

**“That’s Our Language. That’s Who We Are.”: Documenting the
Strengths and Challenges of Ojibwe Language Revitalization in
Neyaashiinigiing**

by

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ABSTRACT

“THAT’S OUR LANGUAGE. THAT’S WHO WE ARE.”: DOCUMENTING THE STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF OJIBWE LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION IN NEYAASHIINIGMIING

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This project explores Ojibwe language revitalization in the Anishinaabe community of Neyaashiinigiing, located on the Bruce Peninsula in Ontario, Canada. Guided by decolonial and Indigenous methodologies and created in collaboration with community partners, this project aims to inform the community’s approach to revitalizing Ojibwe by examining the strengths and challenges of current revitalization strategies. This ethnographic project centers the voices of ten community members, encompassing youth, language educators, and Elders, who shared their perspectives on and experiences with Ojibwe through interviews. This thesis documents how community members continue to learn, mobilize, and teach Ojibwe in various places and contexts within and outside of Neyaashiinigiing. The project also explores community members’ perceptions of Ojibwe, i.e., language ideology, to better understand community needs and desires related to language use and revitalization. Ultimately, this thesis determines the strengths and barriers of Ojibwe revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing from the perspectives of community members.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures.....	vii
1 Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 The Project.....	1
1.1.1 Research Questions and Goals.....	2
1.1.2 Research Rationale	5
1.1.3 Overview of Chapters	9
1.2 Literature Review	11
1.2.1 Introduction.....	11
1.2.2 Decolonization Theory and Indigenous Research Paradigms	12
1.2.3 History and Ethnography of the Anishinaabe People of Southern Ontario	16
1.2.4 Language Revitalization	20
1.2.5 Language Ideology	35
2 Chapter 2: Methods and Introduction to Language in Neyaashiinigmiing	45
2.1 Methods	45
2.1.1 Relationship Building and Project Planning	45
2.1.2 Data Collection and COVID-19.....	48
2.1.3 Data Analysis and Writing.....	50
2.1.4 Knowledge Mobilization.....	50

2.1.5	Ethical Considerations	51
2.2	Language Use in Neyaashiinigmiing	56
2.2.1	The Ethnography of Speaking	56
2.2.2	Language in Use in Neyaashiinigmiing.....	58
3	Chapter 3: Strengths of Language Revitalization in Neyaashiinigmiing	80
3.1	Linguistic Biographies	80
3.1.1	Sam	80
3.1.2	Helen	82
3.1.3	Gregor	82
3.2	Introduction	83
3.3	Positive Language Ideology	84
3.3.1	Ojibwe Fosters Connection.....	84
3.3.2	Hearing and Speaking Ojibwe Evokes Positive Feelings.....	92
3.3.3	Motivation to Learn, Mobilize, and Teach Ojibwe	97
3.3.4	Conclusion.....	104
3.4	Engaging Education	104
3.4.1	Chastity’s Language Journey	105
3.4.2	Language Education at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School	106
3.4.3	Conclusion.....	112
4	Chapter 4: Challenges of Language Revitalization in Neyaashiinigmiing.....	113
4.1	Linguistic Biographies	113
4.1.1	Halle	113
4.1.2	Mary Alice.....	114
4.1.3	Kenneth	114

4.2	Introduction	115
4.3	Colonization and Government Policy	115
4.4	Lack of Speakers	121
4.4.1	Concerns about Dialect	123
4.5	Lack of Language Educators and Resources	125
4.6	Lack of Domains of Use	129
4.7	Lack of Viable/Accessible Formal Learning Opportunities	133
4.8	COVID-19.....	136
4.9	Lack of Hope for the Future.....	140
4.10	Conclusion	141
5	Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	143
5.1	Summary of Arguments	143
5.2	Contributions	146
5.3	Limitations and Future Possibilities	148
	Bibliography	150
	Appendix A: Interview Questions	158
	Appendix B: Researcher Pledge for Ages 14+	160
	Appendix C: Researcher Pledge for Ages 10-13.....	164
	Appendix D: Researcher Pledge for Guardians	168

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Learner, Mobilizer and Teacher Graphic.....	61
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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Project

This research explores Indigenous language transmission and revitalization and will contribute to language revitalization strategies in the community of Neyaashiinigmiing. Furthermore, this project provides a case study on Indigenous language revitalization efforts from the perspectives of community members. Neyaashiinigmiing, also recognized as The Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, is an Anishinaabe community of about 700 people located on the land now known as the Bruce Peninsula in Ontario, Canada. Ojibwe (or Anishinaabemowin) is the Indigenous language traditionally spoken in the community, though all community members are fluent English speakers with a small number of bilingual speakers. Due to forced practices of assimilation such as residential schooling, many Indigenous languages in Canada, like Ojibwe, risk no longer being spoken. To Indigenous peoples, language is intrinsic to culture and identity (Battiste 2000). This concept is recognized by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in its urgent call for funding and support for communities to revitalize their languages (2015b, 2). Language revitalization refers to actions through which communities strive to use communal, political, and educational avenues to increase both the number of active speakers of a language at risk, and the domains of use of that language (Davis 2018). As part of the healing process from the harms of colonization, Indigenous communities have begun the hard work of revitalizing and reclaiming their languages so that they can be preserved for future generations and spoken once again (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015).

This community-based research—developed through conversations with community leaders and community members—aims to identify the strengths and challenges of language revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing by looking at how people perceive and use Ojibwe. I also examine the strengths and barriers to language learning in Neyaashiinigiing. Understanding how people perceive and talk about a language is essential to language revitalization efforts; the ways in which a language is framed to its community or to the world greatly influence if and how it is used (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures 2005). Additionally, the contexts in which Indigenous languages are spoken today are various and changing (Pitawanakwat 2018; Valentine 1995). Identifying and understanding these contexts is essential to developing comprehensive, engaging, and effective language revitalization strategies (Davis 2018).

1.1.1 Research Questions and Goals

The research goals for this project are:

1. To explore and understand the perspectives of community members in Neyaashiinigiing on Ojibwe. Understanding how people think and feel about the language is valuable in determining community members' levels of interest, needs, and desires related to language learning and use. This understanding will, in turn, reveal barriers to language revitalization and inform potential new strategies for revitalization in the community.
2. To determine the various and changing social contexts in which Ojibwe is used in Neyaashiinigiing today. Knowledge of the existing domains of language

use can help to create more appropriate and effective language revitalization strategies.

