst the Te Panekiretanga family that prioritizes the use of te reo Māori, as well as a level of respect, responsibility, love, and friendship for their mentors and amongst their fellow cohort members. That social experience engrained in each member has achieved in many a pattern of camaraderie, support, and resilience for their work and life along their language journey. The specific unique behaviors and methods should be defined amongst each group as they relate to unique cultural practices and contemporary needs.

[► PLAY]

R: Yeah, yeah, I think, of course with conversation, if the language skills are there. Like, the levels that I'm at and the other learners, none of us are really conversational yet. Or we're in an environment that isn't fostering openness of making mistakes. So, I see people being more timid of consistently speaking longer sentences. We're more sensitive about it in our own ancestral language groups.

Yeah, and I could go to all of the other language groups I've worked with, and I'm less sensitive about making the mistakes, about being wrong. *Laughing* But being home amongst them, not just colleagues, but community members that our social relationship isn't ideal. Like didn't go to high school together or we don't have a strong background together. So, it's already not a familiar relationship and not the most positive. No. It's just not what I would like it to be.

I think *one*, we gotta get to the point where we're conversational enough to speak to each other, and we have a common understanding that it's fine if we do make mistakes.

With a lot of people that I've worked with, especially ones that have been doing the work for quite some time, there's almost this routine that while they're at work, they behave one way when they're with these people. And when they leave work, they behave differently, they don't really communicate or talk with the people that they work with. That's not their "social" group.

HK: Hmmm. Yeah. Yes.

R: Then, they're not even really thinking about it, but there's this separation between, "this is my work and then this is my social life" and the two don't blend together. And where I've seen that they do blend, is when they become close like family or they are already family.

Yeah, I think there are a lot of dynamics to this. The people you work with aren't necessarily your best friends.

HK: That's right. Yeah.

R: So then if you want them to know more about you, for me, of course, I'm a bit more of an introvert *laughing* with a lot of people. But being in a small community everyone knows everybody and sometimes you don't want everyone to really know everything about you.

HK: Yep, that's definitely the situation with us. We're not hanging out outside of work at all. We can easily get on at work and do our stuff that we need to do by working together. But it goes back to that first language of introduction, and I think we spoke in English first in our meetings a lot. It's really hard to make that shift, but I think something more needs to happen than just me saying, "okay, I'm gonna speak Māori from now on to these people and they should speak money back to me." There needs to be more. I think we do need to come together and maybe have a couple of workshops where we get to know each other a little better, so that we feel comfortable speaking and communicating with each other in Māori and that it's encouraged. I'm gonna do that.

R: Okay!

HK: When I get time!

HK & R: *Laughing*

R: Yeah, that's a lot of it. That *time*. That's another thing I've seen a lot of and I feel it as well. In the language learning area/space, it's already kind of high stress for some people. Especially when you're starting out, it's very high stress.

HK: Yeah!

R: And so when you do leave that environment, you just want to take a break. You just wanna relax and I think the more conversational you get, the less stressful it may become.

But with you, did you experience that once you got to a point or what was that point with your fluency where it didn't feel like a stressful environment?

HK: In a social setting or with my teaching?

R: What about both? Teaching and I guess being around Timoti and them, if it is stressful still?

HK: Oh, yeah, that's a really interesting question, because I think what you were speaking about that openness and willingness to make mistakes and all the stress...

HK & R: *Laughing*

HK: And the voices in your head that come with that. Or you're trying to think of something to say before you say it and it's too late, and all that kind of stuff. I'm not sure when that stopped exactly, but it was recently. It's definitely stopped. I mean, over the years that's subsided and I think I'm just continuing to learn.

I've always been very interested in language and so if I hear something that I'm unfamiliar with, I'll go and research it or I'll learn how to use that phrase or that word. And being around Timoti has obviously helped because he has language that no one else has anymore. Being exposed to that, I've learnt a lot overtime.

I think for me, my thing is now not my language ability. This sounds really boastful. *Chuckles* But I think I'm very proficient in the language now and able to speak about almost everything and anything on the spot, but *mine* is my wit, maybe. That kind of gives me a little bit of insecurity sometimes, because I don't know if you've noticed, there's a lot of *wit* in our culture and that ability to say things on the spot or drive something home with a good punchline is really important in te reo. And I don't have that.

HK & R: *Laughing*

HK: Like, I'm just not a funny person. So, I think that's probably my only thing where I'm like, "what can I say that's funny right now!"

HK & R: *Laughing*

HK: But it's not an inability in terms of my language proficiency. It's such a good question. "When did it stop?" Yeah, recently I would say recently, very recently.

R: So, it's been? Has it been like 17 years that you've been teaching and learning?

HK: Yeah. So, I started learning 13 right and I'm 30, going on 33 this year. So, 20 years learning.

R: Wow, 20 years learning.

HK: Yeah, so maybe in kind of the last five years that started to go away. Yeah.

R: Hmm. I mean, it's encouraging. I think there's still quite a few people that have been learning and teaching for a while, people who are just a few years in or even a decade in, and they have that question of, "when is it going to get better" or "when is there going to be a major shift with those feelings that lend to that *stress*." I think there are a lot of people that hit a *plateau*.

Were there any methods of learning and teaching the language, the techniques that you used, that helped you be more comfortable?

HK: I think we were very fortunate having Te Panekiretanga set up because that catered to the advanced learner. There was nothing really before that. So, you would have plateaued, and it would have been really hard to progress further with you're learning and you're speaking. Had the school not been established, we wouldn't have had that space we could go to as advanced learners and second language speakers where we could go and be with other people at our level and be encouraged to speak. But also be taught again by those three elders, Timoti, Wharehuia, and Pou, how to advance our language and how to speak in a more sophisticated manner. You know, learning different structures or ways of saying things that we knew how to say before but here's another way you could say this in a more concise way. So, we were learning idioms and all those sorts of things that we probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to learn had that not been established. We were really fortunate with their school. I think that really helped me progress further.

My own methods would be, I think, reading. I like reading and I like reading old texts. I would often look at the Māori newspapers from the 1800s. *Chuckle* Just look at them and sometimes I'd do a word search if I was interested in a word. Then I'd look at how it's used in different contexts. For me, that helps because it gives me time to look at it, think about it, process it, and try to use it. It's my way of learning.

R: What you're saying, is access to the language is absolutely important to progressing, but also is the variety of formats being access.

HK: Absolutely.

R: How has that access and the types of formats impacted your relationship with your language? It's a bit hard to explain this question, sometimes people I've talked to don't get that question...

HK: I kind of get what you're saying. For me, my interpretation of what you're saying is, I think when I was younger and learning, and I didn't have access to the language like I have now which has happened overtime. Having these *social interactions* has *made* the language *real*.

For me, *now*, my language is just the language. Yes, it's a very deep intimate connection to my language as the language of my grandmother. There's a spiritual connection that we have with the language that ties us to our lands and our people. All of that is tied up in our language, but then again, I'm also of this view that te reo Māori is just another language on this planet that allows us to communicate with each other in Māori.

And I went from this view when I was younger, that all Māori language is sacred. It's so special and we have to treat it very carefully and we should only speak it in these places. To now being like, *no*. Having the social interactions and going on these trips overtime has made me realize that even while being in the gym and the restrooms, while on the toilet or whatever *chuckle*

R: *Laughing*

HK: You're still speaking the language to the person next door. And that has made me realize that, *hey*, this *is* just another way of communicating.

And yes, that's very special to us and very dear to us, but it's made it *real*. I think that not having all of those real-life experiences/interactions, I may still be in that space of, this language is tapu, it's sacred, we should not be speaking it there, we should not be changing it. And you see a lot of this, this dialogue online on different language pages on Facebook where people put up a post with this type of question. Which this dialogue is healthy, but if someone will say, "how do you say this in Māori?" And then you have someone respond that, "that's not a Māori way of thinking. We should not be changing the language" or "that's a new construct." And all this goes back and forth, and I think, *uh* *heavy exhale*.

You know, our languages are meant to change and evolve, and we can't stay in the space of "its sacred, it shouldn't change." I think I would have still been there, had I not had all these like real life experiences.

R: Yeah! That's a really great way to explain it. I think it is hard transitioning from, an almost *taboo* space. Like there's a lot of things that are taboo with the language and how do we use this and that properly?

HK: Yeah, exactly. And with the rituals and ceremonies, we do have those spaces and we do have those domains where there is a lot of restrictions and that's understood and respected, but our language is still an everyday language as well, you know. There's different parts of the language and knowing where those boundaries lie is as important, as well.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Hēmi's reflection on aspects of his relationship with his language are intriguing, particularly about how his language became "real" to him. There is transformative power in the lived experiences. For second language speakers, intense study and practice to reach a level of conversational fluency and then having other speakers to communicate with in the language in everyday scenarios has the power to shift mindsets about the theoretical and practical life of a language, and the spaces they exist in.

Feeling the "realness" of language use with other speakers has the power to shift a person's understanding of language loss. Having limitations to the possibilities of progression in all areas of the life of language creates a plateau that can wreak havoc on a person in ways we're still learning to understand.

[► PLAY]

R: Alright, so moving forward, I've seen that there's a consistency of burnout amongst language activists. Doing this work with our endangered languages, especially when it's confined to a small group of speakers in our lives, that puts a lot of weight on you. It's stressful to be in an environment with the pressure of creating another generation of speakers. In your own work, your life, have you experienced burnout, and if so, what have been some of the things you've done to kind of work through that and get you back going again?

HK: *Chuckle* I feel burnout now.

HK & R: *Laughing*

R: I've been really careful about asking this question now because with COVID-19 and everything it is causing amongst our communities. I was like, this is the worst time for reflecting on this, on all the past experiences in comparison to what's happening now.

HK: Yeah, because we have that special connection with our languages, it's our life. You know, it's not just a job. There's a huge commitment that you've made to your people and to your

students. Sometimes that weight, it gets heavy, and I feel like sometimes that I want to run away.

I think before COVID, I was looking at going overseas to live for like a year and just do a traveling kind of thing, because I just felt like I wanted to just leave everything for a bit and come back to it later. I was just saying, like, “oh, te reo will always be here. I can go away for a bit. It's gonna be okay, and I'll come back later.”

I think it's just being really mindful. We tend to take on more than we can handle sometimes or we find it's hard to say, “no.” Maybe the solution to not getting to this point, is just being a little bit more mindful and caring for yourself. Saying “no” when it's not the right thing for you to be involved with and maybe just focusing on one or two things at a time. You know rather than 10, which is easier to do.

The thing that helps me through, is again, those commitments you made to people and your relationships with them. Timote, he's given so much. So, I look at him often, and I think, if he can do that, I can do this. You know, with my hapū, my marae, I'm working and doing things for them, there's that commitment there. I need to do this. And for my students, what keeps me going to class every day, is them. I always have fun once I'm there and I look forward to it. It's those relationships that pull you through.

The other thing I do is translation, which is quite a solitary job translating stuff at home by myself, and that's harder. Because when that gets hard, there's not really anyone else there to see the impact that that has right away.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] We continued to discuss different situations and experiences where burnout was felt the most and how that impacted our personal lives. One example Hēmi explained was a process that helped him shift his perspective and routine. His example helped me reflect on a few of my own burnout experiences I continue to grapple with.

[► PLAY]

HK: One thing that I did recently is I signed up for Portuguese classes 'cause he's (partner) from Brazil. So we're planning on traveling in the future.

R: Oh wow!

HK: I was like, you know, I should learn some basics because I like language and I like going to a country having the basics. I don't like being completely ignorant when it comes to language. Whatever the language is, I like to try. And then being in the classroom as a student, I was like, “oh my God, this is how all my students feel!” And I've been away from that environment for so long that I forgot how they feel, you know. All the nerves and the excitement and the energy that comes with it by being in a class as a student, and it made me feel compassion again for my students.

HK & R: *Laughing*

HK: Which I kind of lost, I think. You know, I was just like, “*come on*” to my students because in our relationship I can do that. But as a teacher, I highly recommend to go back and be a student for something again. Just to feel what it's like again.

R: Yeah. You know, I was noticing in the past years when experiencing burnout myself, with my own languages, I did everything I could but still crashed and burned and it was the worst experience because I didn't understand the different relationships we have with our language, our students, our work, and the stress this work brings. Now, I can look back on those experiences and recognize some issues that have developed from doing this work for so long and working with a majority of just elders.

I have a lot of patience when I'm teaching other subjects. You know, I've worked with kids and teenagers who are in high stress environments with high needs. Such as kids and teens I've mentored and advocated for in juvenile detention centers and group homes, and alternative schools. But a lot of my heavy language work has been with elders and I've recognized that I prefer language work with elders.

And the patience I have with them is more. I prefer being with my elders and my brain and mannerisms, they just switch when I'm with my elders. But when I go back and work with my peers, whether slightly older or younger than me, I would have very little patience, especially when they're not self-motivated. Being in an environment everyday that we're the last ones. We've been given funding to support this language work and it shouldn't be my job to motivate my peers to do their job, to be self-motivated, to be more committed to this work.

HK: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

R: And I'm still trying to figure out situations involving those types of people. How do I stay motivated and motivate others in my same social and language environment, who are not self-motivated with the language, or as motivated as I am or even more motivated than me?

Have you encountered similar situations with your students and groups? Do you take it upon yourself to motivate them to really throw themselves into it or express that maybe they should come back when they are self-motivated?

HK: I'm similar to you and of the later. I lose patience and I don't feel like it's my responsibility to motivate people. I think, we're here and when you're ready, come, you're welcome to learn, but I'm not gonna beg you and motivate you to, you know, to stay or to commit to learning the language. There is too much pressure and effort that we can be expending on the people who are interested and want to learn.

That's Timoti's view as well. That's other people's view as well. I think there are a lot of things available now, programs and things on social media that aim to motivate people. But I think, you're welcome to learn when you're ready to learn. Come.

Sometimes in class when I start to see people just starting to lose their patience or maybe they're not getting it that week or whatever, I'll speak a little on motivation. But I don't spend a lot of energy or time on it.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] Being mindful of impactful energy and actions within our language spaces is a process and method that should be invested in. Creating and refining methods to assess these and reveal their interconnectivity is just one part in language planning to determine how to mitigate exposure to various energies and actions in different social language learning environments. Setting standards for commitment and self-motivation for group members is one way to alleviate tensions and stress amongst group leaders and speakers. It is also a way to reinforce shared responsibilities and overall commitment to the group's morale and goals. Additionally, having a rotation of tasks and skills in addition to language learning helps to develop practical skills (translations, research, grant writing, teaching, curriculum development, project planning, etc.) that each group member can experience and practice.

[► PLAY]

R: Considering how complex social interactions can be in language learning environments, do you look forward to times where you are focusing on the translating? When you have a bit more of a controlled environment, with a list of things to translate and questions you need to reach out to specific people about?

HK: Yeah. There are two types of translating that I'm involved with. There's kind of formal stuff, which doesn't give you a lot of, *chuckle*, what's the word? Enjoyment? Because it's formal language and you send it off and there is a Q.C., "quality assurance," process and you're not really involved with that. You don't see the direct impact that has. Sometimes it's just reports that maybe no one will ever read, I don't know.

But then you have these other projects like the books which are gonna have a really meaningful impact and they're gonna be around forever, and it's kind of your contribution to Māori literature that's growing. Even if it's already a book written in English and translated into Māori, it's gonna be reread and used, and appreciated. So, you put a little bit more care into it and a lot more love goes into the project. Then yeah, you look forward to that process of working with the person who's editing it and proofing it. That process is where you start to work with someone and discussing what you've done and defend what you've done. That process of the translating is what I enjoy as well.

R: What's your thoughts on the importance of the variety of work beyond just learning and teaching the language in the classroom setting? Why do you think it's important to be able to do a variety of work, skill wise and access wise?

HK: For me, it keeps things interesting. It keeps me interested. It's having a variety of projects that I'm involved with. It's in the classroom teaching, translating over here, our workshop over here with a bank, and all these different things going on that are language focused. Mainly teaching but in different spaces or styles. That keeps me interested.

I know that's not the case for everyone. I know some people are quite happy just doing their job teaching and that's alright. But for me, I like variation. I get bored easily. I think if I was in the same space, the same job for a length of time, I'd burnout and not want to move on.

R: Yeah, okay.

HK: I think that goes back to capability as well. I've learned also in doing this, saying "yes" to different things, I've learned that "okay, that's not for me." You know, I'm actually not that good at that, whatever it was. My strengths are here, so I should do this and this and leave this person to do that because that's their strength.

That's another thing, is realizing in the space of language where your strengths are and what your strengths are. When you're working as a collective, there's bigger picture and being okay with it and knowing that someone else is gonna work in that space. You don't have to do everything.

R: Yeah. Was that kind of a trial-and-error process or did you have mentors help you figure that out?

HK: I think trial-and-error. Definitely trial-and-error, and mentors. Like Pānia (Papa) said to me last year, "your space is teaching beginners...that's where your strengths are." And I said that I never realized that or even thought about that. It makes sense, you know, to me now, because when I look back, compared to others, I think I'm very patient and kind. *Chuckle*

I like to work with beginners. I find people at their third-year advanced level, like, "ah, they think they know everything."

HK & R: *Laughing*

HK: I have no patience with them. Yeah, I like the inquisitive little babies in the language but they're adult babies. You know?

R: Yes, that's so important to know what your strengths are and in what context, in what domains. Also, among which groups.

I think that's about it.

HK & R: *Laughing*

R: Thank you so much!

HK: You're welcome! I hope you are able to grab some things from there and from the other interviews and collate it all and spit out some words!

HK & R: *Laughing*

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] I appreciate how our conversation began to conclude. After we had discussed most of the interview questions, we began to reflect on some of my own experiences in the years since we first met at the 2014 Bringing Our Languages Together gathering. Having his outside perspective, advice, and examples of lived experiences are an integral part of this process. We each hold a piece of the stories that define Indigenous language revitalization spanning across nearly a century. Being able to reflect on those experiences and opinions with numerous language activists who were present for the gathering continues to reveal how there are social experiences that are a human experience. Experiences that are not just of language activists or even Indigenous people. The fluctuation of variables are a storm on the periphery of language acquisition. Longevity and endurance are reinforced by each person's and group's investment and value of each other.

Hēmi's encouragement to continue the journey I'm on is a guiding light, another star to use in my navigation forward. The documentation of these conversations with each language activist are meant to be the same type of guide to help others find their way along their language journeys. When we have mentors and networks of support, we can engage in deeper discussions to help us reflect on some challenging issues in our line of work.

[► PLAY]

HK: I don't miss being in that space, but I know how important it is and you're doing some awesome work. And keep doing what you're doing!

R: Yeah, thank you, thank you. I think, I'm still at that point of figuring out, within my own communities, in what ways I can best help. As we have a smaller circle, smaller groups of people, what ways can we all best contribute and work together.

HK: Yeah, it all goes back to relationships, which is the focus of your writing. I think without those relationships, without forming that trust and stuff, we can't do anything in our spaces. I just look at the key examples here. It's always been one person having that *ideal* vision and getting the buy-in from other people and then it becomes a joint effort to establish something or create something. Then more and more people start to buy-in. It may have started with one, but without that circle around that person, it would have never happened. It takes time to form those connections.

R: Yeah, most definitely. You know, I started out my work (dissertation) trying to connect specific language acquisition methodologies with an idea of an "ultimate way" to achieve success that some language activists are seen as having. Like there's that one technique or way to make it easier and can solve a lot of problems with language loss.

So, I started out trying to connect different methodologies and specific types of teaching with that idea for "success." But I've come to learn that, yes, there are certain methods, like immersion, that help, but there's no consistent method that is going to absolutely achieve success of each goal...after all this time, now it's really about looking at those relationships and

how they are the constant. How they are such a huge factor when it comes to learning the language and sustaining progress and growth.

I don't think I know what I need to know just yet, but I'm doing what I can to help with my own communities and the language revitalization work that's needed. I've been working with archives and recordings a lot lately. I'm also trying to keep a good healthy social environment around me while I'm working with the language.

HK: Have you got an elder who you're close with?

R: Yeah, yeah, I've got them. My best friends up here, well my only friends here, *chuckle*, closest friends, are my elders. So, I've got wonderful mentors, but it's very hard finding younger people around my own age who are focused on the language and this type of language work, and who are motivated and prioritize this type of lifestyle.

I think a big issue has been learning that there are very few people who want to be a student again, to start out at the beginning again.

HK: Uh-hmm.

R: But if the environment is good enough and supportive enough, maybe that could help the people be a little bit more comfortable with being uncomfortable while they learn the language and speak it. *Laughing*.

We'll see how it goes. I think there is just so much more to learn.

Thank you so much for the chat. I absolutely love seeing all of your work online!

HK & R: *Laughing*

R: It's so wonderful!

HK: Thanks! Yeah, I need to do a video for that today actually. Thanks, yeah, it gets a bit tiring sometimes but I keep doing it. I'm now getting support to do it. Before, I did it all just because I wanted to.

[■ STOP]

[♦ Starlog Notes:] We continued to talk about his Everyday Māori social media videos and posts. His work is now being supported by the Māori Language Commission. He's had a few other language projects he's working on while also teaching language classes. A few months after our conversation, Hēmi was able to reveal to the world that one of those projects was "Codename Henry." A collaborative creative translation project initiated by the Aotearoa singer Lorde, coordinated by Dame Hinewehi Mohi (Katz Marston 2021). And with the guidance of Sir Tīmoti Kāretu. Five English language songs written by Lorde (2021) for her *Solar Power* album were translated into te reo Māori for a separate album titled *Te Ao Mārama* "World of Light" (Kelly 2021). The translation team included Hēmi, Hana Mareraiha, and Sir Tīmoti Kāretu, with the accompanying singer Bic Runga. Through this project, the translators took up the

responsibility to avoid creating literal translations of the vocals and instead translate the poetic concepts and meaningfulness into a Māori world view. Lyric translations have been made available on Lorde's online YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1u0ukFst60>). Public reviews reveal vibrant online discussions around the impact of the album, particularly that it has been made by a non-Māori artist.

The differing viewpoints presented online provide an example of how broad interpretations and perspectives are of language revitalization work. To me, *Te Ao Mārama* represents an intergenerational knowledge exchange, teamwork, trust, and creative culturally based innovative work that transcends multiple generations and spaces. The album is situated within a global movement for environmental and Indigenous rights and is part of a 21st century representation of Indigenous people, their languages, cultures, and world views. There is much work still to be done to *re*right and *re*write representations of and our own understanding of our own Indigenous peoples presence and impacts in the past, present, and future.

Creating a network of support with like-minded mentors and peers provides a way to disrupt lateral oppression. It provides examples of possibilities and offers guides, comrades, and support systems beyond a dominating reach of internal complexities. Yet, such relationships are dependent on each person's openness to engage in a transformative kinship and revitalization practices. Each relationship is greatly impacted by the maturity of each person to engage in these types of practices.

As Hēmi has shared, he works better with adult learners who are beginning their language journeys. This is incredibly important because language revitalization work can become homogenizing. Each person is expected to work with multiple generations and achieve success at each level. Understanding how your personality, skills, and knowledge allows you to interact with each age group and level of learner and speaker can drastically impact abilities and outcomes. Humans, like any animal, under varying levels of ongoing stress lash out. This manifests in passive aggressive behavior, lateral oppression, suppression, and violence. Being uncomfortable for growth are pivot points, not the long game.

Can each person work well within the different groups and do they even like those groups? Is the language vitality at levels that allows for different acquisition age groups, types of domains, and professions? While many language activists push themselves to do the work because it needs to be done, this in the long-term has negative implications. The work becomes more about maintaining rather than thriving. This is also the case of first gen. and second gen. cohorts. Have successful programs been established or is that still the work to be done? All of these questions begin with the steps to be present, to engage in the discussions, and to be proactive about developing the solutions.

Reflecting on how much I've grown and everything that has happened since the first year I met Hēmi, I'm moved to tears. I'm humbled by his kindness and that of his cohorts and mentors. I look forward to the future conversations we will be able to have and the updates on how we have all progressed and are thriving along our language journeys.

Chapter Seventeen: Taking Root with Bringing Our Languages Together

“The trip...is for all intakes to know each other better and to provide the opportunity for them to discuss issues of import with similarly minded people...this journey is an important one not only linguistically and culturally but, even more importantly, socially for it will strengthen the bonds of human friendship between each of these participants for the rest of their lives” (Sir Tīmoti Kāretu’s letter of purpose for the Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo trip, 2013)

“The purpose of this language gathering is reciprocity; for participants to share and exchange knowledge in an effort to build relationships that can strengthen each other’s language revitalization goals” (Bringing Our Languages Together pamphlet, 2014)

The journey I embarked on, which led me to meet Hana, Tīmoti, and later Hēmi, almost didn’t happen. I was conflicted about applying to a doctoral program because of my ongoing separation from my children’s father towards the end of my master’s degree. Yet, through encouragement from my academic mentors and my elders, I applied to the sociocultural and linguistic anthropology doctoral program at OU at the beginning of 2012 and was accepted for the fall 2012 semester. Towards the end of that spring, I attended the Native American Literature Symposium (NALS) for the first time. I presented on the unspoken impacts to language loss that are occurring in tribal communities. For the first time, I publicly spoke about my own language journey. The small group of attendees in that early morning session included Brandy Nālani McDougall and her partner Craig Santos Perez. Our conversations from that presentation continued throughout the conference. They gifted me with two books of poetry, *The Salt Wind: Ka Makani Pa’akai* by McDougall (2008) and *Night is a Sharkskin Drum* by Haunani-Kay Trask (2002). This is poetry that exposed me to new ways of conceptualizing language knowledge, morphology, and meaning making amidst the multiplicity of impactful elements. I was also present when they introduced the conference attendees to a spoken word performance titled “Kaona Cut” performed by Ittai Wong, Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, William Giles, and Alaka’I Kotrys at the 2009 Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyC9xh9dO08&t=1s>). Their words woke up ancestral voices and songs inside me, eliciting memories I had not thought about since my youth. Building on those conversations at the conference, I was introduced to a handful of people who would be attending the Native American Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) conference that summer.