3. To consider the state of current methods of language transmission and revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing, both the “formal” (i.e., within the Language Nest, at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School) and “informal” (day-to-day, community-based, or ‘traditional’ practices of language transmission—for example, time spent learning on the land with Elders). This will allow for an understanding of the state of revitalization in the community generally, and an exploration of the strengths and barriers related to the various methods of language learning.

The research questions for this project are:

- What are the opportunities for language revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing and the challenges faced by language learners?
 - How do people in Neyaashiinigiing perceive Ojibwe? What is the role of Ojibwe in their lives and how do they think and feel about the language?
 - How do people in Neyaashiinigiing use Ojibwe in their everyday lives?
 - What are the strengths and barriers of language learning in Neyaashiinigiing?

Through an analysis of interviews with ten community members, encompassing youth, language educators, and Elders, this thesis considers the dynamic roles that people assume within the framework of language revitalization. By examining the diverse

settings and contexts in which community members engage with Ojibwe, I argue that individuals fluidly transition through the roles of language learners, mobilizers, and teachers, depending on context. This thesis recognizes that each of these roles are essential to revitalization efforts.

I also conclude that the community's approach to revitalization is built upon a foundation of positive language ideology, whereby community members feel that their language connects them to important facets of their lives like culture, spirituality, identity, personal and collective histories, and community. Members also shared how Ojibwe evokes feelings of pride, joy, and fulfillment, contributing to wellbeing and motivating community members to continue learning, mobilizing, and teaching the language. The language education at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School also stands out as a beacon of strength in the community's revitalization efforts, nurturing a safe, positive learning environment, which ensures that students can acquire Ojibwe in engaging and sustainable ways.

Community members who contributed to this project also identified the various challenges facing Neyaashiinigiing in their journey of language revitalization. These challenges include a shortage of speakers, educators, resources, formal learning opportunities, and domains of language use. These barriers could be addressed by increased funding and resources to facilitate the creation of more speakers and teachers, and spaces and contexts where the language can be learned and spoken.

1.1.2 Research Rationale

In recent years, Indigenous language revitalization has been garnering increasingly more attention from the public. The United Nations (2019) declared 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages in hopes of raising global awareness of the issue to inspire collective action. One of Canada's popular national news networks, the CBC, published and broadcasted 129 articles and segments on Indigenous languages and revitalization in the year 2019 alone. With this growing public attention, it is becoming more widely understood that in many ways, languages embody and impart upon us unique worldviews, values, knowledge systems, and culturally-specific ways of thinking and doing (Battiste and Henderson 2000; Bunge 1992; Davis 2017, 2018; Johnston 2011; Leonard 2012, 2019; Muehlmann 2008, 2012; Spielmann 1998; Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures 2005; United Nations 2009, 2019). Thus, when a language is no longer spoken, we lose this knowledge and diversity of thought that enriches our collective understanding of the world and makes it a more equitable place.

The use of Indigenous languages in particular is diminishing rapidly. A rough estimation suggests that as many as 90% of the world's approximately 7000 oral languages may no longer be spoken within the next one hundred years (United Nations 2009). Further evidence suggests that only 3% of the earth's population speaks 96% of these languages (United Nations 2009, 57). These speakers are mostly Indigenous, and usually Elders; young people have not been acquiring their heritage languages in the same ways or at the same rates as have past generations (United Nations 2009, 57). These facts have created a sense of urgency for Indigenous languages to be preserved

for future generations, revitalized and spoken once again (Davis 2018; Galla 2016; Hermes and King 2013; Johnson 2018; Johnston 2011; Leonard 2012; Moore and Macdonald 2013; Morcom and Roy 2019; Pitawanakwat 2018; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015).

As is the case in many parts of the world, Indigenous languages of Turtle Island (the land now known as Canada by many Indigenous peoples) have been intentionally and violently diminished at the hands of the colonial government. Much of this systematic cultural genocide has been carried out through the operation of day and residential schools. Established and operated by colonial governments and churches, day and residential schools were in operation for over a century with the last one closing in the late 1990s (TRC 2015a). These institutions were designed to forcibly remove Indigenous children from their families, communities, cultures, and identities, imposing a process of indoctrination and assimilation into Euro-Christian Canadian society. Generations of children from Indigenous communities across Canada endured widespread abuse at these schools, where they faced punishment for speaking their languages or practicing their cultures. Along with other forced assimilation practices like the Sixties Scoop, the impacts of day and residential schools on Indigenous communities continue to be felt to this day. Survivors of past and ongoing tactics of colonization continue to raise their voices and call for the decolonization of Turtle Island, which includes the revitalization of the original languages spoken by the ancestral peoples of this land. This project is intended to contribute in a small way to wider decolonization efforts and to directly support revitalization of the Ojibwe language in Neyaashiinigiing. As a white settler and first-

time researcher, approaching this project in a decolonial way necessitated an understanding of Indigenous and decolonial research methodologies, which will be explored later in this chapter.

1.1.2.1 Situating Myself in the Research

Wilson argues that the underlying idea to Indigenous research methodologies is acknowledging that one cannot remove themselves from the world in order to study it; the researcher is inherently part of the research itself (2008, 16). By positioning himself as a storyteller, Wilson embraces this idea in his work, imparting his life and experiences into the telling (2008, 32). He explains that story and metaphor are an important part of the tradition of Canadian Indigenous oral history and shares that listeners learn by filtering and adapting stories to their experiences to make information more relevant to them (Wilson 2008, 32). His work stresses the importance of relationality for Indigenous research paradigms. To Wilson, a relational way of being is at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous (2008, 80). This idea is demonstrated in his research as he reflects upon the web of relations in his own life and invites the reader to enter into an active relationship with the storyteller and the reading itself.

In the spirit of relationality, it is important then to consider my positionality and situate myself in relationship to this research. I am not familiar with much of my family's history, but I know my maternal grandmother's family immigrated from Ireland and settled in Montreal, Quebec in the 19th century. My family eventually settled in Oxford County, on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and the Attawandaron peoples. I only truly began learning about my identity as a settler on this land during my

undergraduate degree at the University of Guelph, which sits on the ancestral lands of the Attawandaron peoples and the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Though I began my degree at Guelph as a history student, I quickly realized that “history” in a Canadian university setting most often means European history taught by professors of European descent. I have always been interested in engaging with Indigenous topics, which led me to anthropology courses, and the work of my advisor, Dr. Tad McIlwraith, and my committee member, Dr. Brittany Luby. Through my courses with Tad and Brittany, I was inspired to continue learning about Indigenous peoples, histories, and issues outside of a classroom by participating in the University’s Project Serve program in 2018. It was through this program that I first visited Neyaashiinigiing and met my Elder mentor, Miptoon.