I was undecided about attending NAISA but made a last-minute decision to embark on a 24-hour road trip from Oklahoma to Connecticut with a colleague of mine. Once we were on the road and knew our arrival date, a new acquaintance from NALS invited me to attend a sweat happening before the conference. The timing of our arrival was comedically perfect. Because instead of showing up when the meal was ready, we arrived when the rocks for the sweat were well done and white hot. I closed my car door and went straight into the lodge where four other people and an unknown number of ancestors were waiting. Together, with open hearts and minds, we prayed, sang, and shared the lodge for blessings for our families and futures. Each prayer and story were bundled into medicine foods to fuel our future journeys. While I did not set out with the foresight or intentions to create the following experiences, I had hope and was open to the possibility of meaningful and lasting collaborative relationships with other Indigenous language activists and scholars.

From that sweat, four of us experienced a gifting of seeds that have grown into a decade of mentorship, love, and friendship. We've become family and have supported each other through changes in our educations, careers, ceremonies, relationships, and the heartbreak and loss of our loved ones. We've become kin to each other and our families have grown close throughout the years. My children now have new grandmas, grandpas, aunties, uncles, brothers, and sisters. None of us speak the same language, nor are we from the same communities, but we

share in the similar types of experiences we have had with our language journeys and lives as Indigenous peoples. Our relationships have been made through positive and meaningful lived experiences and the sharing of knowledge and kindness. Such experiences have transformative puha “power” and medicine. They build steps towards cultivating and nurturing our long-term relationships which have grown from seeds of kindness and have taken root to produce a camaraderie. Such sustains our individual lives and collective collaborations. The tangible reality of these types of relationships have taught me how to work towards duplicating these actions to create other positive productive relationships. Just as my own elders and grandparents taught me, these are also examples that I base social boundaries and interpersonal standards on. Uniquely, each of us who continue to be kin from that sweat have been very vocal about who we are, our intentions, and what types of relationships we want together.

Ceremonies of Indigenous Relationship Making

Such openness and honesty have taught me that positive, productive, and respectful relationships do exist and can be created and sustained in meaningful ways across space and time. Relationship making in this way is a form of ceremony. Ceremonies can be light-hearted and/or intense, yet each have an action of acknowledgement of responsibilities. Some ceremonies bring us together, some separate us. Just as Osorio (2021) has eloquently described as an “‘upena of intimacies,” ceremonies cast ‘upena “nets” entangled with pilina “intimacies” that can sometimes come with

“a set of negative connotations. Not always are ‘upena used to catch fish; sometimes we become caught and caged in ‘upena. I honor the metaphor of the ‘upena for our pilina by also being attentive to what our pilina can become if not tended to. As our lives push us to reckon with the violence we have endured and

inflicted on each other through our relationships, let us always remember that
‘upena can both cradle and strangle’ (xxii).

Sometimes, it takes being in a ceremony to become aware of our own entanglements with the past, present, and hopes for the future. A ceremony of awareness can pivot us out of the space of negative entanglement and open us to guides to inform and strengthen our paths.

I feel it is very important to be cognizant of the duality of ceremonies and relationship makings. A commitment and participation in either should not be made haphazardly. Some years later, my children and I were part of a community language meeting to discuss the divisions in our language groups and how we could move forward to create a new language program. I had just travelled home from a longer portion of my dissertation research trip and I was longing for the relationships I had outside of one of my reservations. I voiced that this language work could be very lonely when our language speakers and groups disagree over things like orthography, funding, and leadership. I expressed how crippling this loneliness can be and how that impacts opportunities for long-term work, and how that search for meaningful relationships and collaborations can pull learners and bright minds away from our communities. I remember being comforted by my elders and later I was invited to a sweat with a different language group that I had not previously been involved with. The outcome was the opposite of the sweat in 2012. There were expectations expressed by the group members that you had to commit to just their group, follow just their ways. I have mixed ancestry and that ancestry gives me strength. In that sweat, the willows became the sky, the stars aligned, and through the doorway my grandmothers came in to sing me onto a different path, apart from that language group. That responsibility, while necessary for that group to create a new generation of speakers with a focused upbringing in one language, was too great for me. I could not commit to what I saw as a request to abandon

my multiplicity of connections, strengths, dialects, and languages. These medicine events can be confusing and relationships begin, end, and continue on in a variety of ways.

At the time in 2012, I was still not fully educated on all the unique ways of culturally based relationship making. This continues to be part of my journey. Particularly because my social anxiety and awkwardness with humans causes me to stumble at times through my attempts at successful communication practices. I joke that I wasn't hugged enough as a child to be at ease with social interactions. An honest sad truth of my upbringing as a 4th generation boarding school survivor. Sometimes I feel the least connected to humans and my peers. I gravitate to the lands, the waters, and the stars. These have always been my shelter, guides, and protection. Yet, through my own life stages, at that time in 2012 I did know that certain acts like an exchange of names and gifting are often universal ways to begin collaborative relationships. Fast friendships between like-minded people have a way of going to work on your heart. Years later, while speaking at the funeral of my sister who I gained from that sweat, I expressed that she was the medicine I didn't know I needed. There is much I still don't know, but reflecting on the events before, during, and since that sweat in 2012, I like to think that through that sweat, my ancestors took pity on me and helped my golden heart shine through my social stumbling's and personal hardships at that time. The sweat and the relationships fostered afterwards became a process of *cleansing*, signifying my own position on the cusp of moving through various life stages and beginning new ones. My *unintentional meetings* disarmed me and made me just uncomfortable enough to be open to change. This cleansing and being amongst like-minded people became a *transformative space*, encouraging open and honest discussions and reflections. The meaningful relationships I gained through these experiences strengthen my path through the coming storms.

Cleansing

The following is not a song I sang in the sweat. It's one of the songs I cycled through on my playlist during the long drive to the sweat. It makes me smile thinking about how the songs recorded by my Newe "the people/Shoshone" elders Beverly Crum and Earl Crum are intertwined with my journey that summer. Their book, *Newe Hupia: Shoshoni Poetry Songs*, was published in 2001 after many years of their collaboration with Jon P. Dayley, who built upon previous work by Wick R. Miller who collaborated with dozens of my elders to document our language, stories, and songs. There were many events that fed the creation of *Newe Hupia* "Shoshoni poetry songs" and many people continue to benefit from their intentions and actions to document and share their songs. Having the *Newe Hupia* accessible wherever I travel has brought their voices with me, and I feel closer to their teachings which inspire and empower me. I'm reminded of the following song I sang to myself before the sweat, it's about a cleansing ceremony before embarking on a journey to harvest and cultivate food, comradery, and protection. Earl Crum sang multiple versions of this song. The vocables and words elicit memory, connection, and puha "medicine power." These are sung while in action. The songs create a canvas, setting, and path, each interconnected with the past, present, and future. The songs are contextualized by the actions they empower, which increases the life and stories of the songs.

Dayley describes this song as a cleansing song for the Natayaa ritual, which are performed before the round dance. These songs are part of the harvesting, gathering, and celebration events. Dayley shared the narrative of an elder woman who shared her memory of the pinenut harvesting festival and the preparations made before the gathering of pinenuts. "So with prayerful thoughts we would wash our bodies. Then we would put on *pisappi* 'red ochre' or *aipi*

“white chalky clay’. We did this so the pinenuts would not be wormy, and so we would have strong healthy bodies. Only then would we go and gather the pinenuts (Crum et al. 4). Each of us carry an unknown amount of learned behaviors, experiences, entanglements, strengths, and burdens. We can be unaware of how our very presence emits energy from these experiences, positive and negative. Seeking to understand Indigenous relationship making is to understand our own positionality and how we impact those around us. While we are on a journey to understand our own selves, this cleansing and prayer done before setting out to harvest and cultivate aligns our energy with intentions. These actions help to wash ourselves, even momentarily, of known and unknown issues impacting our minds and hearts. The following song, *Totsantsi “Cleansing”* shared by Earl Crum is a tool to prime a person for transformative social meaning making. The audio recording of this song is available online

(https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress_pubs/24/).

Haaiyuh waihna
Haaiyuh waihna
Haaiyuh waihna
Haaiyuh waihna

“Vocables/rhythmical songs words”

Totsantsii totsantsi nanasokoppentsi,
Totsantsii totsantsi nanasokoppentsi.

“Cleansing, cleansing the blessed earth,”
“Cleansing, cleansing the blessed earth.”

Haaiyuh waihna
Haaiyuh waihna
Haaiyuh waihna
Haaiyuh waihna

“Vocables/rhythmical songs words”

Totsantsii totsantsi nanapunuhakinna,
Totsantsii totsantsi nanapunuhakinna,

“Cleansing, cleansing, energizing!”
“Cleansing, cleansing, energizing!”

During that sweat, I cleansed my mind and heart. I prayed for guidance and assistance for my journey to come. Within a few months, I would be starting my doctoral degree program and I was unsure where it would take me. I’m not sure which of my ancestors or what part of that

unexplainable force orchestrated the events over the next few days of the conference, but those experiences and the gifting of seeds from future mentors and relations were made possible because we were each open to an exchange of knowledge and relationship making to benefit our future language journeys. The following sections in this chapter are my own reflections on how I was introduced to some of the students and mentors within Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo Māori “Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language,” our future collaborative journey to organize the 2014 Bringing Our languages Together (BOLT) gathering in Oklahoma, and the most meaningful experiences to me and those expressed by others from that gathering.

An Unintentional Meeting

After the sweat, we at a local KOA campsite. These conference venues are pricey. The next day I negotiated an early check-in at the conference hotel. We entered the elevator and I began a ridiculous solo dance in celebration. Giant grin, eyes closed, happy feet swift as lightning. Horribly unaware that the elevator only went up one floor and the doors silently opened to a stunned Māori audience. I honestly don’t know how long they were standing there, afraid to interrupt my joyful madness. All hopes of not embarrassing myself on the first day of the conference were lost. I stepped back from the door, waved once, and asked if they were here for the conference. As they cautiously entered the elevator, one of the men looked towards me with a curious smirk. I learned later that this was Hemi Hoskins, who would later share this encounter with Hana O’Regan, who then I’m sure, had a good laugh while sharing the story with Tīmoti.

The next day, I boarded the bus to attend the conference welcoming ceremony. As we were about to depart, a quick hand caught the door and a tall vibrant woman ran up the stairs and beelined it down the aisle straight towards me. She asked if she could sit beside me, to which I happily nodded. After our introductions, I got up the nerves to share the episode in the elevator.

She let me finish the story and while we were laughing together, she said, “that was you? Those are my mates!” She knew all about it and she still willingly continued to sit by me.

I’ve reminisced about this choice encounter with Hēmi Hoskins and separately with Hana, each still laugh about it. Our friendships began in a ceremony of laughter and smiles. The event was just enough embarrassment to make me feel comfortable, like we were already old friends. We continued to visit throughout the conference. I attended their presentation where she reintroduced me to Hemi, and later she introduced me to Tīmoti. We walked together to lunch on one of the following days of the conference. We spent the time during our meal discussing the rest of their trip after the conference and how they would be meeting with the Standing Rock Lakḥóta language revitalization group and the purpose of their trip. Tīmoti explained how their cohort would be taking another trip with the next graduates from their institute in 2014. We discussed the possibility of that cohort visiting Oklahoma and meeting with the tribal language programs there.

On the last day of the conference, we attended our last session together. Tīmoti and Hana gifted me with a bone heru “hair comb” carved with the Koru design. The design represents the unfurling fern frond and can symbolize the personal growth in a new phase of a person’s life. I was not expecting this gift and I did not have items for exchange. In return, I gifted them the necklaces I was wearing, ones I had made. Wampum shell necklace for Tīmoti. Multi-strand heishi white shell necklace for Hana. These are traditional trade beads representing accomplishments and cultural wealth. My gifts were given to symbolize a reciprocation of my intentions, an acknowledgement of the collaborations ahead and my responsibilities to them.

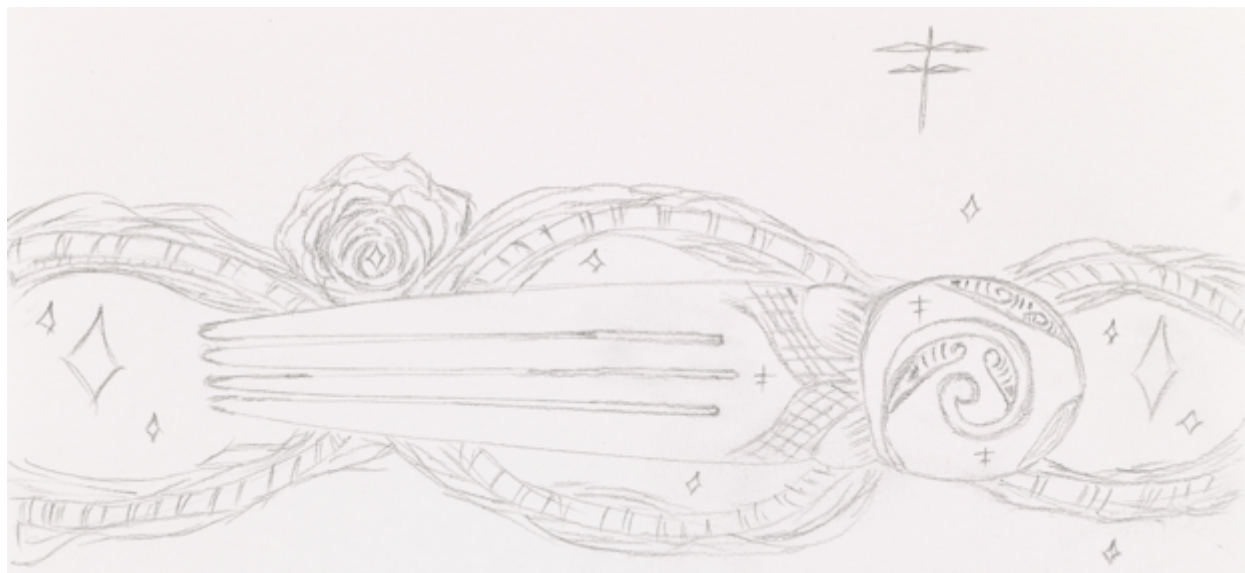


Figure 53: Gift giving is an acknowledgement of reciprocal responsibility. Graphite, ink, and watercolor on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

Transformative Safe Spaces

Over the next year I communicated with Tīmoti about his vision for the gathering and what key topics and themes would be most beneficial. The gathering would seek to create a space where the transformative power of social interconnectivity could be drawn upon to share language revitalization methodologies and lived experiences, with the hopes that these interactions would foster future collaborations and meaningful relationships. In Tīmoti's 2013 letter to prospective participants and co-sponsors, there was a very strong expression of a driving force for their trips. Beyond language use, simply, meaningful human connection. "The trip...is for all intakes to know each other better and to provide the opportunity for them to discuss issues of import with similarly minded people...this journey is an important one not only linguistically and culturally but, even more importantly, socially for it will strengthen the bonds of human friendship between each of these participants for the rest of their lives" (Kāretu 2013). There was no veil or mystery about motives or goals. This gathering would depend on my abilities to

communicate with multiple different Indigenous language groups and to gain their trust and time. I took up this responsibility as a personal and professional endeavor. Yet, I fully understood it would require each individual and group's willingness to be open to the invitations and to follow through by attending the gathering in a positive way. I set out to create transformative spaces and bring together language groups who expressed interest and support for such an exchange.

After emailing T̄imoti an introduction packet about the statuses of the Oklahoma Native American tribal languages at that time, I went to work on becoming more acquainted with some of the leading language revitalization practitioners in Oklahoma. Through my involvement with the Kiowa Kids, the Num̄un̄uu language groups, the Oklahoma Native American Youth Language Fair, and my Master's thesis research on the Shoshonean Reunions, I knew there were a wealth of language activities and incredibly committed language activists in Oklahoma. I began to assess local resources for a multiple day gathering that would bring together as many of the Oklahoma tribal language groups, scholars, and language activists as possible. I began this work as I started my first semester in my doctoral program but it was not meant to be part of my dissertation research. Each of these areas of work blended with my personal life. I can say this now confidently and openly, that the support and guidance T̄imoti, Hana, and my language activist allies extended to me during those early years in my degree program gave me hope in humanity, in our Indigenous communities, and how language revitalization could be a conduit for healing and wellness. The kindness and support I received from other language activists and practitioners who committed their time, guidance, and resources to participate in the gathering, host additional days, and share their wealth of knowledge, provided positive experiences that much of my work throughout the following years was inspired by. Their actions propelled me forward. Their ways of being helped me envision better social relationships and to establish

social and interpersonal collaboration boundaries and standards to uphold and create in my own life and amongst those I work with. These standards guided the creation and promotion of the positive spaces that would seek to create for the gathering.

This work also helped me weather the storm in my personal life. No matter how endangered our ancestral language(s) may be, each of our lives continues to be shaped by interpersonal influences and a range of elements that impact our abilities and motivation to participate in language acquisition and revitalization. You see, I began my doctoral degree amongst a devastating and traumatic end to an abusive eight-year relationship with my children's father. On the surface we were a strong Native couple, role-models by being ceremonial, higher education students, and later as parents to a new generation of children in our cultural, language, and ceremonial communities. The shame of being another statistic, another Indigenous person suffering domestic violence was not what I wanted people to know. Added to this, my abuser was another Indigenous person, and these situations are rarely reported because Native communities have a tradition of protecting our own. How could I publicly say that a ceremonial man and culture and language keeper could be abusive, dangerous, and manipulative? How could I expose one of my own people? When I did choose to go to the police and the courts, I lost my social community which was made up of ones who I thought were close friends and family. I was harassed and shunned by some of our mutual family and community who we participated with in cultural, language, and ceremonial actions. My children and I lived in fear during those first years that our violence protection order would not be enough to actually protect us and that we would not have the strength to withstand the long-drawn-out volatile custody court cases. The language revitalization work and spaces that had previously been such a strong part of our lives became nearly impossible. We had to find new communities to be part of.

Our involvement with select individuals amongst different cultural and language revitalization groups brought my children and I out of that intergenerational trauma and lateral violence. We were welcomed into new communities with people who reinforced cultural teachings, kinship knowledge, family safety, and teachings of wellness and holism. Our language groups were our safety nets and pursuing language revitalization together brought us new family and networks of support. We are stronger in our identities and health because of our transformative experiences of kinship and revitalization. These teachings and strength I carried through my work to organize the Bringing Our Languages Together gathering in 2014. This work was a challenge during those first years but the opportunity for more language groups to experience the visceral power of sharing language revitalization experiences in meaningful spaces with the mentors and cohorts of Te Panekiretanga felt *right* and a necessary part of my language journey. Throughout the years, I've been told how impactful the experiences at that gathering have been to the language journeys of other people as well. That continues to give me hope and evidence of the power of positive productive Indigenous relationship making.

Bringing Our Languages Together Gathering

By the spring of 2013, I had had dozens of discussions with language activists in Oklahoma. I attended numerous Indigenous language workshops, programs, and activities meeting a wealth of incredibly driven language learners, teachers, and program directors. Their feedback was invaluable. Some connections I made were very professional, business driven. These I did not always offer tobacco to or participate in a gift exchange. Others became more personal, where I offered tobacco and gifted. For some, I provided meals at various meetings and led community discussions about the gathering. In the previous years I had worked closely with my Numunuu elders who helped to organize the Shoshonean Language Reunions. These

discussions and my involvement at those gatherings aided my insight into this work.

Additionally, Tracey Satepauhoodle-Mikkanen, who at that time was the Executive Director of the Jacobson House Native Art Center, became an incredible ally and supporter of the gathering. By the summer of 2013, I had developed a draft agenda for the gathering. The city of Norman along with the University of Oklahoma (OU) would serve as a home base for Te Panekiretanga. Here they would be hosted for the first day of the gathering.

Planning the next two days of their activities would be dependent on which language programs were located within a reasonable distance to Norman and who had the resources and intentions to welcome the mentors and students of Te Panekiretanga into their communities. I was part of a graduate language revitalization class at OU with Joshua Hinson, who had begun his doctoral degree around the same time as me. We discussed the possibilities of the Chickasaw Nation being a host and how Joshua would prepare for their gathering and how it could be mutually beneficial. The Sunray family and Joshua both pointed me in Jacob Manatowa-Bailey's direction to be a possible second host for Te Panekiretanga. My participation in the Sauk Language Department master-apprentice workshops directly introduced me to Jacob and his team. We began discussing what would being a host mean, what that would require, how his team would welcome such visitors, and what could be learned from each other. At the Sauk Language Department workshops I was introduced to additional language activists who I continued to communicate with and who contributed differing perspectives about experiences with their community-based language revitalization efforts. While most everyone was excited about spending time with Te Panekiretanga, Jacob pushed me to review ongoing differences between tribal language programs, demographics, and language acquisition methods of each

group in Oklahoma and Te Panekiretanga. Beyond language endangerment, what do we share and how could we benefit from our time together?

By the middle of 2013, I had reached out to every Oklahoma Native Nation and tribal language program that had contact information, local Native language groups, scholars, and prospective sponsors to discuss the gathering and what would be most beneficial. Tīmoti and his team provided me with additional informational materials about the purpose of their trip and the group members. I attached these materials with an introduction letter and packet about Te Panekiretanga. Included was an invitation to each group to be part of the gathering and a request for presentations about their language programs and work during the first day's workshop session, *Sharing Language Revitalization with Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo*. Tīmoti's letter is provided below. The final gathering locations, sponsors, and co-hosts were determined by the beginning of fall 2013. Day one would be at the OU campus with an evening gathering at the Jacobson House. Day two would be hosted by the Sauk Language Department at the Sac & Fox Nation grounds. Day three would be hosted by the Chickasaw Nation Department of Language at the Chickasaw Cultural Center. Day three dinner and evening gathering would be sponsored by me and hosted at my residence with music and performances by the Sunray Family, Gus Palmer, Sean O'Neil, and Te Panekiretanga. The agendas began to take shape as more language groups submitted their presentation proposals, sponsorship was confirmed, and local Native artists, poets, singers, and students offered to volunteer their time. I'm still amazed and so grateful for how each person was able to come together and give their time, energy, and support to welcome Tīmoti and his students for their first trip to Oklahoma. The prestige of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo caught the attention of many people. It was, however, the on-the-ground efforts of the supporters and co-hosts who made the gathering a reality and helped to create the positive spaces

for Timoti and his fellow mentors' visions to extend beyond their group and into the hearts and minds of us involved.

The following alphabetical list are the co-sponsors for day one of the gathering at OU and the Jacobson House Native Art Center: American Indian Programs at OU, Kiowa Kids (Modina Waters, Randi and Cedric Sunray), Native Naturals, Nūmūnū "the people/Comanche" language groups at Post Oak and OKC, OU Department of Anthropology, OU Anthropology Graduate Student Association, and the OU Native American Studies Program. Additional guidance and assistance with logistics, activities, volunteers, and donations were gifted by Heather Ahtone, Cameron Pratt, the Ceasar Family Catering, Chris Smith, Christine Armer, Corey Still, Dane Poolaw, the Gooday Family Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache Fire Dancers, Gus Palmer, the Jacobson House Drum Circle, Jared Wahkinney, Joshua Nelson, JP Johnson, Juliet Morgan, Justin Neely, Katie Thompson, Kevin Roberts-Fields, Lindy Waters, Lucas Bessire, Mary Linn, Misha Klein, Mosiah Bluecloud, Nicole J. Hatfield, Nicole Umayā, OU Phoenix Drum Group, Renee Grounds Turning Heart, Richard Grounds, Ryan Mackey, Sean O'Neill, Sterlin Harjo, Terrie Kinsey, Toni Tsatoke, Waleila Carey, and Zach Rice. Please forgive me if I've left any names out, as I have a horrible ability to remember names that were not repeatedly listed in my notes during these years. In addition to the dozens of people I spoke with and collaborated with to organize the gatherings, day one was attended by over 150 participants throughout the day and evening events, representing over 23 Native language programs and language groups. I am humbled for their support and kindness.



29 October 2013

Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo
705 Heretaunga St West
St Leonards
HASTINGS - 4201

To whom it may concern,

TE TIRA HAERE O TE PANEKIRETANGA O TE REO

The proposed trip by Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo is predicated on the conviction that the Māori language is an integral aspect of Māori culture.

Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo – the Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language – opened its doors to its first intake in August, 2004. The present intake is its ninth.

Excellence in language, allied to a knowledge of the philosophy underlying cultural mores, are what each intake is expected to master over the duration of the course which is twelve months. There are monthly seminars of three days beginning Friday evening and terminating midday Sunday with the hours varying depending on the issues under discussion. There is no application process but people are nominated by either the tutors or by people who have successfully completed the course but with the final acceptance still being the prerogative of the tutors.

As a consequence whaikōrero and karanga, both cultural imperatives, are a major part of the course. To acquit oneself well in these aspects demands a very high competence in the use of formal and informal language, idiom, mythical, proverbial and biblical allusions where appropriate, when to be assertive and when to be gracious, when to attack and when to resile. Such mastery of language does not come easily but many of the intakes have acquitted themselves well.

The trip is open to all nine intakes but the principal reason, apart from the foregoing comments, is for all intakes to know each other better and to provide the opportunity for them to discuss issues of import with similarly minded people.

This is the third trip to be made by Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo. The first was to Tahiti, Hawai'i and parts of the United States of America, the second was to North and South Dakota to spend time with the Lakota people who are trying desperately to revive, retain and maintain their language which is in a parlous state; and this third trip will be to Albuquerque to visit a Charter school for Indian children and then on to Oklahoma to spend time with the Cherokee, the Chickasaw, the Kiowa and, possibly, the Yuchee. The dates we expect to be in Oklahoma are Monday 19th to Friday 23rd of May 2014. The following events have been organised on our behalf by Royce Freeman, to whom we are deeply indebted.