In preparing for this project, I was faced with some uncomfortable feelings related to my identities and positionality. I was unsure about whether it was even appropriate for me to pursue a research project of this kind, as a settler and first-time researcher raised and trained in predominantly white and/or Catholic institutions. I was also uncomfortable about the ways that the project would benefit me, as it contributes to the completion of my degree, which I am privileged to be able to pursue. Reflexivity is an important first step in decolonial work. I am grateful for my experiences as an anthropology student at Guelph, where I was able to think critically about colonialism and my privilege as a white person moving through our settler colonial society. My education allowed me to reflect on the colonial roots of the field of anthropology and the power dynamics that exist when non-Indigenous researchers work with Indigenous communities. I am also fortunate to

have the support and guidance of my committee members, who apply and model Indigenous and decolonial theories and methodologies in their work.

Reflecting on my positionality is only one step to carrying out decolonial work. In order to root this project in Indigenous, decolonial research methodologies, I relied heavily on the works of Indigenous scholars. Perhaps most significant was the guidance I received from community stakeholders when designing and facilitating the project. Creating this community-based project collaboratively with Miptoon's guidance and Council's approval ensured that the research was appropriate and would be carried out with respect to participants and the wider community. Our collaboration also ensured that the results of the project would be useful and meaningful to the community. This project aims to center the voices of the community members of Neyaashiinigiing who were gracious enough to share their stories and experiences with me. I am honoured that they entrusted me with their words, and that Miptoon and Council trusted me to create this report.

1.1.3 Overview of Chapters

The rest of this chapter includes an exploration of four bodies of knowledge that contributed to the creation of this project. They are decolonization theory and Indigenous research paradigms, the history and ethnography of the Anishinaabe peoples of Southern Ontario, language revitalization, and language ideology.

Chapter 2 begins with an overview of the methodology employed in the creation of this thesis. I tell the story of how my relationship with community members in

Neyaashiinigmiing began and how the project took shape through collaboration with community members and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I also discuss the ethical considerations relevant to this project. Rooted in the ethnography of speaking, the second part of the chapter provides an overview of language use in the community from the perspectives of community members. I discuss conceptions of what it means to be a “speaker,” and introduce a more dynamic set of roles individuals may occupy when participating in language revitalization—learner, mobilizer, and teacher. I then introduce Justin, Robert, and Zoe,¹ three community members from different age groups, and explore the ways in which each person uses Ojibwe and shifts through the roles of learner, mobilizer, and teacher in their daily life.

Chapter 3 begins with three linguistic biographies introducing Sam, Helen, and Gregor. The biographies spotlight each contributor’s unique relationship with Ojibwe and experiences with revitalizing the language. The rest of the chapter focuses on the strengths of the community’s current approach to language revitalization from the perspectives of those who participated in this project. In particular, I discuss how community members’ positive conceptions of the language, i.e., language ideology is one of the greatest strengths supporting revitalization in the community. We will discuss how Ojibwe connects community members to important facets of their lives, evokes positive feelings and motivates people to continue learning, speaking, and sharing the language with others. Chastity’s linguistic biography introduces the next section, where we explore

¹ Some names included in this thesis are pseudonyms and others aren’t.

how the engaging education and supportive learning environment fostered at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School in Neyaashiinigiing contributes to revitalization in the community.

Halle, Mary Alice, and Kenneth's biographies introduce the following chapter. In turn, Chapter 4 breaks down the challenges to Ojibwe revitalization identified by community members, including colonization and government policy, and limited speakers, educators, resources, formal learning opportunities and domains of language use. Throughout the chapter we also discuss possible remedies to these barriers as suggested by community members.

The final chapter offers concluding remarks, a discussion of the contributions and limitations of the project, and possibilities for future research.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Introduction

To situate this study in the existing research, I will explore four different bodies of relevant literature: decolonization theory and Indigenous research paradigms, the history and ethnography of the Anishinaabe peoples of Southern Ontario, language revitalization, and language ideology. I will discuss decolonial approaches to research with Indigenous peoples, which have informed each step of my research process. Next, I will explore some ethnographic materials and online resources related to the Anishinaabe peoples of Southern Ontario and their language, Ojibwe. I will point to some gaps in the literature surrounding the exclusion of youth from discussions about language revitalization and a

narrow focus on organized language revitalization programming in past literature on language revitalization strategies. I will also provide an overview of various approaches to language revitalization efforts in North America found within the literature outlining strengths, challenges, and possibilities for current revitalization efforts. Finally, I will discuss language ideology, a theoretical concept that has allowed me to examine and understand community members' perceptions of Ojibwe and the contexts in which the language is spoken in Neyaashiinigiing.

1.2.2 Decolonization Theory and Indigenous Research Paradigms

As a non-Indigenous researcher, each step of my research process has been informed by the literature on decolonial theory and methods to ensure this research is grounded in a decolonial approach, influenced by Indigenous methodologies, approved and led by community members, and beneficial to community members in Neyaashiinigiing. In recent decades, anthropologists have challenged power structures within the discipline of anthropology that have historically privileged Western voices and knowledge systems in studies on Indigenous peoples (Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005; Hart, Straka and Rowe 2017; Kovach 2009; Morgenson 2012; Smith 2012; Wilson 2008). They point out that all too often, Western academics enter Indigenous communities, extract knowledge, and return to their institutions to translate this knowledge within their own Eurocentric contexts and ways of knowing (Smith 2012). These research traditions cast Indigenous peoples as the exotic subjects of research and allow settler researchers to claim ownership over Indigenous ways of knowing, imagery, and the things that Indigenous peoples create and produce (Smith 2012). This practice erases Indigenous

voices and ultimately perpetuates narratives of colonialism. Decolonial theory is a framework that challenges these colonial power structures and normative forms of knowledge production in settler colonial societies. A decolonial approach is the practical application of these theories, which in the context of this study, is guided by Indigenous research methodologies. A decolonial approach is particularly important in the study of language revitalization, as Indigenous languages embody traditional knowledge, which should not be owned or claimed by Western academics in the form of research (Smith 2012). To produce ethical research that is meaningful to the community, research on Indigenous languages must center Indigenous voices.

Smith (2012) and Wilson (2008) contribute to the literature on decolonial theory by offering important critiques of Eurocentric research and its frequent exclusion of Indigenous peoples and knowledges. They speak about the importance of decolonized research which centers Indigenous perspectives, knowledges, and methodologies. For Smith, Indigenous ontologies (ways of seeing the world) ought to be built into the research process, thought about reflexively, discussed as part of the final results, and disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways (2012, 15). Smith argues that a key factor in Indigenous methodologies is the reciprocity present in “reporting back” to the people and sharing knowledge (2012, 15).