*Ko te reo kia tika
Ko te reo kia rere
Ko te reo kia Māori*

TE PANEKIRETANGA O TE REO - INSTITUTE OF EXCELLENCE IN THE MĀORI LANGUAGE

Figure 54: Tīmoti Kāretu's letter explaining purpose of cohort trips, page 1 (personal communication with Tīmoti Kāretu, 2013).



TE PANEKIRETANGA O TE REO
INSTITUTE OF EXCELLENCE IN THE MAORI LANGUAGE

- 20 May - University of Oklahoma.
- 21 May - Visit to Sauk Language Department.
- 22 May - Chickasaw Language Revitalisation Programme.

The efforts we Māori have made to keep our language alive is the inspiration for many of these people fighting for linguistic survival. Our role is to support and to show that all is not totally lost if there is commitment, perseverance and belief in the proposition that the language is crucial to our culture and our identity.

All their teaching has been through the medium of Māori and this trip is to be no different – this is to be a Māori speaking trip, the third of its kind for many, many a year. It will enable people of different cultures in other parts of the world to hear the Māori language in full flight and to draw comparisons. I am convinced that the exchanges in language and culture will be to our mutual benefit.

The time is not too far distant when these students of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo will be their tribal representatives on different national platforms but, more importantly, will be the ones assuming the positions of their elders on the paepae of their marae throughout the country.

They are an important link to the past as well as being firmly rooted in the present with the knowledge at their fingertips as to what must be done to ensure the survival of the language and culture into the centuries to come.

This is an elite group who are well aware of that fact and the responsibility that is theirs as a member of Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo.

For all the aforementioned reasons this journey is an important one not only linguistically and culturally but, even more importantly, socially for it will strengthen the bonds of human friendship between each of these participants for the rest of their lives.

Nāku nā

Nā Tīmoti Kāretu

Dr. Tīmoti Kāretu
Executive Director
Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa
705 Heretaunga St, West
Hastings - 4120
Hawkes Bay – North Island
New Zealand

*Ko te reo kia tika
Ko te reo kia rere
Ko te reo kia Māori*

TE PANEKIRETANGA O TE REO - INSTITUTE OF EXCELLENCE IN THE MAORI LANGUAGE

Figure 55: Tīmoti Kāretu's letter explaining purpose of cohort trips, page 2 (personal communication with Tīmoti Kāretu, 2013).

Te Panekiretanga o te Reo Te Tira Haere III



Dr. Timoti Karetu
Tuhoe
Director;
Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo



Leslie Tiki Korobeke
Ngāti Maniapoto
Resource Teacher Māori



Pania Papa
Ngāti Korokī-Kahukura
Ngāti Mahuta
Māori Language Consultant



Leon Blake
Tuhoe, Te Arawa, Maniapoto
Kahungunu, Ngāti Porou
Te Whānau-a-Apanui
Māori Language Consultant



Paraone Gloyne
Ngāti Raukawa
Māori language, custom,
protocol advisor to
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa



Hana O'Regan
Kai Tahu, Kati Māmoe, Waitaha
Director Māori & Pasifika
Student Services, CPTT



Charisma Rangipunga
Kai Tahu, Taranaki,
Ngāti Kahungunu
General Manager Iwi Identity
& Engagement
Te Rūnanga o Ngai Tahu



Kingi Kiriona
Ngāti Kahungunu
Ngāti Ruani, Ngāti Apa,
Tainui
Manager, Māori Achievement
WINTEC



Ngaringi Katipa
Ngāti Maniapoto / Raukawa
NZQA - Senior Advisor



Ashina Twomey
Ngāti Raukawa
Ngāti Kahungunu
Kaitiaki Taonga Māori at
Whanganui Regional Museum



Eruera H. Ruwhia
Te Whānau-a-Apanui
Ngāti Awa, Ngāpuhi
Pouako Reo Māori



Justin Tipa
Ngāti Tahu / Ngāti Māmoe
Iwi Advisor
Professional learning and
Development

Figure 56: Te Panekiretanga cohort and mentor members attending the 2014 BOLT, page 1 (personal communication with Tīmoti Kāretu, 2014).



Dr. Dean Mahuta
Waikato
Senior Lecturer Te Reo Māori
Auckland University
of Technology



Hemi Kelly
Ngāti Maniapoto
Ngāti Tahu - Ngāti Whāoa
Lecturer Te Reo Māori
Auckland University
of Technology



Ruth Smith
Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki
Ngāti Kahungunu
Ngāti Porou
Lecturer Reo Māori



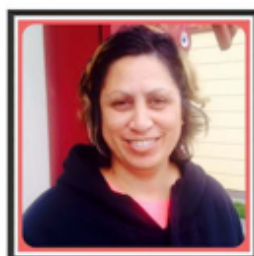
Tiya Blake
Tūhoe, Tūhourangi,
Ngāti Waiāio
Kaiako HOD Māori Studies
(dates to Lena Blake)



Lynne Harata Te Aika
Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Awa
Head of School Aotahi
Māori & Indigenous Studies
University of Canterbury



Henare Te Aika-Puanaki
Ngāi Tahu / Kahungunu
Kaiako Reo Māori
(son of Lynne Harata Te Aika)



Urupikia Minhinnick
Ngāti Te Ata
Kaiako Wharekura
Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o
Te Whānau Tahī



Tawhiri Ruru
Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki
Te Whakatohea
Te Whānau-a-Apanui
Ngāti Te Ata
Student - Bachelor of
Maori Performing Arts
(son of Urupikia Minhinnick)



Chris Winitana
Ngāti Tūwharetoa/Tūhoe
Writer

Tinamaroe Kaipara-Winitana
Ngāti Tūwharetoa/Te Aupouri
Home-maker

Figure 57: Te Panekiretanga cohort and mentor members attending the 2014 BOLT, page 2 (personal communication with Tīmoti Kāretu, 2014).

The **purpose** of this language gathering is **reciprocity**; for participants to share and exchange knowledge in an effort to build relationships that can strengthen each other's language revitalization goals

The day of events is for Oklahoma Native American/Tribal language advocates, instructors, and programs to **learn** about Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo and to **share** each other's language revitalization methods and experiences.

I encourage you to collaborate with me to not only attend the event, but to work to be an integral part of the language gathering, by leading a discussion or presentation on your language revitalization work.



Bringing
Our
Languages
Together:

Sharing
Language
Revitalization
with

Te Panekiretanga
o Te Reo

"Institute of Excellence in the Māori Language"

Tuesday, May 20th, 2014

9:00a.m. - 4:00p.m.

Figure 58: Pamphlet Graphics from the 2014 Bringing Our Languages Together gathering. Digital graphics. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.

In June 2004,
25 students were
invited to be part of
the first intake of
Te Panekiretanga



o Te Reo, a two year program that began under the umbrella of Te Wananga o Aotearoa by Dr. Tīmoti Kāretu, Dr. Wharehuia Milroy, and Professor Pou Temara. Currently the program is in the ninth intake of students who have a higher competence in te Reo Māori and find themselves in positions "to lead in orator and tikanga in their work-place, on their marae, and other places of influence but had no support or avenues within which to obtain a deeper understanding and ability with that which was now expected of them" (TVNZ 2007). Te Panekiretanga o te Reo was created to provide this support and teaching.



All of the students involved in this Institute are actively involved in "language maintenance and retention, while they come from many walks of life such as teaching, elementary, high school, university and total immersion; as well as, Māori language broadcasting, principally Māori language television, law and other forms of employment where the language is needed and employed" (Kāretu 2013).

Tentative Event Details Tuesday, May 20th, 2014

- 9 a.m. - 10 a.m.
Welcoming Ceremony at the
Jacobson House Native
American Art Center
609 Chautauqua, Avenue, Norman
- 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
Presentation by Te
Panikiretanga o Te Reo
Short walk/ride to Zarrow Hall
- 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.
OK Language Group
Introductions/presentations
- 12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.
Lunch on your own
- 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Language Group Presentation
- 2:45 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Breakout activities and discussions
- 4:10 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Closing remarks
- 6 p.m. - 9 p.m.
Community Potluck Dinner
and Activities at the Jacobson
House, Norman, OK.

Figure 59: Pamphlet Graphics from the 2014 Bringing Our Languages Together gathering. Digital graphics. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.

Day 1: Welcoming

In Oklahoma, my elders tell me tornados are a wild horse, whipping its tail, leaping and bucking. The old ones had a more direct way to work with them, but we still do our best. You face towards its direction and you offer up tobacco. You remind it who you are. Through these prayers you send it around you and yours. You learn early to watch the skies. You learn to be prepared for shifts in the atmosphere and how to respond accordingly. Even with our prayers, we still take shelter. We have a backup plan. There is no knowing which way the wild horse will land or whip its tail. In May of 2013, my children and I were in the lower level of the OU Memorial Union building watching the EF-5 tornado ravage Moore, the town just north of Norman. Tornado season in Oklahoma occurs sporadically throughout the year, but the most concentrated events occur during the spring months of April and May. Sometimes we're told to not directly invite people to events. You let them know what's going on and it's their responsibility, their choice to be there. If you invite them, you're responsible for them. You see to it that they get there and back again. I felt this responsibility for the gathering. During the Spring Equinox, I prayed for the protection of all the visitors who would be travelling to the gathering. In April and May during the full moons, I asked my ancestors to calm the storms, to protect the travelers. The week before Tīmoti and his students were set to arrive, I again prayed and looked to the skies for calm. I put together each one of their welcome bags with good thoughts and prayers. Upon their evening arrival into Oklahoma City on May 19th, the air was dense and humid, thick with the smells of trees and flowers. The wind was calm and the moon looked crisp in the sky. It was as if the land itself was prepping for their arrival and everyone's journeys the next day. The weather forecast predicted a light drizzle after midnight, but the week looked to be some of the best weather Oklahoma could offer in May.

On their trips, Te Panekiretanga travels in numbers and they have a very tight schedule they adhere to. The day before their arrival, they were finishing their visit with another language group in New Mexico. A member of their group injured his leg and Hana travelled with him to ensure he was taken care of and was on his way returning to Aotearoa. Hana would join us later during day two of their trip. Knowing this and that the group would be arriving late that evening, I wanted to give them time to settle in that first night. This was instead of having a large welcoming party waiting for them at the airport, which would lead to a larger dinner group that would most likely visit into the late hours. When they arrived, they were certainly ready for a quick dinner and to get some rest before their first packed day of activities. In my excitement of greeting them at the airport, I lost track of where I parked my car. Tīmoti was quick to tease me and I feared that he was worried that the coming days would go astray. Thankfully, the airport is tiny and we made it to the hotel just as the rest of the group arrived on the bus. Their visit was close to Memorial Day and it's a tradition for my Eastern Shoshone family at Wind River to give out Washakie lunches. A small paper bag with food for the travelers. The items vary year to year, but I loved the dry meat, cheese, and apples the most. I included a simple brown paper bag with dried meat, fruit, and some treats with their gift bags. Various donated items from the Native Naturals company and language groups were included, along with shell bead necklaces I had made. These combined were four gifts to welcome each group member. After checking into their rooms, we had a quick dinner up the road before they settled in for the night.

I greeted the sun the next morning. Looking to the east, I offered up my tobacco and cedar to the glowing horizon. I smudged myself in the rays of light shining through the giant oak tree in my back yard. I again asked for their protection, for the protection of all the travelers and volunteers. I prayed for each person to come with a good heart, open mind, and to help each

other through kindness and their knowledge. I also prayed for my children to be calm and for them to have a wonderful experience with me. The early morning was filled with prepping the Jacobson House for the welcoming and setting up the conference room. Coffee, water, and breakfast bars were provided. We had checked out two vans from OU to provide transportation throughout the day for the group. Sean O'Neill graciously volunteered to be one of the drivers with me. Sean and I left the Jacobson House and drove to their hotel to bring them to campus. When we arrived, they were just finishing up their morning briefing and breakfast. After introducing Sean to the group, T̄imoti and I reviewed the agenda for the day and discussed again how they would arrive and be welcomed into the space. In the previous months, this had been a bit of a discussion with numerous Oklahoma language groups, as well.

The University of Oklahoma is an intertribal space for multiple Native Nations, Tribes, and Indigenous groups from across the world. Locally, the neighboring Native Nations and Tribes are the Absentee Shawnee Tribe, Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Caddo Tribe, Delaware Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Comanche Nation, Ft. Sill Apache Tribe, Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Kickapoo Tribe of Oklahoma, Kiowa Tribe, and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes (Wichita, Waco, Keechi, and Tawakoni). Before the colonial demarcation of the land, these were the traditional lands of the ancestral Apache, Caddo, Comanche, Kiowa, Kiowas-Apache, Osage, and Wichita peoples, including multiple bands, clans, and societies within each group. Additionally, these lands were long established central trade routes and gathering places that hosted many Indigenous groups from across Turtle Island “North America” and the lands south beyond the backbone of Turtle Island (Rocky Mountains range and Sierra Madre Oriental). This was a unique complexity of my liaison work between the tribes and T̄imoti. In my conversations with T̄imoti to prepare for their

arrival, and described in his previous conversation chapter, there were many questions about what the local Indigenous welcoming protocols would be and how Te Panekiretanga group members would call and respond.

I again looked to my elders and understood that this first day was a collaborative sponsorship amongst many different groups. Each of the separate groups had their own unique ways to welcome visitors into their territories. Each also expressed that they did not want to overextend their own ways when many different groups would be present. In the end, availability of local individuals, along with my own cultural traditions as the organizer, finalized our plans. Tīmoti's group would follow their Māori cultural pōwhiri (welcoming ceremony) protocols. This included a Karanga (welcoming call), whaikōrero (formal speech) by Kingi Kiriona, and a waiata (song) by the group. During our discussion at their hotel on the morning of the first day, we again reviewed this process. The day before Te Panekiretanga arrived, I had confirmation of some of the early morning attendees. The eldest member of our Oklahoma group was Virginia Lee Carey (Cherokee) and she expressed that she wanted to offer up a prayer and hymn in Cherokee. This would be followed by an opening speech by Tracey Satepauhoodle-Mikkanen, Gus Palmer, and myself. I would then gift each of the local welcoming group members with various items for their assistance. The morning of the welcoming, I was asked to sit with Tīmoti's group, which I saw as an honor during their visit. Tīmoti expressed to me that he usually sees Native American groups standing when prayers and some speeches are being made. He told me that if I was going to sit with their group throughout their trip to be aware of how they remain seated during these. He said, "just do as our women do and you'll be fine." This was natural for me because it is also what the young women in my own families are instructed to do. When we arrived a little after 9 a.m. at the Jacobson House, our hearts were humming in unison.

The planned welcoming had a few additional local speakers. Tīmoti's group listened attentively. Soon, Kingi began their response and was joined in song by the group. Their voices echoed through the crowd, saturating the air with energy.

The only thing I regret about this first day, is that I don't have more photos and recordings of the event. This was in 2014, before the surge and normalization of social media that we see today where many people are recording from their phones while at in-person events. I was very cautious about creating spaces where we could all be in the moment. At some of the local gatherings and workshops I had seen how people did not speak freely when they knew they were being recorded. People would be less open and comfortable at these events. I wanted this gathering to be about how we all felt in the moment and how we could be in a safe space that encouraged open and honest communication. When the cameras and recorders are on, there is a visible shift in the social atmosphere, particularly amongst people who were not accustomed to being documented. Additionally, numerous individuals expressed that they did not want to be recorded or photographed. Tīmoti's group and a few in my local teams verbally agreed to their photos being taken. Additional photos were sent to me by some of the Te Panekiretanga members after they returned home. The following are some of their photos and my own. These photos elicit the emotions shared that day.



Figure 60-61: At the Jacobson House morning welcoming, Day 1. (Left) Te Panekiretanga beginning their arrival call. Sean O'Neill is on the far right. (Right) Te Panekiretanga singing song after their introduction. Royce K. Young Wolf 2014.



Figure 62-65: At the Jacobson House morning welcoming, Day 1. (Far Left) Virginia Lee Carey and Gus Palmer. (Center Left) Whaikōrero by Kingi Kiriona. (Center Right) Welcome speech by Royce Young Wolf and youngest son, Oh-hah-moe. (Far Right) Cedric Sunray sharing a MOWA Choctaw hymn to welcome Te Panekiretanga. Royce K. Young Wolf 2014.

Day 1: Sharing Language Revitalization with Te Panekiretanga

After each of the scheduled speakers welcomed Te Panekiretanga in their own cultural and personal way, additional participants were asked to introduce themselves and share their unique cultural welcoming ways. Some shared a prayer and a song, others shared stories. Each expressed their excitement and appreciation for the gathering. Hearing so many ancestral languages spoken in one space was astonishing. We continued to visit amongst each other after the morning welcoming. Then we headed to the indoor conference space to begin the language

revitalization presentation sessions. I introduced the group to the planned agenda and again explained the purpose of the gathering; reciprocity, to both learn from Te Panekiretanga and to share with them the language revitalization methods and experiences that are happening in Oklahoma. Since most introductions were made at the morning welcoming ceremony, we began with the Te Panekiretanga presentations. A select handful were already chosen amongst their group to share their unique language journeys before and after becoming part of Te Panekiretanga. They began with a remarkable discussion about second language speakers, their importance and how such people are the future. Much of the same sentiments shared that morning have been reiterated in my conversations with Tīmoti, Hana, and Hēmi in the previous conversation chapters.

Reflecting on their presentations, I'm moved by their progression through each truth telling and how these began with stories that would not overwhelm the participants. They slowly built up to the more intense language journeys. The next oldest to Tīmoti was Leslie Tiki Koreheke. He spoke briefly after Tīmoti provided their initial introduction. Leslie shared his feelings about being one the oldest in the cohorts. This struck a cord with me and others in the room. Taking up language revitalization can begin at any age. The next topics shared were about different types of intergenerational knowledge exchanges between families in Te Panekiretanga and how each were driven to refining their language knowledge and skills in different ways. They expressed how this strengthened their bonds, but each had their own relationship with the language. A mother in the cohort chose to extend her language use within her professional career, but her work was not directly related to language teaching. Her son, also a cohort member, was on a personal journey with his language work. He committed his time to the cohorts outside of his regular job. Next were a few stories about how different members were

seeking to increase te reo Māori within their educational and professional careers. Some of the younger group members briefly shared how they were invited to join Te Panekiretanga and their responsibilities to their mentors and the community they had together.

The last story shared was from an older couple who began their journey as adult language learners. After having children, they refocused on te reo Māori language learning in their home. I remember listening intensely as they commanded the room and were resolute in their purpose as a family first. They began with learning and teaching simple words to their children. “Table, food, mother, father, etc.” They then shared how they had a long journey to find different communities that were like-minded and shared the same values. They expressed how they’ve shifted from one community to the next, searching for comradery and support. Their focus was for the well-being of their family, their goals and dreams, also their realistic needs. It was a reminder that while each Te Panekiretanga cohorts were made up of mentors and students who supported each other as a community, they were drawn together from many different communities. Their journeys to get to Te Panekiretanga were a great achievement, but this was only a few years in a longer journey to meet and overcome broader challenges within their home communities, professions, and the state of affairs in Aotearoa. They expressed a greater responsibility to keep the language alive in multiple spaces, but also to continue to support each other’s journeys and careers. This couple expressed how they eventually decided to form their own community with their family because certain issues could not be resolved in other ones communities. I often think about their story and what it takes to create a community of like-minded people.

Those who were not already family or partners, or acquaintances, were coming to know each other in these educational spaces for the first time. Each took up the responsibility to be

better, do more, become the experts, and bring those teachings back into their professional and personal lives. The prestige and respect earned by Sir Tīmoti Kāretu, Dr. Te Wharehuia Milroy, and Sir William Te Rangiua Pou Temara became beacons shining bright for the te reo Māori communities, students, and prospective students. Throughout their lifetimes of work and by being exemplar models themselves, they have developed the ability to shift the social atmosphere creating transformative spaces ripe for the demands of higher excellence. Each cohort member expressed that their participation in Te Panekiretanga was more than just a pursuit of the language. As Tīmoti has said, the language has been the priority, but so too has been creating and maintaining this community of cohort members. A community of like-minded language champions, activists, warriors, and practitioners who weave the language throughout their greater deeds and lives. I would argue that while Te Panekiretanga is an opportunity for excellence in the Māori language, it is also a rare opportunity to be amongst a community of people distinguished by their social, academic, and professional standards, infused by their Indigenous culture and language. Together, amongst their cohort, they created transformative spaces at this gathering. Spaces where they reinforced each other to be open and honest about their deeper work and their lives with te reo Māori and together.



Figure 66: Day 1, Te Panekiretanga and local participants at the *Sharing Our Languages with Te Panekiretanga session*. Royce K. Young Wolf 2014.



Figures 67-68: Day 1 at the *Sharing Our Languages with Te Panekiretanga session* (Left) Hēmi Kelly and Ruth Smith. (Right) Jacob Manatowa-Bailey and Hēmi Kelly. Royce K. Young Wolf 2014.

More than a few tears were shed during these presentations. You could feel the powerful emotions moving throughout the room. Tīmoti's use of "friendship" being part of the purpose of their trips was more relevant than ever. It was at this point that the agenda for the workshop shifted. We began our roundtable discussions as we waited on the lunch that was running late. I informed the participants that the second portion of the workshop would be on language acquisition methodologies. From the chatter in the room after the stories shared by the members

of Te Panekiretanga, methodologies were no longer a focus. Yet not everyone was of the same attitude. There was a moment just after the food arrived when I was pulled aside by a man in one of the local language groups. He had spoken very powerfully during the welcoming ceremony but now he was a bit agitated. A woman stood behind him and she was apologizing. Tīmoti came to stand just behind me, listening around my shoulder. The man seemed to be shaken negatively by the truth telling. He expressed that they were going go ahead and talk while we ate because this wasn't for him. He wanted his group to present on their language work but he wasn't alright with staying longer. The woman continued to apologize and said they were fine to stay but the man began to speak a little louder and moved closer to me. At this point, Tīmoti leaned in closer as well. I took a deep breath and expressed how unfortunate it was he would have to leave and if there was anything I could do. I also reminded him of the positive space that needed to be respected here and of the older speakers I had been in communication with about their group attending the gathering. With the mention of the elders' names, he calmed himself and apologized. He explained again that this wasn't for him but those with him could quickly share their language work while we ate, and then they would be on their way. I agreed to this and introduced them to the room and said it was alright to continue eating while they presented. The young man and his mother presented quickly. They took their food to go. Tīmoti sat beside me and said this happens sometimes. It's too much for some to hear. Again, I thought about how each of us can have lives outside of our language work, apart from our language groups. How even amongst communities and families, like-mindedness and values need to be revived as well.

The participants seemed unphased by these exchanges. They continued to visit amongst each other and once again the room filled with laughter and smiles. Teasing commenced and ended too soon. With full hearts and bellies, the remaining participants began their presentations.

Some shared the history of their languages, some shared songs, and other focused on their future goals. One of the presenters described internal disputes that were causing stress, but this person did not elaborate much more besides acknowledging such situations exist. The local participants still seemed apprehensive about publicly discussing some of the heavier internal issues until the presentation by the Kiowa Kids group, provided by Cedric Sunray, unsettled this silence. His presentation brought about a lengthy discussion led by T̄moti. In addition to information about the group's projects, Cedric provided the participants with a list titled, "So you want your language to die...Here are some helpful ways to make that happen." Through this list, he named deeply problematic issues impacting Indigenous language revitalization efforts. There were no hidden meanings with this list of issues that many of us had experienced, but few of us fully engage in discussions about because they are rift with conflict. T̄moti described how important it was to discuss such issues, to name them, because they can disrupt even the most seasoned of us. Of these issues, the following four on the list were openly discussed in the context of a person carrying out such actions that snuff out language efforts: "Do not understand that language is constantly shifting and changing; Believe that the revitalization of language is based on language knowledge and not the management of personalities; Do not have a clear goal for your program, do you want fluency or do you want enrichment; Allow just a few people to be viewed as keepers of the language." Each of these were unpacked throughout our conversations. These continue to be present at various levels described in the ongoing work amongst the language activists' experiences documented in this dissertation.

The discussion we had with Te Panekiretanga about these various issues made this list an important place to begin to reflect on internal conflicts that occur amongst language groups and the wider Indigenous communities. It's a heavy guide to address complex issues impacting

overall cohesiveness, friendships, and values. This list is simply a place to begin. Within a few months of the gathering Timoti informed me that his group had translated the concepts on this list into te reo Māori. I've continued to review this list and have added to it over the years. The full list is included in the Appendix. After this discussion, a couple more groups presented. The afternoon agenda began to wrap up. We were running over schedule, but some still wanted to watch the film screening of the 2014 documentary *Heenetiineyoo3eihiiho* (*Language Healers*) which featured the Yuchi Language Project. After the screening, those of us remaining visited for a little bit more and began preparing for the evening gathering.



Figure 69: Day 1, evening events at the Jacobson House. Te Panekiretanga sharing song. Royce K. Young Wolf 2014.

The evening activities at the Jacobson House were breathtaking and a powerful example of the kindness and gifting known of many Oklahoma Native American and Indigenous communities. The flyer provided below details the featured activities and guest performances. The dinner was a potluck made possible by a dozen or more local families. Each of the volunteers contributed more than their time. They helped to make the gathering feel like a family reunion. The cohort members of Te Panekiretanga shared more songs with us, and local participants responded with their own songs and stories. Throughout the evening there was a

stickball game, a live painting and spoken word presentation, big drum singing, more stories, and good eats. After the sun set, we were gifted with an Apache fire dance. For some of the people leading the activities I was able to help them with funds for their gas and supplies, others refused to accept anything more than the gift bags I made them. Those celebrations were only day one of the gathering. The volunteers helped to put the Jacobson House back in order as attendees began to trickle home for the night. Sean and I shuttled the members of Te Panekiretanga back to their hotel. The next day would also begin early, as we set out to be welcomed by the Sauk Language Department and community.



Figure 70: Day 1 flyer for 2014 Community Potluck Dinner Event flyer. Original photos and logos courtesy of artists and participants. Digital Graphic. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.

Day 2: Kîmâchipena “Let’s Come Together”

“Our language makes us related together as human beings and also to all these things. Our language tells us who we are as Sauk people. We were happier people back when we all spoke our language. We were prouder people then. At that time we didn’t argue as much. We were closer to one another at that time. Everything becomes more difficult without our language” (Sauk Language Department 2009). These are some of the opening English translated lines spoken in the Sauk language by Jacob Manatowa-Bailey in the video *Kîmâchipena – Let’s Come Together* (2009) available at www.talksauk.com and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOR5CII00fI> online. Throughout the years since meeting Jacob Manatowa-Bailey in 2012, he has become a mentor to me. His determination and conviction to the continuation of his Sauk language brings an air of intensity that few share. He is one of the exemplars to which Tîmoti calls us to be. This has become possible because of the knowledge shared with him from his elders and mentors, as well as his own responsibilities and standards for his life and language work. Jacob and his team were organizing language methodology and revitalization workshops in Oklahoma years before I became involved. Day two of the gathering being hosted by the Sauk Language Department’s team, spearheaded by Terrie Kinsey, and his community gifted me the opportunity to enjoy being amongst the groups and being present in the moment and comradery. The memories from that day continuously feed me and make my heart happy.

We travelled from Norman in the early hours to the Sac & Fox grounds. There the group was welcomed by tribal leaders, the Sauk Language Department, and community members. After the morning presentations, we were treated to coffee and snacks under the covered pavilion. The group members floated amongst the crowd. Each creating gathering circles alight

with laughter and storytelling. Here I was able to sit amongst my peers of like-minded people and mentors. We were later brought over to the gathering hall where the lunch feast was being served. During lunch, group members from Te Panekiretanga were asked to introduce themselves and were given gift bags. Afterwards, we were brought back out to the dance grounds for cultural demonstrations and a celebration dance. More gifts were exchanged amongst the Te Panekiretanga group members and the Sac & Fox community members. This part of the day's festivities came to an end and we went back into the gathering hall to begin the language revitalization session amongst Sauk and other tribal language learners and mentors.

The photos below were taken by myself and are those Te Panekiretanga members shared with me.



Figure 71: Day 2, Te Panekiretanga group members during the welcoming ceremony by the Sac & Fox Nation. Royce K. Young Wolf 2014.



Figure 72: Day 2, Morning gathering and sharing stories under the covered pavilion with the Sauk Language Department. (Left to Right) Joshua Hinson, Urupikia Minhinnick, Katie Thompson, Dean Mahuta, Kingi Kiriona, Jacob Manatowa-Bailey, and Āwhina Twomey. Royce K. Young Wolf 2014.



Figure 73: Day 2, Te Panekiretanga group members during the welcoming dances by the Sac & Fox Nation. Royce K. Young Wolf 2014.



Figures 74-75: Day 2, afternoon events at the Sac & Fox Nation. (Left) Royce Young Wolf seated next to Tīmoti Kāretu and Ruth Smith at the Sac & Fox Nation celebration dances. (Right) Conversations after the feast. (Left to right) Hēmi Kelly, Tiya Blake holding a baby Sauk language learner, and Ruth Smith. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.

Towards the end of the first day of the gathering, Jacob and I had discussed what this afternoon gathering would entail. He had been watching how the different community members and members of Te Panekiretanga were interacting and what the topics were of their conversations. We discussed what he had seen being most beneficial. The journey of the language learner was a key topic, but he wanted more discussions about solutions to some issues. The personal stories shared amongst each person were immensely impactful and eye-opening. For the language discussion session on the second day, Jacob decided to have the attendees form a giant circle in the gathering hall. Te Panekiretanga group members were interspersed amongst the local community members. Here Jacob opened the space up through sharing a story with the assistance of his apprentices Katie and Mosiah. Jacob spoke in Sauk, Katie and Mosiah took turns translating for him. He told us about one of their trips, similar to the trips taken by Te Panekiretanga, but they were only a group of three. It was a struggle at first to have Katie and Mosiah stay in the language during these trips. They took turns ordering from restaurants speaking in their Sauk language and one of them would translate it into English. Jacob spoke of the loneliness of being only a handful of Sauk speakers amongst the rest of the world but they

were determined to increase that number. Katie and Mosiah each shared stories about what motivated them to learn more, to speak together, and how they are looking towards broadening the work they do with Sauk. From here, Jacob had each person around the circle speak about their inspirations and language learning experiences. There were numerous people who cried during their introductions and regained their composure and spoke of the challenges to their work. Each shared a piece of themselves with the group. Some said this doesn't happen back home. This act of openly sharing their feelings, their struggles, and dreams. Many were overwhelmed by their workloads. There are only a handful in each of their home communities that they could truly rely on within their language groups. Each person related feelings of being inadequate in the face of the causes of language endangerment, yet each was committed to continuing onward no matter the odds.

The atmosphere was transformed into a safe space, a creative space. This was contributed to the fact that many of the attendees were part of the Sauk language learning community and people from other tribal language groups had ongoing collaborations with Jacob. They had either attended some of his workshops or were being mentored by him. These established relationships encouraged more openness amongst the groups. Following our truth telling, Jacob instructed us to share solutions to some of the issues we had heard. I recall how there were still more questions about the issues expressed than strategic solutions.

Again, Tīmoti and some of his students spoke up about defining and categorizing these issues; who are the players, who are the stakeholder, and what are the wanted outcomes, then work from there. At one point, Tīmoti spoke sternly that each had to take responsibility for the issues, and either be the change or get out of the way. The message was clear. The work is not done by just acknowledging the problems, that just turns into complaining and/or whining when

no action is taken to actually solve the issues. You have to put more energy into working on the solutions. And if you don't want to be part of the solution, leave. Go on. Because the real language leaders will keep working. Some of the people nodded in agreement. Some lowered their heads and looked at the ground. More broader methods were to simply disengage from the troublemakers and toxic social environments. Set the standard that language groups are only for positive productive people. There were expressions about how to reinforce those standards and maintain them, which is a complex task and requires strong leadership by a good exemplar. Respected elders usually exert this air of authority and role but being amongst adult language learners who are your peers, exposes a younger person to a litany of criticisms. The outcomes are not always positive and language work is hijacked by tasks required to manage personalities. These occurrences were not unique.

Hugely important during these discussions was that the older mentors reorientated the group to see that these issues and solutions were not anomalies. Each Indigenous language activist shared in various forms of these negative and positive experiences. They also shared the necessity to keep moving forward and those methods must be thought out and strategic. Each language leader, mentor, and long-term language activist had grit and endurance, matched by their self-motivation and love for their work. Some of the Māori members had more of a direct path to their success with te reo through the established language programs, others took longer to get onto that path. None of them had their success just handed to them and it didn't come without a struggle. Yet even the struggle could be enjoyed. Some people from the local communities offer their thanks and quietly left. Others came forward and embraced the other group members, shaking hands, exchanging gifts and contact information with one another. Different people expressed their intentions to keep in communication and to travel to Aotearoa one day. After the

farewells, Jacob Manatowa-Bailey, Joshua Hinson, and I regrouped. We looked to each other, opened our eyes wider, breathed in deep and laughed. There was still an intense energy in the air. More than a few people were shaken up. I hoped that they were leaving with some of the energy and would go to work with a sense of a new drive, passion, and clarity awoken in them. The next day we would be hosted by Joshua at the Chickasaw Nation's Cultural Center. We left the Sac & Fox Nation and headed to dinner in Norman.



Figures 76-77: Day 2, afternoon events language revitalization sharing session. (Left) Tīmoti Kāretu speaks during the Sauk Language Department conversation session. (Right) Jacob Manatowa-Bailey speaking to the group during the Sauk Language Department conversation session. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.

Day 3: *Issafalama'shki* 'You must Return to Me'

Pōkarekare Ana Māori love song

[translations provided in personal correspondence with Lokosh (Joshua Hinson), 2014]

Pōkarekare ana
ngā wai o Waiapu,
Whiti atu koe hine
marino ana e.

They are agitated
the waters of Waiapu,
But when you cross over girl
they will be calm.

E hine e
hoki mai ra.
Ka mate ahau
I te aroha e.

Oh girl
return to me,
I could die
of love for you.

Tuhituhi taku reta

I have written my letter

tuku atu taku rīngi,
Kia kite tō iwi
raru raru ana e.

I have sent my ring,
so that your people can see
that I am troubled.

Whati whati taku pene
ka pau aku pepa,
Ko taku aroha
mau tonu ana e.

My pen is shattered,
I have no more paper
But my love
is still steadfast.

E kore te aroha
e maroke i te rā,
Mākūkū tonu
i aku roimata e.

My love will never
be dried by the sun,
It will be forever moistened
by my tears.

Issafalama'shki “You must Return to Me”

(translations provided in correspondence with Joshua Hinson)

Ittombikbi' Bokoshi'at
iknokta'lohokya
ishabaanablikma
noktala'chi, Amihoo

The waters of the Coffin Maker River¹
are not calm
but when you cross over,
they will be calm, my woman

Amihoo,
Issafalama'shki
Salla'nikat
Chiholloli

My woman
You must return to me
I could die
of love for you.

Antaloowa' taloowali.
Naalhila'fa' impilashlitkoot
Chimoklaat ithána'ni
Ampalammika.

I sang my song.
Because I sent uncut cloth²
Your people can know
that I am afflicted.

Taloowa' aktaloo'wo,
Naalhila'fa' iksamikshookya
Chihollolikat í'ma.

I sing no songs,
I have no uncut cloth³
But I still love you.

Ahollaat inittakat ikintahoka'chi⁴
Chiholloli billi'ya'shki

My love's days will never be finished.
I shall love you forever.

Above is the Māori love song *Pokarekare Ana* and the Chickasaw language interpretation

Issafalama'shki “You Must Return to Me” by Joshua Hinson (personal communication). After

the completion of the third day of the gathering, Joshua continued to communicate with members

of Te Panekiretanga and being so moved by one of the songs they shared, he reinterpreted it into the Chickasaw language with cultural and historical meaningful contexts. While these actions were done for a song, they also represent the actions that many of the gathering attendees would need to go to work on. This is engaging a process of reinterpreting and contextualizing the knowledge and experiences shared by Te Panekiretanga and other participants into their own unique culture, language, and social circumstances. Just as every language acquisition methodology must be modified, so do these teachings. I'm thankful to have the friendship and mentorship of Joshua Hinson over the years. His stories and teachings I reflect upon and reinterpret in my own cultural and language contexts. He was one of the first people I spoke to about my intentions to organize a gathering in Oklahoma with Te Panekiretanga. He told me to go for it and let him know when it was going to be because he wanted to come. When Tīmoti confirmed their visit, Joshua would become much more than an attendee. Throughout the planning stages, he showed me more than moral support, he trusted I would be responsible to keep at it and take care of all logistics leading up to the last day of the gathering. We brainstormed ideas about activities that would be dynamic and contrast with the two previous days of the gathering. The welcoming would be inherently Chickasaw with the language committee elders guiding the welcoming protocols and cultural sharing. The feast would have traditional foods. There would be round table discussions and a tour of the Chickasaw Cultural Center. On a whim, I inquired about the theater and if a film screening would be possible. Joshua was excited about the idea, so I started searching for possible films to show.

Late one night in January of 2014 a Facebook post provided a link to the Sundance Film Festival website. Spotlights was the premiere of Sterlin Harjo's (2014) *This May Be the Last Time*, a powerful documentary tracing the life of Mvskoke Creek language hymns and how these

chronicle the lives of his family, community, and ancestors

(<http://www.thismaybethelasttime.com>). I got goosebumps watching the trailer. For me, singing hymns amongst my relatives and new acquaintances has always given me a deep sense of welcoming, of being home with the language and music. I reached out to Sterlin and shared with him the purpose of the gatherings with Te Panekiretanga. He expressed previous connections he had with various Māori groups from his trip to Aotearoa which were awakening. He spoke about how he was welcomed and then encouraged to sing Mvskoke hymns to them even though he didn't think he was much good at it. He shared that his film screening could be a way to give back and share some Mvskoke hospitality alongside his Chickasaw relatives. Most people involved in language work and the arts in Oklahoma know each other or at least know of one another's work and programs. I never asked about Joshua and Sterlin's friendship but I know he was quick to agree to the screening because of where it would be and who was organizing it. With that, the schedule was finalized.

On the third day of the gathering, I was invited to travel with Tīmoti's group on their charter bus to Ada. When we arrived, we were greeted by Joshua and members of their Language Committee. The committee's president, Vera Tims, welcomed us onto their lands and expressed good words and sentiments in Chickasaw. Jesse Lindsey announced the Friendship Dance and stomp dance. This was followed by the Language Committee sharing some of their Chickasaw-Choctaw hymns. Tīmoti's group listened and waited to be signaled to begin their response. This was led by Henare Te Aika-Puanaki, who spoke loud and passionately. Later that day, the group teased him about speaking on every topic, all the rocks, waters, birds, etc., which was keen and just long enough. Afterwards, we all enjoyed the language department's presentations about their various projects. Members of Te Panekiretanga discussed some of their own projects and gifted a

few more songs. At lunch our conversations continued as we enjoyed traditional dishes of Pashofa and wild onions. When we were full, people began shifting from one table to the next, visiting different members of each group. One of the most beautiful exchanges I enjoyed were their comparisons of the woven Chickasaw belts which had designs very similar to the Māori weaving designs and the yarn they wove for the poi balls they had brought with them. The gifts exchanged that day were layered with meanings. There weren't as intense conversations during this time, like there were the first two days. There were discussions about language learning styles and more technical aspects of the language work. Mostly, there were very heartfelt exchanges about life with the language, community, and the work to document each of the last speakers knowledge. There was a strong presence of the elder speakers and Joshua gladly let them direct the dialogue during that part of the day.

The photos below were taken by myself and are those Te Panekiretaga members shared with me.



Figures 78-79: Day 3, Welcoming by the Chickasaw Nation. Joshua Hinson greets Te Panekiretanga group members upon arriving to the Chickasaw Cultural Center. (Right) Tīmoti Kāretu and Hana O'Regan. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.



Figures 80-81: Day 3, Gathering events at the Chickasaw Cultural Center. (Left) Group photo of the Chickasaw Language Committee and Te Panekiretanga group members. (Right) An exchange of gifts between Charisma Rangipunga (right) and a Chickasaw language group member. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.

Later, we were split into a couple groups and given a tour of the cultural center and the traditional village outside. We regrouped at the theater, thankful to be out of the Oklahoma heat and humidity. Waiting for us was Sterlin Harjo and Joshua. Sterlin greeted us and shared the story of his visit to Aortearoa and the importance of the sharing of songs that he experienced. He told us about making of the documentary and we began the screening.

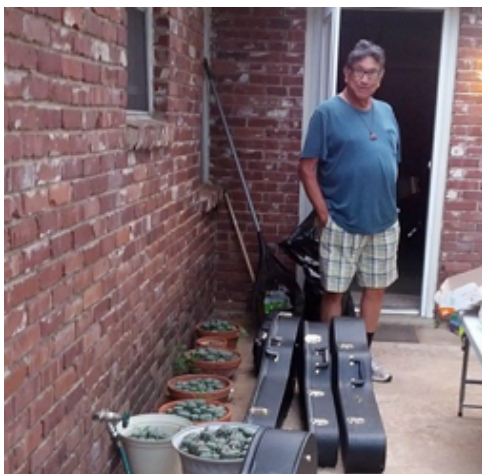


Figures 82-83: Day 3, tour of the Chickasaw Cultural Center. (Left) Tīmoti Kāretu and Parone Gloyne. (Right) Tīmoti Kāretu and Lokosh (Joshua Hinson). Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.



Figures 84-85: Day 3, film screening at the Chickasaw Cultural Center. (Left) Sterlin Harjo greeting Te Panekiretanga and introducing his documentary in the Chickasaw Cultural Center theater. (Right) Te Panekiretanga members responding in song after viewing the film. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.

We passed tissues amongst the group during the film. I felt strongly that the story is a memento to the fragility of Indigenous lives, but how there is resiliency in numbers, in community. The stories embedded with the language, the songs, and the journeys together were resounding and heart quaking. After the credits and the applause ended, there was silence amongst the group. Then Hana O'Regan and a few others stood and began singing in response to the film. Timoti and the rest of the group joined in. Joshua and I looked at each other, eyes glistening with tears, and smiled at the beautiful moment. Electricity shook down my arms reminding me of the power of shared experiences through positive inspiring energy. We again thanked Sterlin and our hosts. Photos were taken and we loaded onto the bus. On the drive home, Kingi told me stories about the songs they were singing. He and a few others translated the words and meanings. When we returned to the hotel, Timoti's group headed in to meet and reflect on the day. They would head to my home later that evening for dinner and a community gathering.



Figures 86-87: Day 3, Evening Gathering at the home of Royce K. Young Wolf. (Left) Gus Palmer arriving to my home for the evening gathering on the third day. (Right) After the meal, conversations and music was enjoyed by Te Panekiretanga members, local community members, and my family. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.



Figures 88-89: Day 3, Evening gathering festivities. (Left) Henare Te Aika-Puanaki (left) joins Gus Palmer (center) and Sean O'Neill sharing music for the evening celebrations. (Right) As the evening went on, various members joined in playing the extra guitars and instruments Sean brought. They serenaded each of us throughout the evening. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.

Throughout each day there were fluctuating levels of intensity, balanced with celebration, and moments of calm and being in appreciation of the moment. Each day, Timoti led morning and evening discussions on the logistics of each day and reflections on the meaningful experiences. There they expressed an array of experiences, and both positive and negative feelings, and they modified their actions and reactions accordingly. Continuing in the truth

telling practice, clearly each day was not filled with just overwhelming happiness and joy, there were still uneasy experiences during each daily gathering. There were life experiences at each location, in all it's beautiful messiness. There were miscommunications. Teasing. Local community members didn't see eye-to-eye and there were expressions about ego. I remember hearing some comments asking why some people were at the gatherings because they really didn't help with language work. Individuals came as spectators and observers, and they left the same.

I only know truly about my own experience and those who have shared their experiences with me. I do know that amongst these spaces there was puha "medicine energy" and many were impacted by it in a multitude of ways. I sat amongst local language groups who had attended other workshops and trainings, who didn't necessarily share perspectives with one another. Then when discussions were had, they disagreed and left more frustrated. Their defenses were up. Some members in these same groups I saw discuss the same issues with Te Panekiretanga members, which led to greater clarity. Knowledgeable Indigenous language activists from outside of the local group were able to assume a mediator role guiding them to arrive at productive reflections. The Te Panekiretanga members did not say anything new during these discussions, but it was received openly.

Those who made the effort to be open and willing to engage in a process of truth telling, reflection, and collaborative problem solving experienced inspiration. Their journey empowered. For some, their spark was reignited. Their paths cleared or shifted. Their memories of the gatherings fed their hearts and minds. In the following months there was continued communication between the gathering participants and various mentors and cohort members of Te Panekiretanga. The Chickasaw translation was shared with me later that summer. Lokosh

(Joshua Hinson) translated culturally informed interpretations of the song *Pōkarekare Ana* a Māori love song sang by some of the Te Panekiretanga cohort members. The following are his notes for that translation:

Provided as footnotes in Joshua Hinson's *Issgfalama'shki* "You must Return to Me" translation (personal communication, 2014).

1. Known colloquially as the Tombigbee River, the dividing line between the Chickasaw and the Choctaw nations in the Mississippi homelands. The name of the river refers to a coffin maker, ittombi 'coffin', ikbi' 'maker' = ittombikbi' 'coffin maker'.
2. The reference to a song and to the sending of uncut cloth reflects ancient marriage practices of the Chickasaw people. In this case, the composer is reflecting on the singing and the exchanging of uncut cloth that sealed a marriage. Knowing that these things had been done, his wife's people can understand why he is longing for her return.
3. The composer is mourning his wife's absence, reflecting that neither new song nor uncut cloth can bring her back.
4. An allusion to an ancient Chickasaw death proverb; when a person died their relatives would say Nittak intaha, 'His or her days are finished'. In this case, the composer is expressing that the life of his love, the days that are numbered to that love, will never end, even in death.

In the years following the gathering, various Oklahoma groups continued to communicate with Te Panekiretanga. Numerous people have travelled to Aotearoa and rendezvoused with various friends from the gatherings. The following year in 2015, as smaller group travelled with Tīmoti back to North Dakota and then back to Oklahoma for another gathering organized by Ryan Mackey and JP Johnson of the Cherokee Nation. I was invited to bring my boys with me and spent another few days amongst my extended Māori family of like-minded peers, mentors, and friends.



Figures 90-91: Gathering in 2015. (Left) Royce K. Young Wolf and Tīmoti Kāretu. (Right) Royce K. Young Wolf and Hana O'Regan. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2014.

In-between the gatherings, I've drawn upon the collective works by many of the gathering's attendees and their broader language and community work. I'm incredibly humbled to have been part of making these extended connections and seeing them develop more over the years. I look forward future gatherings and when I will be able to once again be amongst them.

Endnotes

❖ **Meaning Making Visual Guide** ❖

[Visual guide text]

Expanded transformative gifting through space and time.

Gift giving is an acknowledgement of reciprocal responsibility.

Gifting is ceremony.

This ceremony, like most ceremonies, are made to make you stronger. Cultivating relationships through this practice creates a network of support with positive productive like-minded comrades.

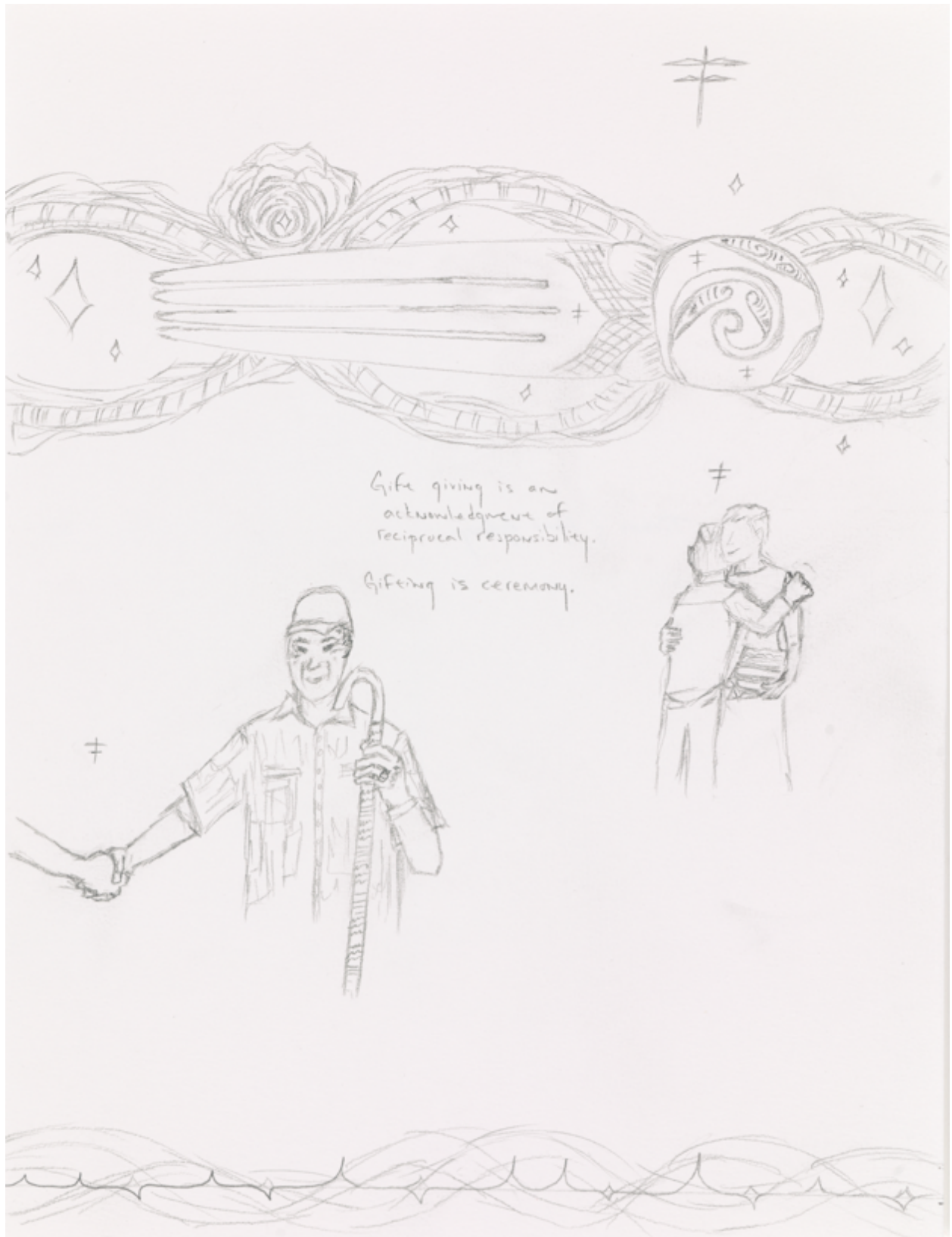


Figure 92: Expanded transformative gifting through space and time. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

PART V: WE ARE BORN INTO A UNIVERSE OF PRE-EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS

CHAPTER 18: LIFE STAGES OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE JOURNYS

CHAPTER 19: INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE LIFE STAGES FOR RELATIONSHIP MAKING
AND WELLNESS

AFTERWORD: AN ONGOING JOURNEY AND MAACAGIRAAC MIIGUXDA

Chapter Eighteen: The Power of Naming in Actions to Rise Above Lateral Oppression

καὶ τί δὲν κάνατε γιὰ νὰ μὲ θάψετε
ὅμως ξεχάσατε πὼς ἦμουν σπόρος

What didn't you do to bury me,
but you forgot I was a seed.
-Dino Christianopoulos (Mina 2018)

They tried to bury us,
they didn't know we were seeds.
-Zapatista and Indigenous Movements
(Mina 2018)

The above quotes represent three translations of a truth telling poem that embodies perseverance and endurance beyond the moments and legacies of caustic environments and toxic relationships. They represent a process of translation and reinterpretations amongst different cultural groups who rally behind the internal meanings of these lines. We ourselves embody the power and knowledge to overcome, and together we create change. The power of these words has inspired grassroots movements around the world. Inspiration and guided truth telling are seeds that feed our actions. These seeds come in many forms, but for them to take root, there must be a spark of meaningfulness which plants them in our psyche, in our hearts and minds. It is my hope that parts of the conversations with the language activists and the additional research presented in these chapters will become seeds for motivation and inspiration along other peoples' language journeys. The stories shared with me from each of the language activists have taken root in my own heart and are growing through the work I continue to do beyond this research.