Decolonial research requires collaboration between researchers and participants, with community members leading each step of the way. For Wilson, the key to decolonizing research is bringing Indigenous peoples into the research process and making the research visible and beneficial to their communities (2008, 15). To ensure the

research is meaningful and beneficial, the community should decide the topic of study while the methodology should incorporate their worldviews (ways of seeing the world) and ethical beliefs at all stages of the research process (Wilson 2008, 15). With this in mind, it is crucial that this project reflects an understanding of these past fraught research relationships, and a dedication to a decolonial approach.

As a settler academic, Morgenson (2012) focuses on “destabilizing the academy” as a goal of decolonizing research. He argues that decolonizing research is not only about modelling Indigenous research, but also challenging “normative knowledge production” to “denaturalize power” within settler societies (Morgenson 2012, 805). He identifies decolonizing methods as activism that anticipates the end of state rule. Morgenson reflects upon the ways in which his Indigenous students challenge the academy from within the institution through their decolonizing methodologies. Specifically, they do this by exposing epistemological norms in research, disturbing academic legitimation by affirming the resonance of research in Indigenous spaces, and communicating in diverse mediums that suit the diversity of Indigenous audiences (Morgenson 2012, 806). For Morgenson (2012), decolonizing research requires the disruption of colonial conditions of knowledge production.

Hart, Straka, and Rowe follow a similar vein as Morgenson, as they argue that decolonizing methodologies are about more than just research; they are about critiquing and destabilizing “the very foundations of our society” that continue to reproduce colonialism at all levels (2017, 333). Their study involves a collaborative team of Indigenous and settler researchers, and they reflect upon the complexities of navigating

their relational accountabilities while working from an Indigenist framework (Hart, Straka and Rowe 2017, 332). This framework reflects similar understandings of Indigenous methodologies discussed by Smith (2012) and Wilson (2008). They define their framework as a progressive Indigenous viewpoint that recognizes colonial oppression, advocates for Indigenous empowerment, and centers the local cultures of Indigenous communities within the research (Hart, Straka and Rowe 2017, 334). They also discuss some ways in which settlers can be part of the decolonization process. For example, settlers can educate members of their own groups, challenge colonial oppression, and support Indigenous people in practices of self-determination (Hart, Straka and Rowe 2017).

In particular, a decolonial approach to language revitalization necessitates firstly understanding that settler colonialism “is a structure and not an event” that is reproduced everyday (Geiger 2017, 223). Geiger explains that settler colonialism involves “the continual reproduction of a colonial relationship that is founded in conquest, but which nonetheless endures across spatially, temporally, and qualitatively different phenomena” (2017, 223). His approach to decolonial language revitalization involves restoring the “logic of the gift,” which dismantles the “logic of elimination” and “death ethic” characteristic of settler colonialism. To escape the “negative situation” of cultural and territorial elimination, dispossession and exclusion of Indigenous peoples must be replaced with the positive logic of the gift (Geiger 2017, 221). This means “materially, subjectively, and politically reorganizing society such that the people, languages, and forms of knowledge that have been marginalized, dispossessed, and subject to the logic

of elimination could become subjects of generous inter-human interaction” (Geiger 2017, 230). This process begins with affirming Indigenous peoples through “loving acts of listening,” and helping to create more spaces where Indigenous languages can be spoken and heard (Geiger 2017, 231). At its core, language revitalization is about people, not about language (Gerdt 2017). My work takes on this people-centered, decolonial approach to considering language and revitalization.

1.2.3 History and Ethnography of the Anishinaabe People of Southern Ontario

Older ethnographies written about the Anishinaabe people of Southern Ontario like those by Jenness (1935) and Rogers (1978) provide some insight into the historical background, social organization, and economic activities of Anishinaabe peoples in the area. Jenness describes how the Ojibwa people originally “all came from another part of the earth in the west,” travelling in small bands and guided by a blessing from the Great Spirit (1935, 1). At this time, Ojibwa peoples lived in bands each led by a Chief— a position that was usually passed down patrilineally—and a Council of other band members (Jenness 1935, 2). They relied on fishing and hunting for subsistence and travelled throughout the territory belonging to their band in smaller groups or individual families relative to the hunting and fishing seasons (Jenness 1935, 7). Bands were further divided into clans representing natural beings like a bird, fish, or animal (Jenness 1935, 8). The clans were patrilineal and exogamous (members would marry outside of their clan) (Jenness 1935, 7). As European settlers began to occupy Ojibwa lands, these ways of life started to change. Ojibwa peoples’ movements were restricted by settlers, and they

were pressured to give up their traditional hunting and fishing practices in favour of activities like agriculture (Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation 2020).

The Saugeen Ojibway Nation refers to the people of The Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, as well as the Saugeen First Nation, which is located on the opposite side of the Bruce Peninsula. These two Nations have a shared history and ancestry (Saugeen Ojibway Nation 2019). The Saugeen Ojibway peoples occupied two million acres of land before the occupation of the British began in the 1700s (Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation 2020). Despite efforts by the Crown to prevent the encroachment of European settlers on Saugeen Ojibway land, this intrusion continued throughout the 1700s and 1800s (Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation 2020). In 1836, the Saugeen Ojibway were convinced to surrender 1.5 million acres of their land which encompassed all lands south of what is now known as Owen Sound (Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation 2020). Today, the land now officially known as Neyaashiinigiing (meaning “point of land surrounded on three side by water” in Ojibwe) Reserve encompasses 15,451 acres of land on the Bruce Peninsula (Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation 2020). This is unceded territory, meaning that the land was never signed over to the Canadian government in a treaty. The Saugeen Ojibway Nation has recently begun a groundbreaking court case against the governments of Ontario and Canada claiming land, treaty rights, and compensation for the treaties broken by the governments (Saugeen Ojibway Nation 2019).

Literature on the Ojibwe language also provides an important understanding of Ojibwe worldviews and ways of life. Spielmann’s monograph (1998) uses linguistic

discourse analysis to explore Ojibwe worldviews in the Algonquin community of Pikogan in northwestern Quebec. He shows that Ojibwe philosophy, spirituality, and culturally specific ways of thinking and doing are “built right into” the structure of the language (Spielmann 1998, 239). For example, through analyzing the Ojibwe language, he demonstrates that harmony in social relations, generosity, and respect for individual autonomy are all central to an Ojibwe worldview (Spielmann 1998). Spielmann also points to the significance of language to Indigenous peoples, saying “There is perhaps no greater sense of need in any Aboriginal community than to keep the Aboriginal language strong. Language is the soul of a people” (Spielmann 1998, 49). He describes how knowledge of one’s Indigenous language is considered an intrinsic part of being Anishinaabe, as languages are a gift from the Creator, and embody this unique relationship to the Creator and “attitudes, beliefs, values and the fundamental notion of what is truth” (Spielmann 1998, 50).

Similarly, Valentine’s (1995) ethnography about Severn Ojibwe in Lynx Lake, an Anihshiniwak community in northwestern Ontario, uses discourse analysis to describe Ojibwe communicative practices in daily life. Her study on language in use contributes to the ethnography of speaking through an analysis of various speech genres and speech events in the community, including discourse over trail radios through the band’s radio station and during church services (Valentine 1995). She describes how new technologies and ideas are uniquely incorporated into existing and “traditional” community contexts, which is reflected through language use (Valentine 1995). Valentine (1995) seeks to center the voices of the Anihshiniwak in her work through a focus on

individuals' conversations in Ojibwe within the text. These sources provided me with some background knowledge of the Ojibwe language and the worldview that it embodies.

Basil Johnston (1929-2015) is a prolific Anishinaabe author, storyteller, and educator. He was a member of the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation and lived in Neyaashiinigiimiing for many years. After working as a secondary school history teacher throughout the 1960s, Johnston was hired by the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in 1970 to give lectures based on artifacts from the museum (1990a). Through this work, Johnston identified a need for better educational materials on the Anishinaabe peoples (1990a). Thus, he began using storytelling in his lectures and books to teach others about Anishinaabe ways of life and to revitalize Anishinaabe culture and language. Over the course of his life and twenty-five-year career at the ROM, Johnston published twenty-five books in English and five in Anishinaabemowin (1990a). When he retired to Neyaashiinigiimiing in 1995, he continued teaching and writing, shifting more of his focus to revitalizing Anishinaabemowin.

In his 2011 book *Think Indian: Languages are Beyond Price*, Johnston wrote, "it is language that imparts upon people different values, ideals, outlooks, perceptions, understandings, aspirations, institutions, and influences their customs and traditions and manners" (Basil 2011, 129). For Johnston, languages embody the unique wisdom of a group of people. When a language is no longer spoken, the world loses a wellspring of knowledge from which to share or borrow ideas (Johnston 2011, 130). He argues that speaking an Indigenous language is an exercise of one's freedom of speech, and that Indigenous languages are comparable to dissent in their embodiment of different

opinions, perspectives, insights, and understandings (Johnston 2011, 131). Johnston (1990b, 10) says:

There is cause to lament but it is the native peoples who have the most cause to lament the passing of their languages. They lose not only the ability to express the simplest of daily sentiments and needs but they can no longer understand the ideas, concepts, insights, attitudes, rituals, ceremonies, institutions brought into being by their ancestors; and, having lost the power to understand, cannot sustain, enrich, or pass on their heritage. No longer will they think Indian or feel Indian.

Through Johnston's work, he aims to inspire Indigenous people, especially youth, to learn the language of their ancestors. He espouses the inherent value of all languages and calls for the government to take direct responsibility not only for the loss of Indigenous languages, but for their revitalization efforts (Johnston 2011, 132).

1.2.4 Language Revitalization

Researchers have responded to issues of language loss by examining different practices of language revitalization in various communities. To make language learning engaging and effective, youth must be involved, and their voices must be heard in the process. Despite this crucial point, perceptions of young community members are mostly absent from the language revitalization literature (Davis 2018; Hermes and King 2013; Johnson 2017; Moore and MacDonald 2013; Morcom and Roy 2019; Pitawanakwat 2018). This lack of attention to youth perspectives is significant, as youth are terribly affected by the loss of Indigenous languages. As the number of fluent speakers declines, there are fewer knowledge keepers to pass on the language to the younger generation as they come of age (United Nations 2009). This has created a sense of urgency around the revitalization and preservation of languages for future generations. A few studies

outline the creative ways in which youth exercise their agency through their Indigenous language (Muehlmann 2008; Wyman 2012). Within the Cucapá community in Mexico, for instance, youth demonstrate their agency to claim their Indigenous identities through the use of “groserías,” Cucapá swear words (Muehlmann 2008).

Outside of academia, there are many examples of exceptional young Indigenous language learners who show a deep commitment to language revitalization. Adelyn Newman-Ting is the 11-year-old author of the book *Finding the Language* (2021). In her debut book, illustrated by Justine Greenfield, Newman-Ting tells a beautiful story about Kesugilakw (Kesu) and Bob, two young friends who embark on an adventure to save the Kwak’wala language and the land. With the help of a raven named gwa’wina, a wolf named u’ligaan, and a group of children from their community, the friends solve clues they receive from Elders using Kwak’wala words, knowledge, and cultural practices (Newman-Ting 2021).

In addition to learning some Kwak’wala words, readers of *Finding the Language* get to learn about the special relationship between the land and the language. In the book, an Elder shares: “Our culture comes from the land. Our language comes from the land. Our knowledge comes from the land. The future is on our shoulders, because all living life depends upon each other” (Newman-Ting 2021, 51). Within the story, Newman-Ting includes a discussion of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 13, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Article 13. SDG 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable high-quality education and promote

lifelong learning opportunities for all,” while SDG 13 calls for immediate action to address climate change (Newman-Ting 2021, 4). UNDRIP Article 13 outlines Indigenous peoples’ right to “revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons” (United Nations 2007, art. 13). By weaving this discussion into the story, Newman-Ting emphasizes the importance of Indigenous language revitalization and reveals its inherent connection to caring for the land. She also reminds her readers of Indigenous peoples’ rights to language, which have long been recognized internationally through UNDRIP (2007). Newman-Ting’s imaginative story serves as an inspiring example of young Indigenous people’s passion for their languages and revitalization, with a hopeful eye towards the future. As the future learners, speakers, and teachers of their languages, young people are powerful stakeholders in language revitalization efforts. Their participation in such efforts is therefore crucial to effective and sustainable language revitalization.