This has been a long journey, longer than most in my academic fields. I'm pushing towards a decade of this research work, just like in the old days for doctoral degrees. Yet, I know that the majority of these conversations are representative of relationships that could only be grown through that amount of time, trust, and reciprocal responsibility. Additionally, these

research findings have been the result of over 20 years of my own involvement in my ancestral cultural and language work. Yet, I am not writing from a position as a “cultural and language expert.” Maybe when I travel to the old villages across the river, I’ll have earned such a role. In reflecting on my language journey thus far, I’ve chosen to write from my position and exemplar role as an Indigenous mother who is actively engaged in creating change for a better here-and-now and future for my children, myself, and like-minded people.

Culture and language knowledge lives in every aspect of my life, and it informs nearly every opinion and action I express and negotiate. Yet, through the very act of this expression, I’ve embodied social roles that I’m uncomfortable with in my own communities. While I feel I’ve seen too many winters, I’ve not yet seen enough to have the prestige that many of my mentors and elders have. Therefore, these writings are empowered by the fact that I am an incredible educated Indigenous woman and mother, and I strive to embody Indigenous wisdom and wellness through my LAR work. More than that, and what continues to be resoundingly important to my own conscience and ethics, as well as those of my children, family, and my mentors, is that I strive to be a good human being filled with love, kindness, and the grit that comes with an upbringing on my tribal reservations. This upbringing and knowing how fantastic and beautiful our Indigenous people can be with Indigenous wisdom, resiliency, wellness, and holism makes it even more difficult knowing the tangled history of colonization and historical trauma that has carried out systematic genocide on Indigenous communities, life stage knowledge, and our language and cultural practices.

Throughout the conversations with Indigenous language activists, some of the most despairing encounters with colonization are those amongst our own Indigenous community members. Recontextualizing the opening chant, “they tried to bury us/they did not know we were

seeds,” is a call to rise and grow beyond the internal complexities attempting to bury language activists. Understanding the tangled roots of this internally colonized environment requires an in-depth unpacking of community-based toxic social dysfunctions. This process of truth telling, naming, and recontextualizing Indigenous knowledge to address such issues in transformative spaces is part of life stages for an empowered language journey.

Seeking to Understand Internal Social Dysfunction Caused by Internal Assimilation

Through a process of truth telling, the second wave of colonization can be described as being driven by internal assimilation which has birthed prolific colonized Indigenous minds. Our Indigenous people, languages, and cultural ways are being throttled by social dysfunction, intergenerational trauma, and lateral violence and oppression. I’ve always grown up knowing that forms of these are what you expect when you visit the reservation border towns. Gawking eyes, curled lips, hateful stares, and vulgarity thrown by non-Natives riddled with racism and hate. I’m not fazed by any of that external ethnocentrism trash. What I can’t stomach is the diabolical treatment occurring within our Indigenous communities by our own people which negatively impacts our abilities to sustain ourselves, create and maintain healthy families, and language journeys. I’ve seen culture and language knowledge hoarded as an item of prestige. Cultural teachings and languages commodified amongst select circles, who then lash out at each other over orthographies, funding, misappropriation of funding, political nepotism and favoritism, disenrollment, horrific secrets, petty disagreements, resources, and addiction. The list is exhausting. It is confusing to honestly know what the internal and external causes of such behaviors are. Particularly confusing is knowing when there are deeper roots of trauma causing such actions or when these are just petty manifestations of greed or jealousy that feeds these actions and sickness. Maybe the person is just a mean tater tot. Who knows? Yet, those are not

the social behaviors or environments that energy should be diverted to. Instead, being equipped with awareness of the issues and steps to move beyond them should be skills developed to maintain a long-term language journey.

In the previous chapters, there are positive examples of inspirational Indigenous relationships amongst mentors, mentees, and like-minded peers. While these examples are needed, there is a growing vocalization by language activists that can be described as a romanticization of LAR work which does not prepare language activists for long-term success when encountering the opposite experiences. To further understand the dynamic negative social and political environments that language activists are exposed to, an unpacking of truth telling about the internal Americanization and prostitution (Trask 1999) of Indigenous languages within community based conflicts is required. The following sections prioritize the importance of the transformative power of reframing Indigenous kinship practices and truth telling to recontextualize solutions through culturally informed lenses.

Reframing Transformative Kinship to Expose Lateral Oppression

What I have been taught from my elders and mentors is that the stalwart foundation of our Indigenous communities is our kinship with all things. Layered within the origin stories and through the retelling of them are interconnections that are all encompassing, relational and reciprocal. Each generation expands kinship knowledge, it fluctuates and accumulates through lived experiences, teachings, and interpretations of memories and cultural and ancestral knowledge. The flood of such elements across space and time can easily complicate foundational relationship making kinship knowledge. This gives way to kinship practices being used to carry the burden of relationship making within Indigenous communities, creating numerous

generations that lack in lived examples and experiences of culturally informed relationship building and maintenance skills.

The ones who most often carry kinship knowledge are our elders. When a person is born, the responsibility and craft of making relationship connections is carried by the older generations, parents, grandparents, and elders. Kinships breathe magic and medicine into our lives, they are a gifting of seeds which grow and reinforce interconnections with the past, present, and future. As the person grows, they should undergo teachings about the responsibility of those relationships and how to reinforce and giveback to them. These are life stages. Those ties can make a way forward for each person. Sometimes even, when a direct family member is known in a good way and respected, just mentioning the person's relation to them defines the beginning of their relationship with extended family and/or community members. Kinships also have the power to define the relationships amongst strangers until each person makes these connections in their own way. Unpacking the transformative power of kinship knowledge alongside the recognition of contemporary internal threats to healthy relationships reveals a complex web of issues related to a history of toxic social environments, lack of access to resources, and misguided context-based solutions. Indigenous language endangerment includes the loss of healthy reciprocal kinship knowledge and skills.

Kinship knowledge is complicated by historical and contemporary experiences of intergenerational colonization, boarding/residential school experiences, removal and relocation, displacement, dispossession, loss, adoption, assimilation, intergenerational trauma, and/or lateral violence and oppression. These issues raise many questions about the wellness of contemporary Indigenous kinship systems and how they manifest within Indigenous language groups and communities. Kinship knowledge begins with our own positionality, our self in-relation (Kovach

2009) to other community members, worldviews, and cultural histories. The practice of finding ourselves and how we relate to our own families and broader language communities begins a journey of inquiry into how those relations were made, maintained, and sometimes lost. Defining our responsibility to those relations reveals kinship reciprocity. Kinship is a powerful force within Indigenous communities, but it can be easily manipulated and provides a scapegoat for reciprocal relationship responsibilities. Kinship and relationship making, if not clearly defined, can become convoluted by conflicting priorities and/or disingenuous intentions and actions.

Just as Johnston (1988), Perley (2011), Simpson (2017) Treuer (2020), and dozens of Indigenous scholars and language activists have remarked on, there continues to be an epidemic of the colonization of the mind and our internal relationship making practices amongst adult language learning groups. Truth telling is a powerful step to reveal disjunctions between surface vocalization of Indigenous kinship knowledge and actual actions implementing such knowledge. Perley (2011) describes how even though there is an internal community vocalization of support for kinship, and cultural and language knowledge and values in his Tobique First Nation community, these don't always translate support for such in everyday individual priorities and actions. He attributes this to a variety of colonization and assimilation erasures, one being "language suicide" amongst community members who actively choose to abandon their language and be complicit. Looking to an older generation experiencing these same issues is Basil H. Johnston (1988) who revealed how he carried his kinship, language, and cultural knowledge beyond his boarding school experiences, but did not actively apply such knowledge in his everyday actions. To address these complexities, he had to *relearn* how to make relations with his wife, his family, community, language, and with himself.

Leanne Simpson (2017) elaborates on the necessity of clearly defining indigenous forms of knowledge to inform and guide our personal and public actions which create and maintain our Indigenous communities. Through her process of reflection on an ethical framework of Nishnaabeg grounded normativity, Simpson states that the “ethics and values that individuals use to make decisions in their personal lives are the same ethics and values that families, communities, and nations use to make decisions about how to live collectively” (24). Knowledge of kinship, culture, and the language does not always segue into lived actions aligned with the values necessary to create and maintain healthy Indigenous relationships. Internal conflicts amongst communities can manifest in language groups when such values are not clearly defined, implemented, and modified to address changing needs amongst each group.

Language revitalization is difficult. It’s a path that tests your endurance and ability to create and sustain language use and interpersonal relationships with the last speakers and learners. This work brings you in and out of many circles, and in-between an array of relationships that may be uncomfortable. The achievement of first cohorts creating successful language methods and programs depends heavily on the relationships of the people who are working together and their individual support networks. Treuer (2020) further defines the challenging complexities of intratribal relations and actions amongst environments of oppression. He describes the issues of internalized assimilation which creates situations of lateral oppression through reoccurring experiences in Indigenous communities likened to a “crabs-in-the-bucket pattern...This manifests itself in lack of support, gossip, bickering, discouragement, lack of funding, and political attacks on, by or between folks trying to advance the tribal language...blaming and shaming.” (37-38). Guidance from a leading mentor helps to reinforce

the necessity of holding true against actions by people who do not share the same values or may not be directly involved in the language work.

Sir Tīmoti Kāretu has stated in a 2014 interview (translated from te reo Māori into English) in regards to such issues that “for the language to survive, people must want to speak it, they must be willing to work hard for it, and they must be staunch in their belief that this language should be treasured forever more...(and) funding should go to those who are active in the fight for our language’s survival” (Te Karere TVNZ 2014). Treuer (2020) further sheds light on internal practices within tribal nations with severely endangered languages and assimilated work forces who engage in a “governments-grant game. Immersion used to be the guiding model for how to run an effective language program. Now it’s a buzzword for writing a grant to the Administration for Native Americans” (41-42). I have witnessed over the last 20 years an accumulation of millions of dollars allocated for an array of language and culture projects led by the same groups of people within various tribal communities which have not resulted in the creation of a single new conversationally fluent adult speaker. Instead, I’ve seen administrative and political squabbles deter prospective learners and mentors. I’ve seen the creation of new jobs for language revitalization positions seized by nepotism and the funneling of resources for new staff who in their own lives were not committed to learning the language before being paid and after becoming a permanent employee. These issues hijack the energy, time, and resources that are needed for each person and the group to thrive in their language work. Ignoring the dysfunction and not confronting the problems head on by naming them (O’Regan 2021) is a momentary reprieve but these issues tend to bottleneck and manifest in ways that still take the focus away from the actual language acquisition and revitalization work.

As time goes on, even when there are successes, if internal social dysfunctions are left to fester, they inevitably weaken the transformative power of positive kinship in creating and maintaining long-term LAR work. Creating strong positive, productive, and reciprocal interpersonal connections helps to mitigate the very nature of intensive language learning which can be disruptive to group moral. Especially when individuals become overwhelmed by the amount of work and commitment it takes to actually learn and teach their ancestral language(s). Anonymous woman 1 expressed a situation where they recruited a very vocal supporter of their school, but when the person was hired they gradually began to display more toxic behavior towards the curriculum, pedagogies, and epistemologies. This person actively pushed back on creating an immersion environment for the students. I've seen similar types of people choose to sabotage the implementation of intensive language work because it is too time consuming and challenges their capabilities, knowledge, skills, and even their actual intentions to share their knowledge or be actively engaged in empowering revitalization efforts. Such actions forces Language work onto the periphery and the core is consumed by actions and reactions to toxic and negative interpersonal behaviors and experiences. Kinship in these situations can be taken advantage of leading to complicity and/or retaliation against people who work to expose the dysfunction and need for change. The challenges of intensive adult language work makes people vulnerable, uncomfortable, and exposes trauma and insecurities which can lead them to lash out at their peers and mentors. Internal toxic behavior that holds Indigenous knowledge and language captive in dysfunctional environments is a perverted use of kinship empowerment. Such practices can be characterized as an internalization of a "prostitution and pimp" relationship in LAR.

Defining the Americanization and Prostitution of Indigenous Language Prestige

This exercise in naming is difficult. I write uneasily about this “prostitution” of the language and culture knowledge because I am still grappling with the reality of its Indigenous community-based existence. Yet, giving such actions a name to draw out the sickness is important decolonizing work and ceremony along a wellness journey. The description and implications of “prostitution” is in the context put forth by Haunani-Kay Trask (1999) who described a relationship of degradation and victimization between the industry of American tourism, the pimp, and the victim in her foundational text *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai’i*. “Hawai’i itself is the female object of degraded and victimized sexual value. Our ‘*aina*, or lands, are not any longer the source of food and shelter, but the source of money...The American relationship of people to the land is that of exploiter to exploited...The phrase, *mālama ‘aina*—‘to care for the land’—is used by government officials to sell new projects and to convince the locals that hotels can be built with a concern for ‘ecology’” (143). In this sense, the ancestral language and cultural knowledge has entered a space of internal commodification that is not easily accessible to all community members. Indigenous language has shifted in one generation from being banned and looked down upon to now being tied to financial gains and prestige. The Americanization of Indigenous languages has created a culture of tourism and controlled performances by language speakers, learners, and gatekeepers. The hype and public accolades of sporadic language use in single event community gatherings and across social media may be helping people to see the language in a positive light but the long-term responsibility to language learning for fluency has far less followers and committed activists. Whether intentionally or an outcome of a learned behavior, Indigenous language is positioned in a tourism economy. The knowledge embedded in the language, knowledge that feeds worldviews and infuses meaning into Indigenous identities, is being victimized for its

prestigious value. While we have seen the same hoarding of culture and language materials by outside researchers, there are the same actions being carried out by local Indigenous community members.

The “American culture” as Trask (1999) defines is that of an exploiter. Indigenous language and culture knowledge is the commodity. Historically, salvage ethnographers and their word lists flooded to reservations to document the knowledge and ways of the “disappearing savages.” Yet, when Indigenous ancestors survived and retained cultural and language knowledge, a second wave of academics and hobbyists flooded Indigenous communities funded by grants to complete their research. Somewhere along the way, the monetary exchange for trade items and stories became normalized, and language sharing was commercialized. Fast-forward through time, the same language sharing that was traditionally gifted freely in families, is now complicated by an adoption of actions that hoard knowledge, carry out lateral oppression to restrict access (gatekeepers), and in-fighting. Financial gains reposition Indigenous languages in spaces that divide the language knowledge the highest bidders or favored kinships. Trask (1999) describes this victimization being carried out by a middleman, the “pimp.”

“The pimp is the conduit of exchange, managing the commodity that is the prostitution while acting as the guard at the entry and exit gates, making sure the prostitute behaves as a prostitute by fulfilling her sexual-economic functions. The victims participate in their victimization with enormous ranges of feelings, from resistance to complicity, but the force and continuity of the institution are shaped by men” (140).

This “prostitution” of Indigenous languages I write cautiously about because I’m entangled with an ongoing victimization of my own ancestral languages that have been stolen and are very much still being laterally oppressed by my own family and other community members. I’m too close to some parts of that pain to clearly reflect upon the more intimate details of this ongoing experience. I’ve seen speakers turn down opportunities to teach youth and various groups

because we could not pay for their time. I've also seen relationships between family members stressed and disrupted because one member was being paid more or not at all by linguists and language documentation projects. There has also been divides in community support because one group supports different speakers and openly criticizes other speakers. The occurrences of lateral oppression and trauma are creating an environment of gatekeepers and hoarders ("pimps") who are restricting access to language and cultural knowledge resources and/or they're being volatile by bullying and belittling those who they may feel are in competition with them. The "Americanization" of Indigenous language and culture has instilled a practice of commodification in a prestige and financial game, much in the way Treuer (2020) describes the "government-grant game." To be a language speaker and amongst the group of learners is prestigious but using language and cultural prestige as a form of "prostitution" and "pimping" is a perverted internalized form of colonization and assimilation. Particularly, when such prestige is used to oppress community members from progressing or thriving, as well as gaining equal access to the language and culture knowledge. This creates a cycle of dysfunction and assimilation, as language and culture knowledge aids Indigenous people with their wellness, identity, and culturally informed values.

Seeking Solutions through Access and Context

Without positive access to language and cultural teachings amongst people who embody kindness and kinship values, an Indigenous person's education and value of their Indigenous identity can be stunted. Historically, lack of access to language and culture was associated with systematic relocation of Indigenous families away from traditional Indigenous communities to urban centers. Hana O'Regan (2001), in *Ko Tahu, Ko Au: Kāi Tahu Tribal Identity*, relates this lack of access to identity education attributing to a downward spiral amongst Māori people. "One

of the greatest costs of urbanization for Māori has been the impact that it has had on identity and therefore self-esteem and self-worth. Loss of cultural pride combined with the socio-economic problems that feed it and on which it in turn feeds, result in a downward spiral effect which has left many Māori with negative views about their Māoritaka” (pp. 113-114). The loss of access to valuable language and cultural teachings through kinship knowledge attributes to dysfunctional individuals and families. When individuals become grounded and aware of connections between their cultural identity, language, and wellbeing—from my experience—they are less likely to be emotionally exposed when reexperiencing negativities carried out by internal members. However, there is a lack of documented experiences within Indigenous communities which expose and quantify details about the frequency and types of intratribal lateral violence and oppression occurring. The sensitivity of recounting these experiences is triggering, so too is research to quantify internal causes and effects contributing to systemic language loss, attrition, and endangerment.

Michael Walsh (2018) in his article “‘Language is Like Food...’ Links between Language Revitalization and Health and Well-being” surveyed research findings about wellness outcomes of long-term endangered language practitioners. He found that there is a lack quantifiable “proof” of the links between revitalization and wellness. Yet, his findings supported both positive and negative feelings towards language acquisition and revitalization. Long-term participants in language revitalization had the most conflicting responses. “Full-blown language revival is a long and arduous journey...and in some cases may decrease Indigenous well-being rather than improve it. Given the sensitivities connected with language loss, it seems to me that there is an important role for Indigenous health professionals in future studies of links between language revitalization and health and well-being” (8). Voicing such experiences are not

commonly practiced as it sheds a bad light on Indigenous communities. Airing dirty laundry complicates funding processes and reporting for language revitalization efforts. In some of my ancestral language groups and communities, I've experienced being harassed verbally, physically, sexually, and spiritually by both male, female, and non-binary genders because I've been resolute in the kinship rights and ethical teachings from my elders and mentors. I don't shy away from speaking up that efficient and successful language and cultural work for conversational fluency requires consistent commitment, not a habit of helicoptering in for just the fun, paid, or social media buzz activities. There has to be equal access for all tribal members and descendants. We ourselves must rise to be the experts in our fields and that requires a higher level of commitment beyond just learning to speak the language at a novice level. Yet, this progression is dependent on access. It's dependent on sharing in-depth language knowledge and culturally informed knowledge through positive spaces prioritizing lateral kindness and an embodiment of positive kinship values.

Defining, modifying, and engaging realistic approaches to naming the internal causes of language endangerment, loss, attrition, and apathy within Indigenous communities situates the language activists at a pivotal point along their language journey. I've seen my own language circles grow smaller because a few of us have had the strength to voice our needs and wants for higher standards, accountability, and responsibility. My elder mentors reminded me that this is not the first time our people have had to separate themselves from such dysfunction. To speak out and pursue a better life is in our blood. Contextualizing actions for change by drawing upon meaningful historical and contemporary examples is one way to begin a dialogue to counter lateral oppression. These toxic environments and relationships are not our traditions. Reflecting on my own experiences rooted in the causes of the loss of my Hidatsa language, I'm able to

explain and contextualize ancestral and historical actions to combat internal disruptions and external influences.

Contextualizing Puha/Xubaa through a Xoshga Narrative

One way my own kinship and genealogy knowledge is empowering and transformative is the story of the origins of my name and my ancestors' story of survival. I've had to call upon this knowledge and kinship to openly assert my rights to have access to language and culture teachings on more than one occasion. This narrative is puha/xubaa "medicine power." I've been told multiple versions of the following events. I'll do my best to retell them here in the ways the stories were shared with me by my elders. My own direct ancestors, Maacu Dabaash "Juneberries" and Enemy Dog were part of the Hidatsa families who separated from the larger groups to preserve their ways of life. There were many events that led up to this. In the 1830s, multiple waves of smallpox epidemics, warfare, raids, and other threats were thrust upon the different Hidatsa and Mandan villages in an area along the Missouri River now called the Knife River Villages. During the epidemic, some of the survivors travelled north-west along the Missouri River to escape. Cherry Necklace and others set up a lodge to heal survivors of smallpox and the sickness inflicting their minds and hearts from the devastating loss of nearly 90% of their families and extended clan members. They cleansed themselves and began to rebuild their communities.

Some regrouped with other survivors and established multiple villages north of the epidemic sites. The largest village was named Like-A-Fishhook in the 1850s. Maacu Dabash and Enemy Dog stood with a younger war leader named Crow Flies High and his older mentor Bobtail Bull in the 1870s. They spoke out against other tribal leaders and their families who were choosing to not share the food and resources equally amongst the people. They ultimately

separated from the Like-A-Fishhook Village and refused to adopt the treaty restrictions, boarding schools, Christianity, and village corruption. They left and travelled north-west to the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers near the same area of Cherry Necklace's lodge. In my heart I feel that they too began again after cleansing themselves of the sickness and dysfunction happening in the old village. Maacu Dabash and Enemy Dog helped to establish a new village, Xoshga-Awadish, where they kept traditional cultural, ceremonial, and kinship values alive. Over time, their language shifted creating a newer dialect of Hidatsa. My own family were part Apsáalooke (Crow) and maintained strong ties to their relatives traveling to and from Xoshga-Awadish.

In 1894 the U.S. military forcibly removed Crow Flies High's band from their village and forced them back to the Fort Berthold Reservation in the dangerous winter months. I'm named after Maacu Dabash and Enemy Dog's daughter who was one of their children who survived the forced removal and long walk. She went on to marry Leo Young Wolf. Their daughter was Francis Young Wolf, who married Minot Grady. Minot was the son of Joseph Ward and Prayer Woman. He was also the last member of the Idishuga "Wide Ridge" Clan. Both of his parents were lost to sickness and he was adopted by his Ishaawe "father's sister" Jessie Ward and her husband Charles Grady Sr.

My grandma Sally White has told me her mother was good friends with Minot and she helped support him when he worked to adopt a non-tribal member into the clan so that the clan would not die. My great-grandfather Minot relied on the relations and kinship with the Water Buster clan to do this. My grandpa Delvin Driver, who is a close relation through Minot Grady's Ishaawe Jesse Ward, helped my boys and I to once again be adopted into the Idishuga Clan. This took place at one of our Xoshga gatherings. There are still only a few handfuls of us who are part

of the Idishuga Clan. The meaningfulness of this history and ancestral actions has shaped my life in ways I am still coming to understand. My heart sings when I introduce myself as a member of the Idishuga Clan. My elders and mentors came to my family's aid for this adoption, gifting me with their support, kindness, blankets, and presence.

Through my own genealogies and this kinship, I'm reminded of how trauma repeats itself and manifests in unpredictable ways. When my Xoshga ancestors were forced back onto the Fort Berthold Reservation, they witnessed how colonization and assimilation had dismantled parts of their traditional kinship and cultural practices. The Xoshga held a celebration dance where songs and stories were being heard again for the first time in many years. There were differences in the languages because of the extended separation and language shift. The dances, regalia, and close kinship practices were looked down upon by "progressive" tribal members, missionaries, and Indian agents. The name Xoshga became derogatory and belittling. Yet, Xoshga leaders like Drags Wolf, the son of Crow Flies High, continued to lead our people in a new tribal government. My grandfather Leo Young Wolf, who was also a tribal representative, would help translate each English language document and order of business into Mandan and Hidatsa so the older speakers would know what was being done. Many of the cultural teachings that remained are because Xoshga families kept the teachings safe and alive.

However, even this proud history has been shaken by a new industry and agenda of colonial settler-states. Traditional homelands were flooded by the Garrison Dam and continue to be ravaged by fracking in the Bakken shale. The flood of outsiders and modern-day man camps are physical threats contributing to an ongoing unsettling and disruption to traditional kinship values and relations with the land and each other. Many Indigenous communities share an ongoing struggle with dualities about traditional values and contemporary priorities. Families are

divided on either side: the extraction or protection of resources, the unequal distribution of wealth and resources, enrollment or disenrollment, activism for or against, etc. Identifying these disruptions and acknowledging their influence and naming the disruptive behaviors must be accompanied with context-based explanations and solutions. These shed light on the past, the here-and-now, and needs for the future. Lateral oppression is a deeply rooted issue amongst Indigenous communities. It's easy to complain about these issues without truly unpacking the complexities that have birthed and raised such dysfunction. Viewing these issues through discussions about access to knowledge and context are transformative techniques.