Some anthropological and sociological studies on language revitalization provide general overviews of current language revitalization strategies (Galla 2016; McIvor and Anisman 2018; Pitawanakwat 2018). Pitawanakwat’s interview-based study consults language activists, scholars, and teachers in Canadian cities and reserves to assess Anishinaabemowin revitalization methods and strategies (2018). These experts find that immersion schools, where youth are taught primarily in Anishinaabemowin from a young age, are the best way to get people speaking. Pitawanakwat (2018) emphasizes that language learning is ideally social and linked to cultural teachings. For her study on the

use of technology in language revitalization strategies, Galla (2016) spoke with language teachers and experts from many different Indigenous communities across the world. While her participants found that there are great possibilities for the use of technology in language revitalization—especially for engaging with youth—a lack of funding and resources presents significant barriers for many (Galla 2016). Hermes and King (2013) analyze the use of simulated-immersion Ojibwe language software by two different families. Focusing on the parents, their study finds that the use of the software was easily incorporated into their family dynamics (Hermes and King 2013). Each study mentions and involves youth in some way, at least acknowledging the importance of their participation in revitalization. However, none actually consult young people on how they think or feel about their Indigenous language, or their communities' revitalization strategies. This study will begin to fill this wide gap in the research.

Much of the past research focuses on organized language revitalization programs like formal language lessons and classroom activities (Davis 2018; Galla 2016; Hermes and King 2013; Johnson 2017; Moore and MacDonald 2013; Morcom and Roy 2019). This study will provide a more holistic understanding of language revitalization through also analyzing the everyday, informal, community-based and traditional methods of language transmission and revitalization. Moore and MacDonald's (2013) study analyzes literacy practices like orthography and school-based language acquisition in an Aboriginal Head Start program, focusing on perspectives of teachers involved in the program. Johnson's (2017) work details her experiences with two adult participants in piloting and assessing the effectiveness of the author's Tlingit textbooks and sequenced curriculum.

Many similar studies acknowledge the significance of the “real world” application of language and the importance of fostering domains of language use, yet overlook these domains in favour of more institutional forms of language transmission. This study will capture a more complete picture of language transmission and revitalization through attention to these institutional contexts as well as language use and learning in everyday contexts, from the perspectives of language learners and speakers.

1.2.4.1 Case Studies on Language Revitalization in the Literature

Now I will explore some language revitalization practices within the literature, focusing on the North American context, then narrowing the scope to Ojibwe/Anishinaabemowin revitalization strategies. After the review, I will draw some conclusions about common best practices, challenges, and possibilities for existing approaches to Indigenous language revitalization. I chose to discuss the following case studies because they provide an overview of a wide range of approaches and contexts.

1.2.4.1.1 North American Indigenous Language Revitalization Strategies

Davis’ (2018) study examines the revitalization strategies for the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma. The Nation created a centralized language department, which began by recruiting Speakers—people who have spoken Chickasaw since childhood. The Speakers went into the community to find, assess, and recruit other Speakers to help create and facilitate language programs (Davis 2018). This is significant because community-led language revitalization strategies are key to the success of such efforts. This is a central tenet of “language reclamation,” a decolonial approach developed by Wesley Leonard (2012), which emphasizes the community’s right to speak a language

and to have community agents “set associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives” (359).

The community now has extensive language programming, including a Master/Apprentice program, camps for youth, and community, high school, and university classes (Davis 2018). Davis (2018) demonstrates that the most effective of these is the Master/Apprentice program, which pairs a student one-on-one with a fluent Chickasaw Speaker. The learner and Speaker spend ten to twenty hours together outside of a classroom setting each week for two to three years (Davis 2018). The program’s success is due to the fact that it is immersive (i.e., fully spoken in Chickasaw), oral conversation-based, and focused on everyday situations and contexts (Davis 2018). By learning Chickasaw through conversation and face-to-face interaction, learners are better able to apply knowledge to their own lived experiences outside of the formal learning process.

The Nation also creates merchandise with Chickasaw words, holds language-themed events, and uses extensive Chickasaw signage within the community’s public service buildings (Davis 2018). These initiatives have created a tremendous amount of visibility for the language throughout the Nation. The Nation has placed Speakers at the centre of the community by creating significant roles and paid positions for Speakers as translators, teachers, and Masters (Davis 2018). These efforts have led to the valorization of the Chickasaw language and Speakers, so much so that people strongly associate their Chickasaw identity with their linguistic status, or their relationship to Speakers or learners (Davis 2018). Chickasaw revitalization is so prevalent in the community that some learners label objects and places in their homes and offices, helping themselves

and others who encounter those spaces to learn Chickasaw (Davis 2018). Sometimes this involves a creative process in which people use their knowledge of Chickasaw to come up with new words. For example, Matt, the Martial Arts Coordinator and an Apprentice from the Master/Apprentice program, created a sign in Chickasaw to indicate his office (Davis 2018, 115). He had to create a new word, using the original Japanese meaning of karate, “empty hand,” to make *ilbuk iksho itenachi*, which translates to “hand empty teach” (Davis 2018, 115).

Ultimately, this study on language revitalization for the Chickasaw Nation presents a unique case. The Nation’s profitable enterprises provide them with the resources to invest in language revitalization and allow for their outstanding success. In a survey in 2007, Davis found that 39% of respondents reported knowing or being able to understand a few Chickasaw words (2018, 147). A 2014 survey saw that number rose to 59%, revealing a 20% increase in the amount of people with introductory knowledge of the language (Davis 2018, 147). This progression demonstrates the direct impact of the Nation’s various efforts over the past decade. The Nation’s revitalization strategies and successes provide a helpful and hopeful example for other communities of what can be done to facilitate language revitalization with the help of much-needed resources.

Galla (2016) finds that a lack of funding and resources stands in the way for many communities considering incorporating technology into their revitalization strategies. Technologies discussed include audio and video recordings, instant messaging, interactive video conferencing, interactive computer games, and surfing the internet (Galla 2016). When feasible and appropriate, technology is an effective means for

recording and distributing language materials (Galla 2016). It is especially helpful for people who live away from their traditional homelands, as they can stay connected despite their geographical distance (Galla 2016). For example, one learner says that video conferencing allows her to speak with and hear fluent speakers in conversation, which she otherwise would not experience living away from the community (Galla 2016, 1143). Needless to say, the use of technology has become exponentially more important to language revitalization efforts due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Galla's study also shows that incorporating technology is a great way to engage and empower youth to get involved in revitalization efforts (2016). One survey respondent said that if youth are even remotely interested in language, they may be enticed by technology as it can make learning fun and engaging (Galla 2016, 1144). Another respondent stated that when youth get involved, their skills are valued by language teachers, especially Elders who may not be comfortable with using technology (Galla 2016, 1144). Tech has the potential to bring together youth ("digital natives") and Elders (language and knowledge keepers) to work collaboratively to document and create language resources (Galla 2016, 1144).

Like Davis (2018), the authors of a study on Halq'eméylem revitalization in a school-based language program in British Columbia emphasize the importance of community participation in language revitalization (Moore and MacDonald 2013). Elders are deeply involved in the creation and implementation of the Stó:lō Head Start program, run solely by community members (Moore and MacDonald 2013). Twenty families participate in activities based around a seasonal calendar created by Stó:lō Elders (Moore

and MacDonald 2013). The cyclical calendar reflects traditional practices and activities that Stó:lō people would historically be doing at different times of the year. For example, the calendar shows that during Xets'o:westel (November/December), people would be moving from longhouses to pithouses, making baskets, nets and blankets, hunting deer and ducks, and smoking fish (Moore and MacDonald 2013, 717). This is important because the seasonal rounds “are inseparable from the community’s spiritual and social life as well as the changes the community has experienced in the most recent past” (Moore and MacDonald 2013, 709). This emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant language education that is rooted in key traditional practices and knowledge, like those on the cyclical calendar. For this community, it is important for language lessons to be grounded in these cultural contexts because learning culture and language are mutually reinforcing (Moore and MacDonald 2013).

Due to a shortage of fluent speakers to participate in the program, teachers are often learners as well (Moore and MacDonald 2013). Immersion is not an option, so the program is mostly text-based. This means that Halq'eméylem literacy has become central to revitalization. Although generally seen as unfavourable compared with more immersive approaches, codeswitching (shifting between multiple languages in a conversation) between Halq'eméylem and English is required in this context because there are so few fluent speakers (Moore and MacDonald 2013). Moore and MacDonald (2013) find that English is used in a unique way as a helpful teaching tool to direct learners’ attention to key words and make learning easier and more accessible. To support reading comprehension, teachers place Halq'eméylem labels on objects around the classroom

and students play interactive computer games (Moore and MacDonald 2013). Learners read along while singing popular English songs translated into Halq'eméylem, promoting written and oral learning (Moore and MacDonald 2013). Teachers then provide parents with paper copies of the songs so that they may sing along together after the program, continuing their learning in the home through family time (Moore and MacDonald 2013). This process works to reinforce intergenerational language transmission, which is considered a culturally appropriate way of teaching and learning.

A study on Tlingit revitalization in B.C. describes another classroom-based strategy with a more immersive, highly structured approach (Johnson 2017). Johnson (2017) describes studying Tlingit with two other learners, using an intensive sequenced curriculum that she designed herself with textbooks, teaching manuals, learning objectives, and regular assessments. The curriculum, referred to as the Direct Acquisition Method, is fully immersive and includes games, activities, and sentence drills (Johnson 2017). There are six textbooks in total, each accompanied by teaching manuals, computer games, and audio recordings of Elders speaking (Johnson 2017). Johnson (2017) argues that since Tlingit is “critically endangered,” the focus should not be on teaching children, but on creating parent-aged fluent speakers. Learners need to spend a total of 2,000 hours or two years of full-time study to become advanced speakers (Johnson 2017). Once enough adult speakers are created, the final step in the process is to create domains of language use like immersion schools and language nests to support youth learning (Johnson 2017).

1.2.4.1.2 Anishinaabemowin Revitalization Strategies

Considering strategies for revitalizing Anishinaabemowin in particular, different approaches emerge that explicitly aim to take language out of this classroom setting and into the home. To Hermes and King (2013), bringing Ojibwe back into the home is critical to reviving intergenerational language transmission. Like Moore and MacDonald (2013), their goal is to create more informal, family-based learning (Hermes and King 2013). As most researchers acknowledge, language learning must be rooted in real-world contexts to be most effective, creating a connection between learning and use in everyday places like the home. Hermes and King (2013) argue that immersion schools and organized programs do not provide this connection and have not produced enough fluent speakers. Further, while school-based efforts provide status and support for Indigenous languages, they “also tend to transform that language, both in form and in function, into an academic, frozen, and culturally disconnected register” (Hermes and King 2013, 127).

Hermes and King (2013) analyzed the use of simulated-immersion Ojibwe language software called *Ojibwemodaa!* by two different families. They found that use of the computer program was easily incorporated into the families' schedules and dynamics. For example, Melinda, and her son, Mic, had a friendly rivalry and would often tease each other (Hermes and King 2013, 132). This translated into their use of the software when they turned it into a game and competed to see who knew the most Ojibwe (Hermes and King 2013, 132). Their rivalry made the potentially dull task of language learning more collaborative and engaging. For Melinda and Mic, the learning also became interpersonal, providing an opportunity to develop their mother/son connection (Hermes and King 2013).

Hermes and King (2013) also found that the parents were more interested and invested in the software than the children and were aware of the larger goal of using Ojibwe meaningfully in conversations. Despite trying to encourage their children to think in the same way, parents reported that the kids treated the software like a chore (Hermes and King 2013). Although using it for eight weeks did not lead to significant use of Ojibwe in the broader context of the home, it prompted interest in and discussion about the language (Hermes and King 2013). In this way, technology can act as a basic starting point for language learning. Encouragingly, parents expressed that they felt less intimidated and more excited about learning Ojibwe after using *Ojibwemodaa!* (Hermes and King 2013). Hermes and King (2013) say that more research must be done to understand what kind of tools can be more engaging for youth.

Though there is value in the more informal approach the researchers argue for, perhaps this approach is too informal to create and support fluent speakers in a timely and effective way. This kind of software may be useful as a supplement to other kinds of learning, like in the way that similar software is used in the Stó:lō Head Start program (Moore and MacDonald 2013). Hermes and King (2013) make some generalizations about immersion schools and language programs as overly rigid and formal institutions that do not promote meaningful learning and use outside of the classroom. In contrast to this perspective, research that focuses on immersion schools reveals that these programs aim to promote deep learning and use in everyday contexts.