Unpacking Transformative Revitalization and Mentorship

Just as our ancestors sought the guidance of mentors, living and spiritual, we too must create networks of support. Relationship making with experienced mentors reinvigorates the traditional kinship practices. Mentors in this context are those who have been successful in relationship making, who are actively involved in the LAR work, who have a maturity and wisdom to see the truth in the disruptions, and actively share ways they've overcome similar situations. Mentors also provide an essential part of healing and empowerment. They are examples of the reality of dreams, of possibilities that have become untangible through processes of decolonization and revitalization. Trask (1999) reminds us of the transformative power of revitalization and reclamation. "Of course, the cultural revitalization that Hawaiians are now experiencing and transmitting to their children is as much a *repudiation* of colonization by so-called Western civilization in its American form as it is a *reclamation* of our own past and our own ways of life." Integrating the teachings of kinship knowledge to reinforce the value of each individual and how their intimate connections to their ancestors and the reality that they

survived, is powerful knowledge about the beauty of each person's existence and involvement in the LAR work.

Acknowledging and identifying how manipulative and brainwashing colonial assimilation is and the specific ways it is ravaging each Indigenous social communities and the interpersonal relationships is a beginning step to disengage and reflect on how language and culture may be a victim of prostitution and pimping by our own tribal members. Trask (1999) further states that,

“This is why cultural revitalization is often resisted and disparaged by anthropologists and others: they see very clearly that its political effect is decolonization of the mind...Hawaiian values can be grouped under the idea of *'ohana*, loosely translated as “family,” but more accurately imagined as a group of both closely and distantly related people who share nearly everything, from land and food to children and status. Sharing is central to this value, since it prevents individual decline...The *'ohana* works effectively when the *kua 'ana* relationship (elder sibling/younger sibling reciprocity) is practiced” (143).

Internally colonized minds amongst our own communities fear the shift in values, in an overpowering embodiment of cultural and kinship values, and the unity of voices and bodies in opposition to their laterally oppressive learned and adopted behaviors. The pimping and prostitution of language and cultural knowledge amongst our own tribal members is a result of colonized minds. I've often questioned how the language could live in these social and politicized environments and how long can we sustain ourselves if we are being ravaged by internal lateral oppression and staggered aggression and violence. Simply, we can survive by convincing ourselves there is pride emoting from the grit of “rez life” but we are very unlikely to thrive the way our ancestors prayed and dreamed of the future for their descendants.

I am still on a journey of healing from these experiences. I mourn the elders I've lost during those times who did not live to see a remedy to such wrongs or to see a new generation of fluent language speakers solely supporting each other, working through issues peacefully, and

being supported by the broader community. When I scroll through social media posts it feels like there is change, we're making headway. Yet, social media can be misleading. It can romanticize the human experience, veiling the reality of on-the-ground movements and frontline actions and repercussions. Social media can veil the root causes of dysfunction and why there are still greater numbers of people who don't commit to long-term language acquisition and revitalization. Even while there is an increasing resurgence of cultural identities represented by youth and adults, there are still language apprentice and teaching positions unfilled. Yes, positive representation is important on social media, but not if it eclipses the root causes of internal language endangerment. My family and I have been drawn to numerous language groups because of the online and public positive promotion just to find another complex weaving of relationship issues manifesting in group instability, failure of goals, and a lack of long-term camaraderie. Language methodologies almost become irrelevant in the face of social discontent.

One of my beloved elders who would light up the room each time he shuffled in and out gave me so many seeds of knowledge about living for kindness and education. We spent long evenings and afternoons together sharing the language, discussing the different dialects and causes of those, and teasing each other about our accents. Each discussion weaved representations of language shift and the interconnectivity of history, political affairs, food sovereignty, and disconnections over renewable resources. We also saw numerous language group members come and go, cycling through funding, locations, resources, staff, and teaching methods. None of the new language groups/organizations/classes seemed to solve the issues on the periphery that complicated language learning and sharing. Our last conversation before he made his journey to the old village was beautiful and haunting. We were in a bookstore off the reservation and his health had visibly taken a turn for the worst. We paused in our discussion,

taking a deep breath in and out. He said he was tired of seeing bright minds not valued. He told me bluntly, “Royce, don’t let this kill you. This stress and all their arguments, it makes you sick. Take care of yourself and your boys first.”

I brought a blanket to his wake, gifting it to his family. So many people came together to show their support after his death. After embracing his family, I thought about who would tend to his garden. Why could various individuals not all come together during his life? Why did they not support his bright mind and push for renewable energy? His words push me forward and remind me that I was valued by him. I am worthy of my ancestors’ prayers and dreams. His words also call upon a deeper reflection on realistic boundaries and priorities. The global movement is a call for language revitalization to bring our languages back into our homes but what does that home look like if the internal social atmosphere of language work is riddled with such social dysfunction. Who and what lives in the homes that makes our community members lash out at each other in such disparaging ways? If there is dysfunction and trauma in the home, it is ever more important for those of us who embody teachings of positive wellness and holism to teach ways to overcome such negativities through kinship knowledge and to create safe spaces for language learning. Providing examples, lived experiences of positive healthy relationships and social interactions has transformative power.

Another elder of mine in another community, even though he had difficulty walking, would make the effort to be at our language class every week. In one class he sat listening to me talk how I missed my Gahguk Lora. How being there made me feel like I was home. We talked about the simple memories of growing up and eating off the land, berries, roots, and plant medicine. He provided names in the language for each of these and the elder women would chime in and out to share their stories and words. The next class he was there waiting with a

handkerchief bundle in front of him on the table. I sat between him and an elder woman. My boys played behind us. After getting coffee for them and sitting back down, he started to unwrap the bundle and took a few items from it. He scooted it towards me and motioned with his chin for me to get some. Inside were wild plums, still warm from the afternoon sun. My heart was revived with each bite. We sat smiling enjoying the sweet treats. My eyes brimmed with tears as we began singing hymns and learning the translation of the words.

Through that experience, I have an example, a teaching, that I continue to share. In other language classes amongst different language groups, I purposefully take the time to harvest foods that some elders and others might not be able to gather. Each food is meaningful. It's a gift I can give in addition to my time and knowledge. Sitting together, feasting from an act of kindness, is transformative in ways that shift a person's day. This action weaves positive memories alongside the language learning and camaraderie. This is Indigenous knowledge I share with my mentors and peers.

Recontextualizing Indigenous Knowledge

What are some actions that release lateral oppression from our minds and aid in moving us beyond it? How can these actions open our hearts and minds to see the disconnections between kinship knowledge and physical manifestations of this knowledge? Robin Wall Kimmerer (2020) in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* pulls generations of Indigenous transformative kinship knowledge into simplistic ways of beginning a path forward. "A sweetgrass braid is burned to create a ceremonial smudge that washes the recipient in kindness and compassion to heal the body and the spirit" (293). This isn't a singular tribally specific teaching, but it resonates in the heart and grounds you in kindness. Kinship is not just human to human relations; it is elemental and

spiritual. I view sweetgrass as both a tangible medicine and philosophical one. While my Indigenous cultural and ceremonial practices have taught me intimate kinship knowledge of sweetgrass, there are other Indigenous groups who do not use sweetgrass. Instead, modifying this action of cleansing the mind, body, and space makes the representation of sweetgrass a catalyst for change.

Each of the Indigenous scholars I've drawn teachings from are part of that braid of sweetgrass. Their words reveal the hardships, the sensitivities, and their truth telling as part of a movement of change. Each is seeking a better future through their actions in documenting their knowledge and the knowledge of their families and elders. The weaving of those Indigenous knowledge strands reveals teachings that can be remade into medicines with the power to help us make sense of the contemporary experiences causing internal language endangerment within our Indigenous communities. Again, a word of caution, these types of cleansing practices have better success if individuals are open to the healing and a standard of social behaviors and ethics are reinforced. In one experience I've witnessed members in a language group who smudged and then became physically violent when one member expressed sentiments they did not like. Yet, because of a perversion of kinship practices, there were no repercussions for the violent member's action, and they were later promoted to another employment position. Shared values and like-mindedness was lacking in this situation.

Having in-depth conversations with like-minded individuals weaves a path of healing and reflective dialogues. Even though some of these experiences shared by Indigenous language activists and scholars can be seen as homogenizing the Indigenous experience in LAR, their insight, responses, and actions represent a continuity of multiple generations working to expose and address the internal issues. The purpose of drawing upon their writings and teachings is to

show multiple paths forward by shared Indigenous voices that offer up examples of hope and comradery across cultural boundaries, demographics, and space and time. Combating colonization and the hardships it inflicts has unified multiple generations across nearly every Indigenous group. The exchange and mentorship of language acquisition and revitalization methodologies have also united generations in the same fashion. So too are the movements for healing and relationship making for wellness and holism. These conversations with Indigenous language activists sheds light on the need for positive and productive relationships, lasting friendships, expert level mentorship, and wellness to combat the external and internal causes of language endangerment. The sharing of their seeds of knowledge is a practice of transformative kinship. These actions are empowered by revitalization and reclamation knowledge.

Chapter Nineteen: Indigenous Language Life Stages for Relationship Making and Wellness

The following conversation is with an Anonymous Indigenous Language Activist (A3) not included in the previous chapters because their personal background needed to remain anonymous. The short portion of our conversation is information focused on the content for these last chapters. These portions help contextualize the complexities of Indigenous LAR work within small communities across the entirety of North America. A3 has worked locally amongst their own Indigenous communities, amongst their partners, and amongst many other Indigenous communities they are not from. I've been in communication with A3 for over a decade.

A Conversation with an Anonymous Indigenous Language Activist

Anonymous Indigenous Language Activist

Recap of LAR work:

- ✦ 20+ years of language acquisition and revitalization experience
- ✦ Partner and parent
- ✦ Second language speaker
- ✦ Participant and teacher in intensive adult language immersion classes, language nests, Master-Apprentice, and a plethora of long-term and short-term LAR methods
- ✦ Language teacher of multiple ancestral languages
- ✦ Public and private teacher and professor
- ✦ Indigenous advocate
- ✦ Curriculum development, project planning, language endangerment and loss assessments, group dynamics assessments, and efficacy of LAR curriculum and methodology assessments
- ✦ Author and literature reviewer
- ✦ Grant reviewer
- ✦ Language learning material content creator
- ✦ Language documentation, preservation, and translation

The following conversations have been edited for length and clarity only.

("R" represents my voice. "A3" represents their voice)

A3: My lack of complete fluency is based on the fact that I've worked for more than a dozen different Indigenous language programs with totally different languages. The reality is that if I had spent all these years working just with my

own languages, of course, fluency wouldn't be an issue at all. But I haven't done that.

If you want to do the work that I've been fortunate to be involved in, you're going to have to sacrifice something.

R: What would it have taken for you to be able to stay in your language communities?

A3: I would have needed to not be with the incredible partner I have.

R: Hmmm.

A3: So that was not an option for me. That was the primary determining factor for me. I can't even think about how it would have turned out for me had I just been working full time in my own Indigenous community on the language because maybe I would have encountered negative politics or things that would have drove me out anyway.

R: We're not told that, though. About the impacts of staying in our communities when we are looking for job stability, or when we begin intimate relationships, and/or want children or whatever. Culturally, yes, we're taught you can't be with that person because you're related. *Laughter*

For some of us, you gotta have a partner from outside of your tribal community. There's no Indigenous handbook about bringing your languages home amongst these intimate relationships and navigating or mediating all the complexities of what language(s) become a priority, while also navigating all the external community issues as well.

When we talk about the reasons why there is language endangerment, of course there is the colonial side, the historical side, but there's the contemporary political side and other more public dynamics. There's also a very personal side, personal responsibility.

What are those very personal dynamics impacting language endangerment and impacting revitalization and acquisition?

We've talked about this before, and when the topics of language revitalization are discussed, what are we really revitalizing?

A3: That's it. That's the key. And that's not the question a lot of people are asking. They're talking about language revitalization, but not *wellness* revitalization.

R: Yeah. This is in the same context that there can't truly be a language revitalization without a cultural revitalization. And there can't be one without the other.

This applies to all revitalization areas, not just culture and language. The goals of our ancestors were for us to not just survive but thrive, and that isn't happening just because we still exist, because we have survived. There has to be an awareness and intention in-regards to what is actually being revitalized.

A3: I've worked in numerous language programs and the most successful one I've worked in also has gone through a lot of social and personal dysfunctions. Their success is based on the fluency being created, not based on the interpersonal relationships being created.

I think there's, you know, effective models to bring fluency that don't necessarily have to incorporate kindness and wellness, even if that is what is trying to be promoted when things fall apart. Again, bringing back the language doesn't always mean bringing back the wellness.

R: Yeah, absolutely.

Seeing cases of success and questioning how do we replicate that? But then finding out the details of how that success was obtained raises questions about how that person or group exists with wellness? What are their relationship strengths? When a language group is so focused on the language acquisition, is there a trade off? Does there have to be a trade-off?

When we look at revitalization, it should also encompass teaching us how to create and maintain the relationships with the cohorts, not just the elder speakers...What are their language lives beyond the hours they are learning and teaching the language? Is it their responsibility to be friends? With so much already on the shoulders of those engaged in LAR (save the language, save the culture), now we gotta worry about saving peoples' relationships, too?

Laughter

A3: It is a tidal wave. I'm over 40 and I've found that it's not surmountable. When I was younger, I really thought you could "fix it." I've been to so many places and worked with so many language programs and I have not seen that. I'm not saying that there aren't Indigenous groups that are regaining their fluency, I'm just not seeing a lot of the wellness piece as well.

I just don't know.

You almost have to break apart from the larger Indigenous community and focus on an isolated family where the language is healthy. When you start incorporating more people, all the baggage from everyone piles up sometimes.

And I don't think there are a lot of bad people there, there's just a lot of traumatized people. And I think that people are willing to accept certain things from their own people that they are not willing to accept from outside people in order to maintain relationships.

R: Could you compile a list of maybe five things from all of your experiences with language work that you've seen maintains and feeds good positive relationships?

A3: The first one is consistency. People have to know you're actually going to be there. I can't tell you how many language programs and nonprofits or key organization language programs I've been in where people don't show up. So that's a big one, when talking about relationship building. That's what we're talking about, right?

R: Yes, yes. Maintaining and sustaining healthy positive relationships in the language groups.

A: People are typically not consistent and that is very unhealthy. When you don't have a system and there are constant excuses, but no one will say, "I just wasn't responsible and couldn't get there."

R: Hmm.

A: The other one is just being, you know, and this seems obvious, but it's being polite to people, right? Being polite to people goes a long way.

The other thing in language work is who's the safe person to bring into your new language program? The elders, who are often utilized in support roles, and then the people building the framework and building the group.

And You gotta have thick skin. You gotta be able to take criticism that are unfounded criticisms, and are unnecessary, and not react in really negative ways. Now, in many instances of my life I've not been able to do that. But when it comes to language, I've had a level of patience with language programs that I don't have in other components of my life. They're almost separate in some senses.

So that's really important because eventually people that want to criticize you, they basically fall apart when you're not just reactionary they eventually disappear and they leave. And then it leaves all the positive relationships still standing.

R: Yeah.

A3: The other thing is your programs have to be a community. They have to be family invested...You need to make sure that you're including everyone, being ultra-inclusive.

Another thing is financial wellness. I've always earned a teacher's salary. Even with my partner, we have struggled financially. This is the wellness part too. Because with that financial wellness you don't have the financial stressors at the level that other people have them. You know, money certainly doesn't buy happiness, as they say, but it doesn't hurt your situation when you're not having to scramble all the time.

R: Right. Do we have a good place, a safe place to live? Are we in a physical space and a financial situation that can sustain focused language work?

Of these different experiences you've described some of the main reasons I've heard from you describing why you have chosen to not live within your home language communities, is well, job security and being in a relationship with your partner who is not from your community.

This relationship though, represents a wellness that you won't compromise on. Could you both get a job in your community to maintain the financial wellness that is needed?

A3: Absolutely not. We could not live in my community. That's 100% no. There are no jobs. That's also why we can't live in some of our other Indigenous communities either. It's not a possibility.

R: Achieving and sustaining these different areas of relationship wellness so that a person, a family can pursue language acquisition work consistently is so incredibly complex. We can't all make LAR work our full-time jobs.

Still, achieving some aspects of the wellness you need as an individual and as part of a family, there seems to be a trade-off that is experienced.

I don't think it has to be that way though. If access to basic language learning and opportunities for advanced learning were created, why can't we learn our languages wherever we need to be to maintain areas of our wellness?

Seeking Language Journey Wellness

Language revitalization spaces and the teaching they can hold are often sought out to help define and *remake* kinship relations and Indigenous identities. Pursuing an understanding of Indigenous relationship making methods for each unique cultural teachings will help these spaces flourish and sing. Defining and implementing braided kinship knowledge amongst like-minded individuals who embody kindness, positive energy, reciprocal responsibility, and commitment to creating healthy language speaking communities is fulfilling the dreams of our preceding seven ancestral generations. As Indigenous people we are often told our actions should benefit the people to come, who are represented by the "seventh generation." In reflecting on these teachings, we can't ignore how we ourselves represent our own ancestors' prayers for that seventh generation. How are we being responsible for our own position as one of those seventh

generations? Life stages of Indigenous language journeys represent teachings that aid in knowledge that can help us become better, do more, and be responsible with our ancestors' and mentors' gifts. These are life stages to help educate each of us to one day become respected mentors and ancestors.

The issue at hand, is that lateral oppression and toxic social environments exists in our Indigenous communities. Working to name the issues and counter them with culturally and historically informed context-based actions is one part of many life stage methods. The complexities at hand are that as adult language learners, we are still growing into our cultural and social roles to become balanced individuals and families. Long-term goals are to be successful with language comprehension and fluency, as well as growing into respected teacher and mentor roles. It takes a village to raise a child, and because of colonization and assimilation, many of us are still learning how to be better Indigenous relations throughout our adulthood. Yet, these processes and life stage frameworks need to clearly defined steps. Understanding specific kinship teachings and values through practical teaching methods demonstrates how the concept of life stage frameworks can be modified to identify what teachings each person already has and what they may still need. Drawing upon curriculum topics in language nests where Indigenous children are being raised to be balanced and empowered culture and language keepers is a place to begin establishing unique Indigenous life stage frameworks for adult language learners.

In the Beginning is Interconnectivity

Through Indigenous language nests and immersion schools, youth learn kinship terms through genealogy activities. Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio (2021), in her book *Remembering Our Intimacies: Mo'olelo, Aloha 'Āina, and Ea*, explains how she began to learn mo'okū'auhau 'genealogies' in her Hawaiian-language immersion school and the meaningfulness of these

names and the interconnectivity they embody. “‘Uamaika’I ke kalo I ka ‘ohā’—by knowing and reciting our genealogies, we were engaging in an ancient practice of accountability and pilina. Our mo’okū‘auhau was at the center of this lesson... We were taught to treat these mo’okū‘auhau as prized possessions, passed down from one generation to the next, and perhaps the medicine to cure this colonial sickness” (xx-xxi). Growing from these gifting of seeds, Osorio has created a wealth of resources, narratives, and bundles of knowledge from the teachings of her mentors, peers, and students. Her research on relationships is an explication of the unique Kānaka Maoli cultural understandings of pilina ‘intimacy’ in tandem with upena ‘fishing nets’ representing the interconnectivity of elements, beings, and subsequent weathering and strengthening of a person’s body, mind, and spirit along their lived and inherited journeys.

Osorio draws upon the symbology of “constellations of intimacies” to define culturally unique ways of relating to each other, kinship, and healing through the seeking and sharing of knowledge. I am reminded of the feeling of lighting moving down my arms and legs when I was first introduced to Osorio’s poetry and spoken word a decade ago. While her book is still new in my hands, every fiber in my being continues to be pulled forward along my path by knowing such Indigenous relationship work is being put into action by a community of like-minded scholars. A community of like-minded Indigenous people, real and beautiful in our strength and frailty, in all of our achievements and efforts to reflect and act upon our short comings and interpersonal needs. Through the sharing of such knowledge, I feel less alone. Osorio’s work, describing both the hardships and successes, provides a navigational point of empowerment, hope, and a framework of inquiry and discussion of such kinship and language knowledge. I’m also overwhelmingly cognizant of how important it is in being open to such intimate teachings, stories, and knowledge, as taking those first steps and long-term lasting meaningfulness is

dependent on it. Trust the process. Work to customize and modify it with the help of mentors and people who are wiser than you. Intentions, presence, and consistent actions become incredibly important as foundations for relationship building in the absence of clearly understood kinship knowledge and ties.

The meaningfulness in the art of Indigenous relationship making is tied to how shared world views and values create an exchange of intimate knowledge that sparks connections at the interpersonal level. From simple acquaintances to long-term comradeship, relationship making occurs in a plethora of ways and fluctuates in multiple domains and contexts. The specific types of relationships focused upon for the work at hand are interpersonal relationships that foster positive systems of support and social interactions between invested and motivated adult language acquisition and revitalization cohorts. These cohorts are multi-intergenerational groups of peers and mentors. While many smaller population Indigenous community language cohort members can be related, this does not mean there is a shared world view or values, nor does it mean they have a close personal relationship. The value of each other depends on the lived experiences of each individual and connected through their language journeys together. Kinship, as Osorio (2021) reaffirms, has transformative power, but these connections must be mutually understood and supported. “When we take aloha seriously, we honor our pilina to each other and all our relations...when bound and accountable to another, we are therefore also bound and accountable to each other’s intimacies and accountabilities” (62). Defining the intimacies of our kinships and the knowledge they carry has the power to extend into reciprocal relationships within a community of like-minded people. The processes of doing such work amongst adult peers engaged in language acquisition and revitalization for long-term positive relationships continues to be a mystery amongst some language speech groups. Today, there is a widespread

public outpouring of truth telling and calls for the end of lateral violence, oppression, and suppression within language speech communities. Such expressions makes this work ever more important and necessary for the creation of healthy and positive core language speech groups. With the knowledge of the transformative power of kinship and revitalization amongst Indigenous peoples, where do we begin and begin again for healthy relationship making?

In Context, Personal Narrative

Composed from the knowledge gifted to me throughout my upbringing are two simple facts: that kindness does not cost a penny and as Indigenous people we have an inherent right to our ancestral cultures and languages. Anyone who charges for this or hoards their kindness, or the knowledge gifted down through generations of Indigenous ancestors, is an assimilated unhealthy human being. Those of us who speak out against such backward ways become easy targets. We experience the brunt of harsh words, jealousy, rumors, bad medicine, and lateral violence. As Cedric Sunray, who has had such experiences, has said during his family conversation with me, “hurt people, hurt people.” Indigenous people, after hundreds of years of colonization, are to say the least, hurt. Numerous Indigenous language activists represented in this research, including myself, have been criticized and targeted by hurt and angry people in our own communities for speaking out. Some are criticized for being too educated. Some of the Indigenous language activists here are even on “fake Indian lists” even though they are exemplars for their LAR work and are some of the last remaining speakers of their ancestral languages. In the end, our circles shift throughout the years, and we learn who is actually committed to being consistently engaged in doing the work to create healthy Indigenous cultural and language informed lives, families, communities, and positive spaces. Ancestral knowledge is

powerful and the colonized and assimilated fear that power, especially the unity of like-minded changemakers.

I've often sat amongst my mentors and expressed that I just want to speak our languages better. Why is that too much? Why is that so difficult? There are reciprocal responsibilities that come with learning the language, by being gifted such knowledge. Again, I've asked them about how it was in the old days, when language was freely given because the person was simply born amongst our people. Language was inherently another way of communicating and its various forms (vocalized, signed, and drawn) were shared as a necessary part of a person's life stages. Yet, many of us are taught to not ask too many questions, but my heart is unrelenting. Why does it have to be so hard to learn our ancestral languages? Why does this work have to hurt so much? In the technical sense, with time and commitment, it's not that hard. What is hard and hurtful is dealing with the reality of elements in the social, political, and economical environments which whittle away at access, resources, time, and motivation.

Much of my inspiration and motivation comes from my memories with my elders and the stories they've shared with me about their elders, our cultures, languages, and lands. The relationships I've had with them help to inform me about the types of relationships I want to invest in, as well as the types of boundaries I need to build to limit my own and my children's exposure to caustic energies and toxic social environments. Learning to create boundaries continues to be part of my language journey, as well as how to build bridges. These are life stages. What I have learned so far is that even seeds that are given freely won't take root unless we are open to the gifts. They also won't grow in the ways that will aid our journey unless we feed them through our reciprocal actions. Learning how to better tend to these seeds happens in many ways. The first being a life stage about the importance of creating positive social

environments in which they are gifted, take root, and cultivated. This understanding and the wealth of knowledge from my conversations and reciprocal relationships with many of the language activist here has formed the following frameworks for Indigenous Life Stages.

Frameworks for an Awareness of Indigenous Language Life Stages

This dissertation research has become a body of work that documents various Indigenous experiences and understandings of relationship making that can be categorized as life stages of Indigenous language journeys. My years of academic studies about LAR has predominately been focused on understanding the history of language endangerment, language acquisition methods, linguistic analysis, and applying these within language curriculum development to address varying levels of language endangerment and vitality. It's taken me half my doctoral career to understand that these are only one part of long-term LAR work. Language learning weaves through each of the life stages, tethering multiple generations together. Language acquisition and comprehension are very rewarding parts of this journey, but do not provide all the needs to sustain a full and balanced language journey.

As Jacob Manatowa-Bailey has stated previously, we have a good understanding of how language is learned and about effective language acquisition methodologies. Key methods for adult language acquisition are no longer a mystery. Seeing language proficiency grow in young minds and adult learners can be inspiring and a visceral energy to fuel movements towards success. At the 2017 Oklahoma Native American Young Adult Languages Fair, Jacob jotted down the following sentiment in the notes he shared with me. "As a language geek, watching a young man make a targeted presentation where he clearly demonstrates the precise vocabulary of on top, under, next to, and in, is like listening to a symphony." Language learners and mentors know the beauty of advancing to this level of proficiency and we often chase that success. Yet,

even the most successful and seasoned language activists have expressed a limit to language acquisition methodologies being effective at addressing, combating, and/or resolving toxic social environments damaging their work within their own communities.

Looking at LAR from this perspective, there is an awareness of how social experiences and teachings in tandem with LAR work are impactful. Language life stages addresses various teachings for positive group dynamics, interpersonal relationship making, safe social spaces, and wellness alongside adult language acquisition. What may begin as a learning of multiple language methodologies and how they function for language acquisition, becomes an education that language learning is relationship work. From morphology and syntax to the connections with the language, teachers, and mentors, relationships are paramount in LAR work. Within each life stage there will be a series of methods to analyze these relationships and progress. Taking the steps to seek an understanding of Indigenous relationship making through the lens of wellness and holism can be a starting point.

First, wellness and holism need to be defined in the context of each unique culture and language group. Then define what wellness could look like for each person, the group, and the community. There are a plethora of Indigenous wellness writings, research, and methods. While I personally draw upon a mixture of my own cultural teachings and ceremony for wellness, I also learn from Indigenous wellness groups that teach to a multiplicity of areas in practice and wellness lifestyles; spiritual, physical, mental, parenting, food sovereignty, family, etc. Some that I've gained knowledge and insight from are Well For Culture (<https://www.wellforculture.com>), the Native Wellness Institute (<https://www.nativewellness.com>), and the Indigenous Wellness research Institute (<http://iwri.org>) to name a few. I continue to learn about how Indigenous

wellness is conceptualized and put into practice from the many Indigenous writers that I've cited throughout this dissertation.

Additional teachings of Indigenous wisdom and wellness can be found in the writings and media chronicling the creation of Indigenous language nests, schools, and communities. Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua (2013), in *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School*, describes Indigenous education as a *reclaiming* and *sustaining* of a balanced life.

“[t]hinking about Indigenous education in terms of rebuilding and maintaining the Indigenous structures that can sustain balanced life—such as ‘auwai and lo‘i—makes it easier to think about how to repurpose knowledge, skills, and materials from various cultures and lineages in projects of Indigenous survivance and resurgence. If transformative, meaningful Indigenous culture-based education is about changing the context rather than just the content of education, then taking long-term kuleana to care for living lands like ‘Aihualama provides powerful opportunities for changing the culture of schooling” (148-149).

Teachings about caring for and valuing the lands begins with teachings about self-love and respect. As Lokosh (Dr. Joshua Hinson) has expressed in our conversation, if we truly just love on each other, we'll be alright. A lot more goes into that, but it can be as simple as letting the love shine through. Looking to whichever wellness teachings are best for you and each group will then be followed by actions of modification, refinement, and repetition. Each wellness teachings are a place to begin, then you modify as needed. This is the same practice language activists already do with LAR methodologies.

Once wellness and holism have been defined for the needs of the group to successfully function, and if possible, informed by unique cultural teachings, the second life stage process is creating space, trust, and detailed steps for guided truth telling. Guided truth telling means establishing specific lines of inquiry for precise goals and topics, then clearly communicating the goals and methods of this process to the participants. Explain how wellness has been culturally defined to help the language group. If these are not defined, truth telling can easily turn into a

process that opens flood gates of expression and/or silence because there are vague goals shared for the process, the topics are too sensitive, and/or there is a lack of trust or comfortability amongst the group members. For the case at hand, a line of inquiry and process could specifically be to openly define how wellness is embodied and/or is lacking in each person, group, and community. These truths don't have to always be intense. While some truth telling could be about experiences of trauma, others could be a need for more time to decompress in between and after sessions. It could be about having healthy snacks, better coffee, or boujee tea to support group morale during intensive language learning sessions. Maybe a group member is "hangry" (hunger induced anger) and not actually intentionally being difficult or irritated. Establishing a network of support and knowledge for how best to craft open discussions and questions about wellness should be part of this process. Reflecting on how well you each know each other is part of this process.

Repetitive actions of greetings, small talk, and even a daily task to ask about each person's wellness could help increase knowledge of each other and strengthen social bonds. These are simple questions, but there are issues that may not be best approached by looking someone in the eye and asking, "hey, what wrong with you?" But humor has its medicine ways, too. Being cognizant about this process and how it impacts each person is really about creating and maintaining good relations. Such support systems will help when the LAR work is touched by negativity, strife, loss, and disagreements that pull at the ties between the group members. Additionally, revealing impactful elements to wellness, both positive and negative, should be further reviewed in a process to name the issues, identify stake holders, and ramifications to the individual and the group's pursuit of LAR and wellness. Lack of participation in this process or

commitment to it could signify issues about solidarity, cohesiveness, and commitment to the wellbeing of each group member.

Determining each person's intentions and motivations at the beginning and throughout the building of LAR relationship work brings into questions about each person's long-term intentions. Has the person been clearly informed about the long-term commitments and incorporation of social wellness? Does long-term efficacy of the LAR teachings and wellness have an outcome that will support the creation of a community of language speakers who strive for and embody their unique Indigenous wellness? Does each person even have long-term intentions or an interest in being a friend, comrade, ally, teacher, and mentor for others in the language group? Human connections, *meaningful sparks* between like-minded people are powerful. *These are medicine*. Individual motivation and group dynamics can be destabilized and deteriorate over time if there are no human connections, shared visions, and like-mindedness. Sparks can also wane over time. It does not hurt to have a process that reinforces a vocalization of each person's value and meaningfulness to each other. "You matter. The work we do together matters, and this is why..." This type of comradery should be invested in and reflected upon continuously.

These actions are meant to be repetitive, just the same with language learning. It is clear from the conversations with the language activists in the previous chapters that there is an absolute connection between their motivation and LAR progress because of the inspirational and meaningful interpersonal relationships they have with their mentors and *like-minded peers*. Each of their cohort gatherings reaffirm and shape their connections. These types of experiences help define aspects of Indigenous relationship making which embodies forms of wellness. There are also very practical ways to determine the needs of the group and implement practicum and skill

building to address those needs. Intentionally engaging these types of processes of repetitive reflection on wellness and LAR progress assessments should become natural over time. This is how we check-up on each other in a family, this is how we determine how to help each other and enjoy each other's presence amongst our language groups. Beginning this process can be structured in a variety of ways and the frequency of these actions should be dependent of the program's needs.

In my conversation with Ryan DeCaire, from his experiences and knowledge about the needs of his group, he expressed a technique they use in their application process for new adult language students. Applicants were given a list of simple words to memorize over the course of a week or so. During the interview process they could only progress if they could correctly communicate the meaning of each of those words. Ryan described that it's more than likely that if a person did not have the self-motivation to learn those simple words, it signified a lack of responsibility to complete tasks required for intensive adult language learning in their program. This method is not a guarantee of long-term success, nor does it sum up the abilities of a person, but it helps with initial determinations and clearly communicates basic expectations of each applicant. In so many ways, each social group of people already assesses newcomers for their like-mindedness and capabilities. We can be judgmental creatures, particularly when our social dynamics, future work, and wellbeing is involved. Put such natural actions surveying for relationship viability into a structured wellness, LAR assessments, and team building for group stability.

Creating and implementing successful language acquisition methodologies must be matched by individual and group wellness teachings and networks of support for long-term effective and productive language journeys. Utilizing a strategic process of guided truth telling,

wellness teachings, naming of issues, constructive criticism, and skill building to create collaborative successful solutions are just a few methods to pursue Indigenous relationship making in order to help sustain long-term language journeys. Reinforce these teachings of wellness through modified LAR curriculums and epistemologies. Openly express how each person is a valuable part of the team, and counter “myths” about language work through trainings about educated responses and actions. Seek to understand each person’s value, role, and worth in the future community of healthy language speakers. Language work is intimate, sensitive, challenging, and fulfilling. The relationships connected to that work have to be given just as much care. Because experiencing hardships in our lives is inevitable but those challenges don’t have to break us and/or pull us from our language journeys.

I remember Dr. Hana O’Regan remarking on the 2011 earthquakes devastating communities and families in Aotearoa. In the midst of dealing with this destruction, LAR was deprioritized in some circles. Positive teamwork and strong relationships experienced through language work will carry LAR through these challenges. Clarity about how language acquisition is an integral part of social relationships and wellbeing provides a reinforcement needed more than ever as the local, national, and global communities continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, political unrest, environmental degradation, and inequality. From my own experience, there is no knowing how such pressures will surface in our indigenous communities. Each of us needs a support system to help us make sense of these experiences and to keep strong through them. A year into the pandemic the drug and alcohol epidemic in my tribal communities hit an all-time high. The increased isolation and unrest in the homes during that time was overwhelming and manifested in so many different ways. In that first year of the pandemic, one of my community’s elders drove from his home into the field and ended his life after expressing

anxiety about the loneliness and fear of what would happen if he got sick. In the same year, a young man reached out for help and informed the police about local drug dealers. After sunrise, he was found with his throat slit for speaking the truth. I still am overcome with sadness about these events. Language endangerment in Indigenous communities is just one issue we are forced to deal with on the daily. Yet, each language activist knows the power of learning our languages and sharing that sacred knowledge amongst like-minded people. Draw strength from those relationships and use them to guide your work forward. Intentional relationship making for community building alongside language acquisition can help us better withstand the storms.

Indigenous Language Life Stage Frameworks in Context

Language life stages have a multiplicity of details negotiated throughout each framework process. As adult language learners, the order of these life stages are not always linear, nor do they a single stacked progression that young students in language nests may experience. Different life stages in different orders may be needed for each person. Some adults may not be open to being young learners again and they may push back on these LAR and wellness frameworks and processes. But getting creative with these processes can aid in creating positive transformative spaces, no matter how challenging the lessons are. Be sure to clearly communicate expectations for each life stage to the language group members. This process reminds me of a family of new adult language learners in a LAR group I was part of. During the interview process, expectations were communicated but after being hired two older members became very vocal that they didn't know they'd have to commit to becoming language teachers. They proceeded to be very critical of the intensive language learning methods and eventually quit. Defining the reciprocal expectations and commitments for each cohort throughout this process is incredibly important. Furthermore, reinforcing these with culturally informed context-

based explanations about the importance of the framework and processes will help express the gravity of such LAR and wellness work.

For example, O'Regan (2016) utilizes the teachings of "Kaupapa Māori," a model she attributes to the late John Rangihau. She writes that, *Kaupapa Māori* can be explained as a system of organizing *tikaka* or customs and practices, *mātauraka* or education and knowledge, and *mātāpono* or belief systems and values within the context of a Māori world view. That worldview is then used as the basis upon which other understandings and issues can be, discussed, analyzed and critiqued (15). O'Regan utilizes this understanding through a "whakapapa-based approach" and a three-stage process of reflection on the intimate interconnectivity of the past, here-and-now, and the future within a Māori knowledge base, "*mātauraka Māori*."

Through *whakapapa* we are able to see and interpret the connections between our human selves and all things in the natural world that can be seen, experienced, heard and considered. Furthermore, *whakapapa* allows the characteristics and qualities of all things to be understood. Within the context of language revitalisation [sic], a *whakapapa*-based approach requires the implementation of a three staged process:

1. understanding what has been – the origins of the language, its characteristics and relationships to other things
2. understanding the current state – what has influenced and continues to influence its status, and;
3. understanding its potential – what is required to ensure the sustainability of that *whakapapa* in the future (16).

Through my own research, the process of identifying, building, and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships amongst speech community group members is paramount in sustaining long-term LAR goals. I've approached this process through a broader lens of strategic elements impacting human wellness. Customizing O'Regan's "whakapapa" based approach in

this context of interpersonal relationship wellness can be interpreted through these three stages of Indigenous relationship making:

1. understanding the origins and characteristics of each person's language comprehension in relation to their historical wellbeing – are there connections between the language loss and their family and personal wellbeing?
2. understanding the current state of each person's language comprehension and wellbeing – how are these currently interconnected and how does this impact the interpersonal relationships they have with their speech language group members?
3. understanding the needs to sustain language acquisition and positive interpersonal relationships – what actions alongside language acquisition methods are being taken to create and maintain interpersonal relationships with wellness and holism amongst the language group members?

This list can be reinterpreted for each unique culture, modified, and expanded upon with detailed explanations linking wellness, social dynamics of language teams, and broader LAR work.

Certain stages would be part of a repetition of conversations amongst each group to understand details of their overall progress together and positive support systems to sustain long-term LAR work and wellness. Ultimately, these frameworks and processes are being created and enacted to help foster meaningful and positive lived experiences for long-term language journeys.

In my conversation with O'Regan we discussed the following which illustrates the necessity and impact of positive lived experiences for language learning. Which have the same breadth of impact for interpersonal social experiences amongst language group members.

H: It is part of a pedagogy as well, if you have good experiences with the language, you're more likely to feel more connected and have a stronger relationship to it. If your language is associated with grief and trauma, or even being bored beyond all belief because you remember just sitting in stuffy classrooms for too long learning and being embarrassed by a bad teacher, you know, you're not gonna have a sense of love and affection or connection and passion for the language.

If your language is a place where you party with your mates, you go skiing, you go watch the sports games and you're having fun and you're laughing, you're whole belly laughing, and that's what you think of when you think of the language, then you're much more likely to learn, remember, and have that positive relationship to it.

R: Yeah. There's definitely that foresight and intention with the work...

H: I say with my language revitalization, you absolutely have to be deliberate about what you do and have to be planned in how you do it, and that's foresight. The deliberate one is not about leaving it to chance, and it's constantly reviewed. You have to be in continuous reviewing mode. What things work and what things don't. Continuous adaptation and continuous improvement has to be part of how you respond.

Just like the Pākehā, the Europeans/the colonizers, did. They were deliberate and they were planned. They reviewed when they tried to come up with new strategies to extinguish language and culture. They had a blueprint for how they did it and we need a blueprint for how we get it back.

R: Yeah, exactly!

Seeing your work with Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo and how much you all travel together and are able to continuously speak in the language together, what have those relationships done for you?

H: They've challenged me. They've stretched me. They've given me strength. They fill my cup. They've been some of the most richest experiences I've had in my life. They're the places I've probably felt the most supportive. The intensity of the friendships and probably even within smaller amounts of times, have probably been the most intense.

They've taken me around the world. That's what they've done for me, it's pretty much made me who I am in terms of the confidence that I have. They're reinforcing that what I'm doing is right, around the language. And the opportunities, they're just incredible, they're mind blowing. I just wouldn't have had the life I've had if it had not been for them.

Let's be honest, I was never going to be an elite sportsperson, so the idea of traveling around the world and meeting other people and being connected with others, you know at the elite level with anything else wasn't going to really happen. But seriously, they have grounded me at the same time as lifting me into the heavens. They've nurtured me at the same time as flooding me with all the emotions that makes life feel real and meaningful.

They've shaped me, sometimes harshly, but at the same time have really been caressing me and making me feel good about who I am and who I can be. So, they've been pretty fundamental to my being.

R: And that comes with a heavy responsibility of developing trust amongst them and having trust.

From this truth telling, I'm inspired and can see and feel a path forward. I'm empowered knowing LAR and wellness can be conceptualized as vast dualities within the same braid of sweetgrass. Each strand of knowledge infuses language acquisition with the goals to not only be

speakers but creators of positive spaces and experiences. These shared experiences are *medicines* to cleanse our psyche and recenter our purposes. To not engage in such processes of Indigenous relationship making and wellness can be limiting the type of life a person can experience throughout their language journey. It is my hope that through these conversations, language learners are exposed to a plethora of vibrant lives and language journeys of Indigenous language activists, champions, and practitioners. Each of the language activists highlighted in this dissertation are exemplars of different types of language reclamation work in addition to their journey for higher levels of language comprehension and language revitalization. No language activist or mentor is perfect, but I view each of them as living medicines amongst their families, language groups, and communities.

This idea of living medicine beings comes from my cultural teachings about plant medicines. It comes from the relationships I have with my elders, like-minded peers, my children and family. Relationships can embody puha, medicine power, and just by having these in your life, they positively influence you. One of the conversations with an anonymous language activists expressed the following about the complexities of medicine beings in LAR spaces.

A3: What's more important, language impact or language fluency?

I'm not fluent. Nor do I claim fluency, ever. I utilize the language so frequently that it engages people to learn the language and I've set up situations where they can learn to use the language the same way. So, language speakers have come out of the work that we have done.

I've also been in situations where we'll have a fluent speaker present, but they don't do that type of engaged work. So, there hasn't been that type of language growth around that person even though they are fluent in the language.

It just depends on how people are looking at the value of language. Is it more important to be "conversational," someone who is utilizing the language but isn't fluent, yet they are still impacting other people? Or is it more important to be an actual fluent speaker that was born and raised with the language but doesn't utilize the language with anybody? Really, I just don't know which one it is.

It might be the spirit of that truly fluent speaker, just being physically present in those spaces, that encourages people to learn the language. The knowledge that that person is fluent, even though they are not directly learning from them, it still encourages them to want to be in that space.

Another way of explaining the power of medicine beings is by Kimmerer (2020), in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. She describes this idea of a “medicine being” in context of her own work with Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants. She shared a story about how cedar is an Indigenous medicine, embodying a network of reciprocal connections to creation, wellness, ancestral memory, and fluidity. It is also a living medicine that just by being in its presence, healing and love is occurring.

Traditional teachings recount that the power of cedars is so great and so fluid that it can flow into a worthy person who leans back into the embrace of her trunk...The first and last embrace of a human being was in the arms of Mother Cedar. Just as old-growth forests are richly complex, so too were the old-growth cultures that arose at their feet...Scientists know Mother Cedar as *Thuja plicata*, the western red cedar...The species epithet *plicata* refers to their folded, braided appearance. The tight weave and golden-green sheen make the leaves look like tiny braids of sweetgrass, as if the tree itself was woven of kindness. Cedar unstintingly provided for the people, who responded with gratitude and reciprocity. Today, when cedar is mistaken for a commodity from the lumberyard, the idea of gift is almost lost. What can we who recognize the debt possibly give back (271-272)?

Cedar is a transformative medicine. Each unique Indigenous culture has various transformative medicines which represent the same types of teachings. Seeking to understand Indigenous relationship making is a journey to learn how each person can be a transformative medicine for their own wellbeing, for the wellness of their family, language groups, and communities.

Circling back to LAR, what in our adult language acquisition curriculums are teaching to this? What are we revitalizing and for what future?

Reflecting on the conversations with long-term Indigenous language activists and further research in the fields interconnected with LAR, reclamation, Indigenous knowledge, and

wellness, strategic language life stages can be aided by the following frameworks and processes: defining wellness; creating a transformative space for honest truth telling; assessing wellness vitality (in a similar way language vitality and endangerment are assessed within communities); naming the issues; identifying the stakeholders and the loose ends; preparing for change and new members; preparing for loss of elder mentors and relationships; educating about grief and trauma; and strategically defining commitments and expectations to help guide paths forward.

Afterword: An Ongoing Journey and Maacagiraac Miiguxda Agihdiawa hii Hoowehiioo

✧ Meaning Making Visual Guide ✧

[Visual guide text]

Page 1: Looking back and moving forward. Where to begin and begin again?

I'm providing this graphic illustration again as a reminder of the complexities of each person's language journey in the broader course of their life. Each of our mentors, elders, comrades, peers, and the young generations have many different life stories. Some do not carry intergenerational trauma, but encounter it upon engaging with community-based Indigenous LAR.

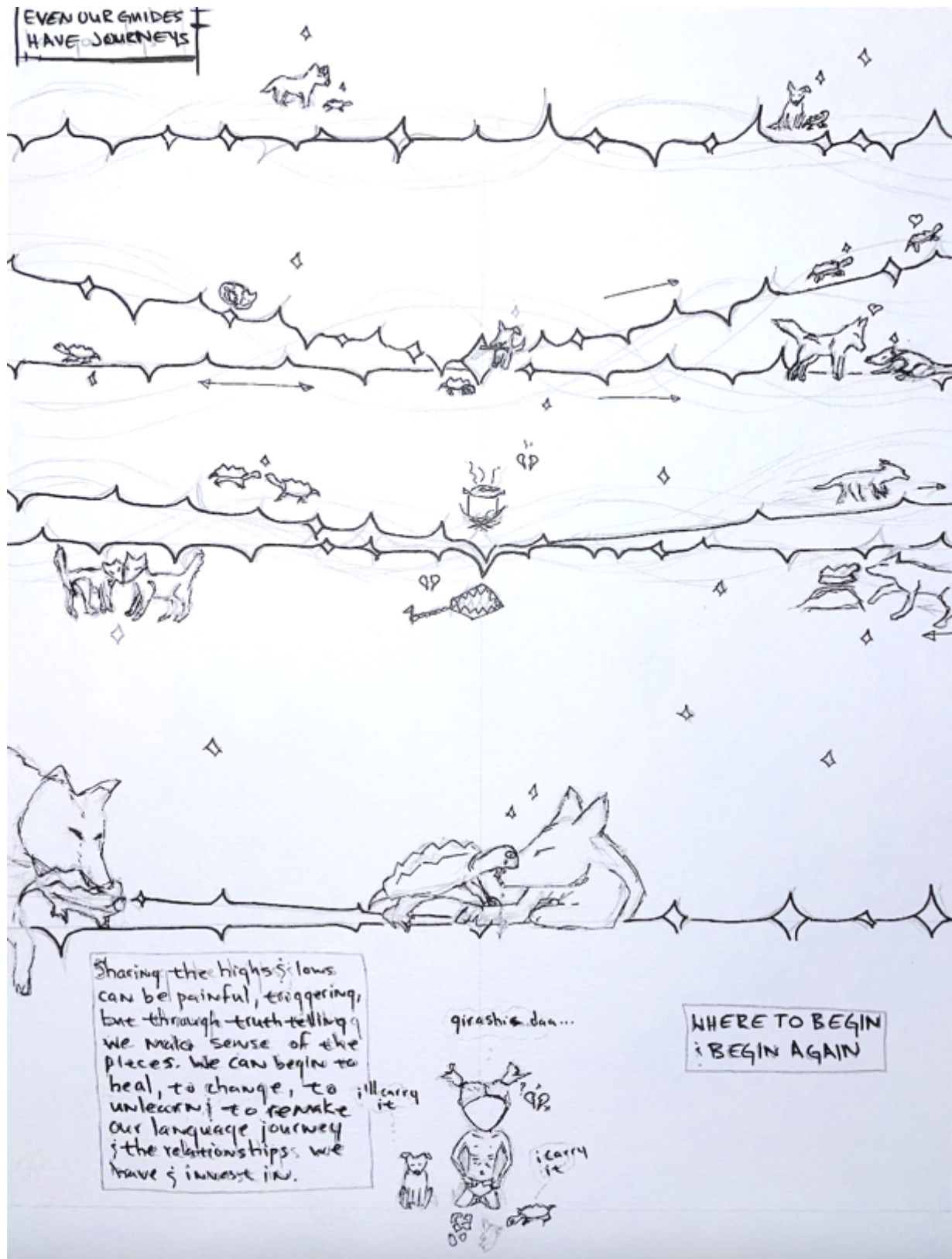


Figure 93: Looking back and moving forward. Where to begin and begin again? Graphite and ink on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

An Ongoing Journey and Maacagiraac Miiguxda Agihdiawa hii Hooweiho

This work is continuous. The contributing experiences are ongoing. Any possible conclusions are representative of this point in time along my own language journey and the journeys of the other language activists I've had conversations with thus far. Most of the language activists here have a wealth of teachings which have specifically contributed to their abilities to be honest, open, and reflective in our conversations. We each have also been exposed to and implemented various practices of repetition for language learning and knowledge sharing. The discussions throughout each chapter have been an exercise in learning through repetition. Repetitive teachings are important because they layer knowledge until it becomes second nature. Seasonal storytelling is an example of these methods imbedding teachings through examples of actions and outcomes in story narratives. Yet, some would say our ancestors were a lot smarter than us today. Their upbringings embedded skills to infer veiled meanings. To just know something is the way it is without deeper explanation. Gus Palmer (2003) in *Telling Stories the Kiowa Way* described that just by being Kiowa, he should know the deeper meanings of dreams and stories being told to him. He questioned if he really knew what was meant by vague retellings of the dreams and stories. Today, these teachings, the interconnective layered meanings, the storywork, need to be explicit. Meanings clearly described and understood through repetitive teachings. A skilled storyteller can expertly weave this knowledge, but we're not all gifted the same way with skills to layer veiled meanings through humor, songs, language, and stories. Nor can we each command attention the same as some exceptional storytellers. Instead, time needs to be taken with this communication. There is a responsibility to clearly define and then reflect on the meaningfulness and necessity of Indigenous relationship making, how it is synchronous with LAR, and can support long-term language journeys. These seeds of

knowledge, research, and truth telling are documented here to help prepare language activists for the myriad of possible experiences and methods to excel beyond complexities encountered along each language journey. Each of us is not alone along these paths. Each of us are as valuable as our ancestors and elders.

This work seeks to shine light on the Indigenous experience in contemporary Indigenous community-based language acquisition and revitalization journeys of adult language activists. Throughout this work, I've been cognizant of the many unspoken truths by myself and the various Indigenous language activists. Each of the language activists have had experiences that are not shared here but influence their opinions and knowledge none-the-less. Additionally, some discussions and topics shared with me during our conversations and during my broader research are beyond the scope represented in this dissertation. In reflecting on shifts over space and time, the perspectives and understandings of what is meaningful in some experiences are fluid. This meaningfulness may change and such actions are an intended process of cyclical reflections. Added to this work is ongoing cross-pollination of knowledge from other scholarly fields and materials intersecting with Indigenous LAR, reclamation, and wellness. My own LAR work purposefully draws upon inspirations and teachings from broader bodies of knowledge and artistic meaningful projects, individuals, and groups.

Because my language journey enriches a plethora of spaces, domains, and activities that I am involved in, I have an inexplicable number of tethers forming networks which feed and tend to my inspirations, motivations, and wellbeing. Gaining inspiration from domains outside of my usual language acquisition work helps reaffirm my own self-value and confidence. Like many of the language activists here, I have my shortcomings and quirks. Since I'm not at a comfortable level of proficiency in my ancestral languages yet, I've found that learning and speaking my

ancestral languages at times still makes me insecure about my lack of proper annunciation, accent, and comprehension. Added to this is my general lack of ease with social interactions, which are connected to experiences associated with my own language loss as a child. These challenges are alleviated through my awareness of them, the triggers, and how to mediate through them. I try my best to have a consistent commitment to do better. My language journey is a process through which I am attaining a balanced life. There is no ideal Indigenous language learner, nor a perfect language program. However, there are more efficient ways to learn and teach the languages in shorter periods of time, such as intensive language learning, master-apprentice, and immersion. Seeking to understand Indigenous relationship making in LAR is work to establish more efficient ways to create and reinforce positive and productive group dynamics amongst adult language activists. This work is a call to raise awareness for the wellbeing of invested language activists, champions, warriors, and practitioners. Our language work needs to promote a journey towards becoming healthy balanced individuals, not elite workaholics. It needs to create spaces that foster the creation and maintenance of interpersonal supportive relationships amongst committed language activists. This type of work is already being done in various Indigenous language groups successfully, but there is a need for more research and narratives.

In closing, I'd like to share a few more meaning making stories about my interwoven upbringings and language journey to humble myself and reiterate that this work is composed of many paths along the same language journey. Each meaningful teaching continues to cast light across space and time.

✧ **Meaning Making Poetics and Visual Guide** ✧

[Visual guide text]

Page 1: Puha/Xuubari Dream

[Poetic Illustration script]

Song: Maacagiraac Hooweihoo

(Vocables and verses)

(Donny Hathaway 1972 version & lyrics of John Lennon's "Jealous Guy")

[First verse]

Way-eh-àh, way-eh-òh
Way-eh-àh, way-eh-òh
Maacagiraac Maxhubaa 'ihdia

Way-eh-àh, way-eh-òh
Way-eh-àh, way-eh-òh
Maacagiraac miiguxda agihdiawa

Dute hooweihoos tzaan Tdame
Apáh
Dute hooweihoos Tdama Sògò Bia
Wáy-áh-wáy eh-óh
Wáy-áh-wáy eh-óh

[Second verse]

Way-eh-àh, way-eh-òh
Way-eh-àh, way-eh-òh
Maacagiraac Maxhubaa 'ihdia

Way-eh-àh, way-eh-òh
Way-eh-àh, way-eh-òh
Maacagiraac miiguxda agihdiawa

Dute hooweihoos tzaan Tdame
Apáh
Dute hooweihoos Tdama Sògò Bia
Wáy-áh-wáy eh-óh
Wáy-áh-wáy eh-óh

[4 beats]

[Jealous Guy intro vocables]

Wah-èh áh-áh way-eh-óhh
Wah-èh àh-àh way-eh-óhh

"I was dreaming of the past
And my heart was beating fast

I began to lose control
I began to lose control

I didn't mean to hurt you
And I'm sorry I made you cry

I didn't want to hurt you
I'm just a jealous guy"

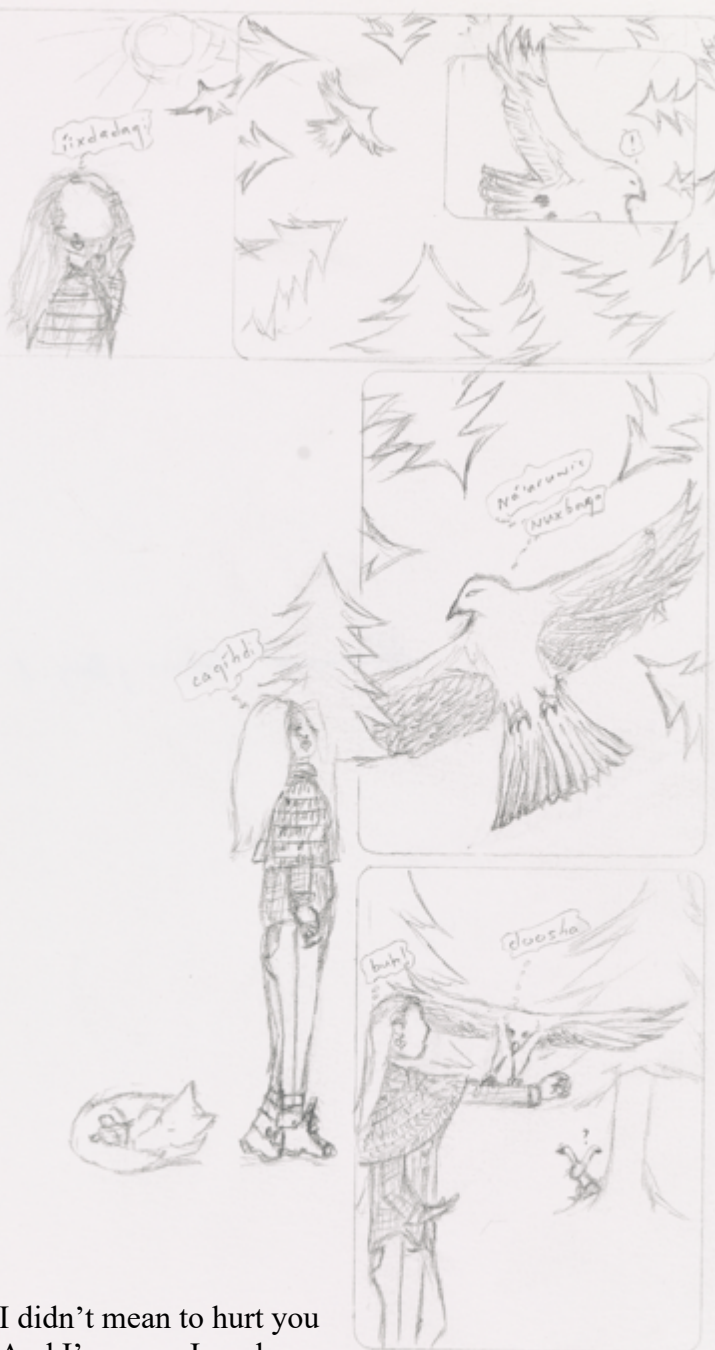


Figure 94: Puha/Xuubari Dream, page 1. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

I composed the above song as a form of healing after the passing of my father. I've shared various details about what I was born into and the first years of my upbringing and a longer process of unlearning and *relearning* in the previous meaning making guides/graphic illustrations. Intergenerational trauma is riddled with actions and reactions that I'm still learning to comprehend. Hidden in my heart, which I tease about being little and dark as pitch because of intergenerational trauma, upon my father's death I didn't know there was a bit of that child who still longed for a relationship with him. I knew he passed away on the last morning of my children's ceremonial fast together at my brother's home. That ceremony and support from family strengthened me. I stayed quiet about my father's passing. I didn't want to shift the energy from my children's accomplishments. Knowing that I've raised my children in a good way to the point that my youngest was completing his coming of age fast was immensely meaningful. This knowledge calmed me about the fact that we were not going to be able to attend his funeral as we were midway across the country moving to our new home. At dawn on the day of his funeral I was driving our trailer along a road through dense evergreens. Donny Hathaway's version of John Lennon's song *Jealous Guy* shuffled onto the speakers. My eyes welled with tears and not wanting to wake my boys, I quietly let them flow.

I couldn't believe I was sad and angry that I actually still thought that maybe one day my father and I could once again share a meal together and he'd apologize for being a violent drunk. At the root of my language loss and years of efforts for language acquisition and revitalization is an entanglement of issues inherited from his life, the life of his mother, and their choices, actions, and reactions. These emotions continue to be odd and unsettling. The thought that maybe one day I'd see him sober, and maybe I'd get my father back still confuse me. I thought about the lyrics in John Lennon's song, "I didn't mean to hurt you/And I'm Sorry I made you

cry...I'm just a jealous guy." Maybe if my father had the strength to vocalize his trauma he wouldn't have taken to the violence induced by alcohol. Maybe I wouldn't have been born into a loss of innocence, a loss of family, and language. Only by ceremony am I able to untangle those parts of me from that initial upbringing in my childhood. Yet ceremony cannot be approached as a miracle machine, even though I have witnessed miracles, ceremonies are to strengthen us to survive, overcome, and thrive beyond the hardships. Learning my ancestral languages has been part of that journey of healing and ceremony. My ancestral languages are puha and xubaa. Through this language journey, when viewed as a ceremony, are teachings and tools for the broader lives we have as Indigenous people.

I'm still processing my emotions about that relationship and loss. The meaning making guides (graphic illustrations) are visual representation of language, friendships, and ancestral teachings that have helped me overcome the loss of healthy relationships with my immediate family. My auntie Jackie Yellowtail has reminded me that this is why we are given multiple moms and dads through our clans and extended families. I've paired the above healing song I composed with a newer version of an illustration which is of a dream very dear to my heart. The first version is somewhere in a box, or shelf, or in a hole, or burnt and tossed to the wind, or hidden away by an old friend. I'd like to think that he's keeping it secret and safe and isn't still mortified with laughter about it. The dream didn't start out with my old friend in it. It began with me speaking Hidatsa to a giant redtail hawk. It was a ridiculously funny puha dream. So many stereotypes and bizarre conversations. I still laugh thinking about it because it was the first vivid dream in Hidatsa that I had had in a while since returning home to where I was born. This dream occurred after an intense language institute and another very difficult time with my father. Through my pursuit to relearn my language I was introduced to a group of incredible Hidatsa

language learners and speakers. Through their kindness and generosity to my children and I, those emotional wounds began to heal. I'm forever thankful for their support, laughter, and stories.

The illustration is meaningful because it signifies a shift in my language journey, one where I felt isolated and alone. Literally, having just the trees, animals, and my ancestors to speak the language to. Instead, through the opportunity for language work and visiting all day with my elders, I somehow gained a new friend who *in this dream* even shared his dry meat with the hawk. Yeah, weird. That humor and healing along my journey has made it possible for me to have the strength to tell my truth and explain how kinship and ancestral language can be riddled with overwhelming complexities. Yet, the technical actions of language learning gave me a calming foundation to stand on amidst it all. This is particularly important because learning Hidatsa has always been like opening a can of worms. The loss of it represents a time in my childhood that I grapple with. It's linked to the causes of dysfunction in my paternal family and my distancing from the community, as well as my ongoing social anxiety which I work repeatedly at overcoming. I remember this anxiety beginning when I was very young. It was after one of the many parties my father had at our house on our rez. Afterwards, I stopped talking openly for a number of years.

When I was brought out of my father's home, my spirit animal was a deer in headlights, especially if I had to speak to humans. I became terrified of forgetting my own name or stuttering from stress and embarrassment. When I think back to my social skills as a youth, they are summed up with me having that voice of that little round garishdawacee 'boy' in the Pixar (2009) animation *UP*. "Good afternoon. My name is Roycie. And I am my Grams Lora's youngest granddaughter. Do you need my assistance?" My Gahguhk 'maternal grandmother'

Lora always said to me, “don’t forget to shake hands and introduce yourself as my granddaughter. Err! And don’t just stare at them like you always do. They’ll wonder what’s wrong with you!” Today, at times, that deer in headlights is still my spirit animal, which unintentionally occurs when my social anxiety takes hold. This manifests in various ways and I don’t make it a habit of explaining the deeper causes of this social anxiety. Sometimes I laugh and say it’s because I wasn’t hugged enough as a kid. True story. I both dislike hugs and long for good bear hugs from my loved ones. Other times I simply don’t have an answer for why I have social anxiety or why I struggle with remembering names. Intergenerational trauma is a tricky beast.

Why is this personal knowledge important? What could it possibly do with Indigenous LAR work? As Indigenous people, relationships are a foundational part of our identity. We are born into a universe of pre-existing relationships. Some of the most confusing and mysterious are those between humans. Because of these pre-existing relationships that have both influenced the survival and decimation of Indigenous peoples and our languages, LAR work can be emotionally and spiritually triggering. A basic part of Indigenous kinship practices is sharing who your family is. On my paternal side, I’m still ashamed at times to say who my father is/was. Then because everyone knows everyone, I have to explain that I’m his daughter from his first wife. That I don’t have any land, he stole that, too. And no, I don’t have anything to do with his oil business. I withhold this information because his family values and actions are not shared by me. We are not like-minded. No matter how thick our blood is, we are not the same. I am more related to my ancestors and the land than I ever felt related to him. These are hard truths. They sting to write yet are necessary to understand the depths of language loss and revitalization amongst my own family. I view my story and upbringing as an extreme experience of language

and culture loss. Many Indigenous people do not have similar backgrounds, but almost all of us in small Indigenous communities are not spared from the lateral violence and oppression caused by colonization and intergenerational trauma.

The causes of endangerment and the pressures of loss elicit internal emotions which manifest in unpredictable personal and public ways. Beginning to gain language knowledge can also cause the unpredictable emotions. Many people have difficulty in clearly expressing these emotions and the causes of them. This complicates a person's awareness for how their expressions of these emotions impact the group dynamics. Engaging in processes of Indigenous relationship making aligned with wellness and holism addresses an array of complexities that eventually surface during long-term LAR work. Sometimes, these surface rapidly. For me, gaining lived experiences with beautiful positive and supportive like-minded Indigenous people provides exemplar models to compare and direct future relationship making standards and boundaries. These examples are also guides for how to reflect on shifting the types of relationships I have and want in the future. They also help me reflect on what type of person I am and how I am influencing those relationships. This can be some sensitive truth telling, mine continues to be.

✧ **Meaning Making Poetics and Visual Guide** ✧

[Visual guide text]

Page 2 and 3: Puha/Xuubari Dream

We are born into a Universe of
pre-existing relationships
veins outstretched,
constricted

Heavy is our blood
with the weight of ancestors
flowing between
intersecting family lines
breathing in and out

In this life
do not be afraid to dream
beyond the inheritance of colonial
lines

Language loss and endangerment
are birthed from broken
relationships
tangled stories
constrict our hearts and tongues

Learning my ancestral languages,
is a ceremony of unlearning and
remaking
it's a journey of looking back
to guide me forward on the path
before me

My languages were gifted
from weathered hands
through the sharing of
hearts and tongues,
words and songs
mend what was lost



Figure 95: Puha/Xuubari Dream, page 2. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

Hiraacá hii Sosore
dammen daigwape are
eloquent
the words flow effortlessly
from
fluent speakers

I look closely at their lips
and tongues
straining my damaged
right eardrum
They blush and I learn a
little more

Only by ceremony
can I cast light upon
the reasons why my
tongue and ears are
damaged.

"I didn't mean to hurt you,
And I'm sorry I made you
cry"

The same words I imagine
my father would have said
to my mother,
had they not been born
ancestral enemies,
grew into lovers
unraveling,
captives of boarding
school traumas

Learning my ancestral
languages,
is a ceremony of looking
back
to remake the path before
me



Learning ancestral languages
is remaking relationships lost

[vocables]
Way-eh-àh, way-eh- òh
Way-eh-àh, way-eh- òh

Maacagiraac miiguxda agihdiawa
[Thank you helping me immensely]

Figure 96: Puha/Xuubari Dream, page 3. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

The above illustration is the second part of the dream. The spoken word poetics is the can of worms I've referred to previously. Even with a new journey, the old ones have a way of pulling at your focus, time, and energy. Language loss, for me, is an emotional and spiritual sickness. By new relationship making with other Hidatsa language learners outside of my direct family, ones who I'm not even related to, I was able to *remake* and *reright* my emotions about the loss of my Hidatsa language. My old friend and his family, through their love and support, created a shield against the overpowering emotions of being home on my reservation where I was born into such trauma. Trauma that even my grandmother and great-grandmother could not protect me from. These new relationships became a bright golden light along my path, and they've stretched back through time to heal those experiences I had as a child. With that healing, I'm able to explain the importance of "maacagiraac."

Maacagiraac in Context

This word, "maacagiraac" is more than just a Hidatsa term of gratitude. It's woven into my very being through oral stories, ancestral memories, archives, lived experiences, and motherhood. Continuing to learn and use my ancestral languages helps me to understand this word and the relationships I have to the ones who gifted me with my Hidatsa name. The month after I had my first son, I brought him home to my father and Maguu "grandmother." During one of the days while visiting with Maguu, I was cradling my infant son and rocking slowly in a chair at the dining table. She was making skillet bread in the kitchen and telling me about her cars and her dog who would protect her when she traveled. She suddenly stopped and said to me, "shh, just be quiet. Don't say anything." I remembered her saying this to me so many times as a child. I could feel in my bones what was going to happen next. My father shuffled up the driveway and burst through the screen door. He staggered in and started in on us. I held my son

tight, wrapped in the quilt Maguu had made him. It was day two or three of his binge. He tried to hold me, to hold my son. He was crying about his sickness. He was screaming about my silence. The next morning, I asked Maguu how to say my name in Hidatsa again. She quickly responded, “Maacagiraac.” I left with my son a few days after that. Within a year, Maguu had a heart attack. My father had gone silent again. Without my connection to Maguu, I went silent as well. We did not speak for a number of years.

After having my second son and the passing of more years, I received word that a language institute was being developed for Hidatsa. I requested language materials, but they were only available for those who attended the institute. I returned again to my home and stayed with extended family in the hopes that I could relearn my language and maybe Maguu would speak to me again. In my language classes I reconnected with a friend of Maguu. She was the one who told me I belonged there. That me being there with my boys was their prayers coming true. This was a good conversation because during the previous classes I was being criticized about having been gone for so long. I was criticized that my family hadn’t had my mother adopted into a clan and therefore I didn’t have a maternal clan. My father had refused to help me be adopted into another clan and so I thought there wasn’t anything I could really do about it at that time. There were discussions about what that meant to not have a matrilineal clan, and maybe you weren’t really *really* Hidatsa without one. Amongst these discussions, I quickly rephrased how I said my name. I only knew the English translation. This was because I learned that “maacagiraac,” the word Maguu told me was my name, means ‘thank you.’ Throughout the years that I stayed away I focused on my Shoshone and Comanche language learning, but I still dreamed in Hidatsa and I held onto “Maacagiraac.” I’d say it in each prayer. I laugh about that

now. Me, young and praying to the Creator and my ancestors, each time saying “Miic Maacagiraac.” My ancestors pursing their lips, saying “hey, it’s ‘thank you’ again!”

It was a long journey returning home those first years during the language institutes. By that time, Maguu had been moved to a nursing home in the same hospital I was born in. She was part of a language documentation group that I volunteered with. She allowed me to start visiting with her again but only if I went and talked with my father to patch things up. Afterwards, my boys and I spent each week in that first summer sitting with her, hearing stories, and learning more words. I asked her again to say my name in Hidatsa. She avoided the question for a few visits. She began by retelling me where my name came from. The short version of the story I had known since I was very young, as well as the short English translation and the meaningful translation of my name. “Gih-dish-stah Wah-kish.” I’ve only met three other Hidatsa speakers who know what the direct translation is. They’ve told me it’s in a different dialect because Maguu learned Hidatsa from her great grandmother Maacu-dabash ‘Juneberries’ who was part of the Crow Flies High Band which separated from the main village in the 1870s. The short translation is “Dancer.” The direct translation is “Dancers beginning to dance.” The meaningful translation is “the one who brings joy, the same joy you feel at the beginning of a dance.”

The journey to earn my name continues to be a mighty and beautiful challenge, one is being made through my role as a mother, scholar, and language activist. As my mentors provide examples of, this work has to be about seeking out kindness and love. If there is none in a place, be the giver of it, but don’t lose yourself in those environments. Maacagiraac Miiguxda Agihdiawa hii Hooweihoo.



Figure 97: Royce K. Young Wolf and sons, Oh-hah-moe (center) and Winterhawk (right). January 11th 2013. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2013.

✧ **Meaning Making Poetics and Visual Guide** ✧

[Visual guide text]

Page 4: Puha/Xuubari Dream

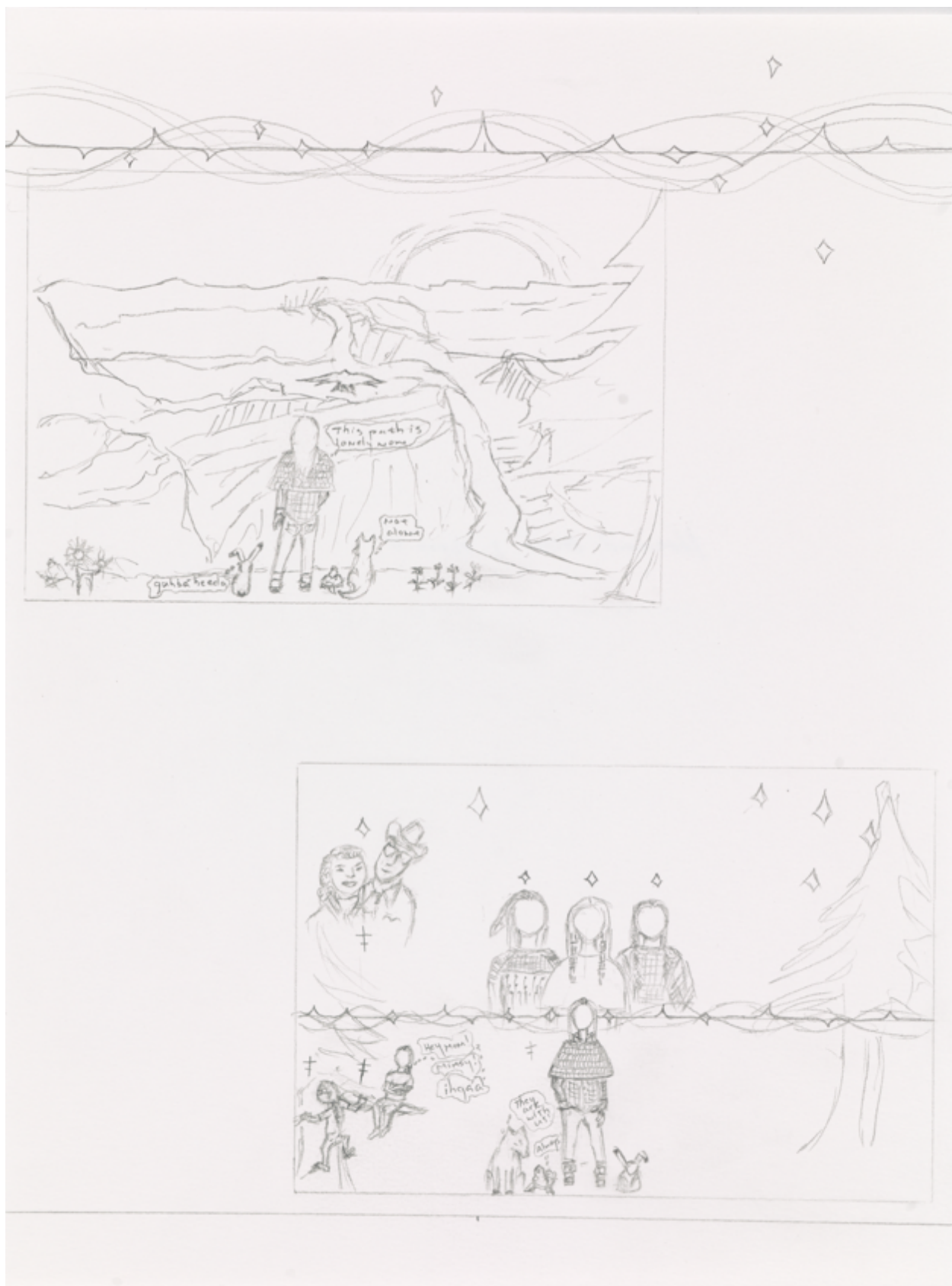


Figure 98: Puha/Xuubari Dream, page 4. Graphite on paper. Royce K. Young Wolf, 2021.

Appendix: Additional Content from Indigenous Language Activists and Anonymous Language Activist Conversations.

SO YOU WANT YOUR LANGUAGE TO DIE....HERE ARE SOME HELPFUL WAYS TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN!

Shared by Cedric Sunray during Day 1 of the Bringing Our Languages Together Gathering.
Later translated by Te Panekiretanga o Te Reo.

1. Argue over dialect.
2. Do not understand that language is constantly shifting and changing.
3. Disallow new words to be developed in the language.
4. Say things like, "That is not how my grandma used to say it."
5. Say things like, "That person was not raised fluent, so they should not be teaching the language."
6. Say things like, "We don't have a word for that." And then be against making "a word for that."
7. Be afraid to try new things!
8. Be highly opinionated and believe you know best.
9. Focus your language instruction on adults and not on children.
10. Teach Indian through the medium of the English language (i.e. What is this? This is an ofi (dog in Choctaw). What is this? This is a sinti (snake in Choctaw). Etc. etc.)
11. Do not have a clear goal for your program. Do you want fluency or do you want enrichment? This is a key question.
12. Do not understand the cultural and educational differences between elders and younger people and don't make adjustments to accommodate these.
13. Believe that the revitalization of language is based on language knowledge and not the management of personalities.
14. To many Chiefs, not enough Indians.
15. Argue over spelling systems!
16. Be territorial. (my bubbles syndrome)
17. Don't truly believe within your heart that the return of fluency to your community is possible.
18. Believe that the survival of your language is someone else's responsibility.
19. Don't believe that the only time you are speaking your Indian language wrong is when you are not attempting to speak it at all.
20. Continually reinvent wheels by not asking for assistance, advice, and materials from other language programs and community members who have previously engaged language.
21. Believe that only fluent speakers can be teachers.
22. Believe that old writing systems, even if proven ineffective, should be continually used.
23. Believe that this is about fulfilling the needs and wishes of adults in your community.
24. Don't focus on the 0-5 year old age group.
25. Argue with public school boards over language in the local public schools.
26. Allow just a few people to be viewed as "the keepers of the language".
27. Allow tribal politics to have a say in your language program.

28. Appease the language uneducated masses by going along with what they want and not with what really needs to happen.
29. Don't develop an immersion school.
30. Be too courteous and allow your language to be negotiable.

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