Pitawanakwat's (2018) interviews with twenty-two Indigenous language activists and scholars found that for Anishinaabemowin, immersion school is the quickest and

most effective way to get kids speaking. One language activist argues that immersion programs with Elders and fluent speakers are “the only way the language will come back” (Pitawanakwat 2018, 465). With Elders re-centered in their traditional roles as teachers, cultural ways of thinking and doing can be embedded in children’s lives through education (Pitawanakwat 2018). One educator, Barb Nolan, says that when she is teaching in immersion, she uses what she refers to as “The Natural Approach” (Pitawanakwat 2018, 464). While Nolan talks to the class, she gestures with her hands, uses facial expressions, picks up tangible things, and draws (Pitawanakwat 2018, 464). This way, the students can see and hear what she is talking about to “catch the gist” of what she is saying, which is how they learn (Pitawanakwat 2018, 464). Immersion allows students to go beyond using simple vocabulary by learning nuances and how to think in Anishinaabemowin (Pitawanakwat 2018). Another educator, Mary Ann Naokwegijig-Corbiere says, “Ideally, from immersion, the learner would internalize ways of expressing thoughts that are natural to our language... They're not force fitting Anishinaabemowin into an English way of expressing thoughts” (Pitawanakwat 2018, 465). Contrary to Hermes and King (2013), Pitawanakwat (2018) finds that the real barriers for learning within immersion education are not the structure and academic setting, but the lack of funding and fluent speakers needed to create effective programs.

Pitawanakwat (2018) shows that language revitalization must be engaging and social. Creative activities like theatre programs, karaoke, and speed dating encourage people to use the language and have fun doing it (Pitawanakwat 2018). For example, one language class performed a theatrical production of a Nanabush story, all in Ojibwe

(Pitawanakwat 2018, 471). Afterwards, the teacher found that the students became close friends and affectionately called each other by their characters' Ojibwe names (Pitawanakwat 2018, 471). They were more confident in their use of the language and took responsibility for their learning by trying out new words and phrases. Speaking Ojibwe became "part of their personality" (Pitawanakwat 2018, 471).

Like Hermes and King (2013), this study highlights the importance of bringing teachings back to the land, where Anishinaabemowin came from. As Anishinaabe linguist, author, and teacher Basil Johnston says, Anishinaabe education was always land-based (Pitawanakwat 2018). Johnston also advocates for starting with oral teaching and learning, which is how Ojibwe was originally used (Pitawanakwat 2018). Emphasizing this point, Nolan says, "The thing is the language must be heard. The language must be listened to. Then the language will be understood and then the language will be spoken" (Pitawanakwat 2018, 465). Multiple participants talked about immersive summer language camps for youth as an ideal example of culturally appropriate teaching (Pitawanakwat 2018). Land-based immersion activities, such as fishing and medicine gathering, bring back this essential connection to the land through language (Pitawanakwat 2018).

Morcom and Roy (2019) focus on a community-based Ojibwe immersion program for kindergarten children on Manitoulin Island. In the program, Ojibwe is the primary language of instruction, and the teacher acts as a guide to the children's learning based on their interests (Morcom and Roy 2019). It focuses on traditional Anishinaabe ways of teaching and learning, emphasizing graphic arts, traditional activities and cognitive,

social, and language development (Morcom and Roy 2019). After recording the progress of a class of twelve students over two years, the researchers found a significant increase in fluency and pride in Ojibwe language and culture among the children (Morcom and Roy 2019). The most significant improvement was in the students' sentence completion, which is very important as it indicates semantic, morphological and syntactic growth, as well as the understanding of complex verb structures, since Anishinaabemowin is a verb-based language (Morcom and Roy 2019, 558). At the end of their first year in immersion, students scored 39% in this area, and doubled that score to 78% by the end of the second year (Morcom and Roy 2019, 558). This is crucial for the goals of revitalization, as students will have the skills, knowledge, and enthusiasm to pass on Ojibwe to future generations (Morcom and Roy 2019). As in many other cases, a lack of funding is a major limitation for this program since the children must move to English school after three years of the program.

This review encompasses only a small number of the myriad innovative approaches to revitalization. Nonetheless, there are some common threads from these studies related to strengths, limitations, and possibilities for language revitalization. Overwhelmingly, a lack of fluent speakers, funding, and resources are major limitations for communities. Some communities work around the lack of fluent speakers by using alternative, text-based approaches. It is also agreed that teachings should be rooted in cultural practices and knowledge, like learning in connection to the land. Most valuable are approaches that include face-to-face conversation and are based in real-world contexts, as they allow the learning to be applied in everyday life. For young people,

immersion schools and programs are the most effective means of teaching. There are many possibilities for the use of technology to help engage youth, make learning more accessible, and supplement other methods of language learning. Finally, community members must be in the lead for language revitalization projects to be sustainable and appropriate. Understanding these needs and challenges for revitalization projects is crucial to creating comprehensive and effective language revitalization strategies, ultimately ensuring the vitality of Indigenous languages.

1.2.5 Language Ideology

The concept of language ideology is a significant part of my theoretical approach to this study. Language ideology has been defined in numerous ways in anthropological literature on language. Woolard defines language ideology in general terms as “representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (1998, 3). Reflecting more on how language ideologies relate to use, Silverstein defines language ideologies as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (1979, 193). More recently, Wyman comments on the taken-for-granted nature of ideologies as “seemingly common-sense assumptions about languages relating to communities’ sociohistorical circumstances” (2009, 337). Language ideology is not about language alone; language ideologies create ties between language and identity, aesthetics, morality, and epistemology (Woolard 1998, 4).

Language ideologies have the power to shape and alter languages and people’s relationships to those languages (Woolard 1998, 12). Politicized ideologies of language

can work to privilege certain linguistic structures and languages over others. For example, perceptions of what is or is not a “real” or “legitimate” language have been used to rationalize decisions about “the civility and even the humanity of others” (Woolard 1998, 25). Most significantly, colonial language ideologies have historically painted Indigenous languages—and thus, Indigenous minds and societies—as inadequate (Woolard 1998). These ideologies, which have been and continue to be used to justify the subjugation of Indigenous peoples and their languages in Canada, have had a lasting and profound effect on Indigenous communities working to maintain their languages today. Spielmann quotes a Mohawk Elder who says, “A history of Canadian government suppression and oppression of Native languages has created an attitude of apathy and fatalism about the need and utility of Native languages by the Native people themselves” (1998, 51). These negative attitudes towards Indigenous languages form a serious barrier to language revitalization efforts.

While colonial language ideologies tend to be more implicit today, they are still present and therefore continue to compound issues of ideology faced by Indigenous communities. For example, common rhetorical practices used by the media and even “experts” on Indigenous language and revitalization may actually work to alienate and harm speaker communities (Davis 2017; Hill 2008). Linguistic extraction is one such rhetorical practice. This refers to the act of “defining, analysing, and representing languages and the people connected to them separately from the complex socio-historical, political, and deeply personal contexts in which they actually occur” (Davis 2017, 40). This practice represents languages as objects to be collected, preserved, and

admired, apart from the lived and embodied experiences of the people to whom the language belongs (Davis 2017). Davis (2017) argues that extraction is colonial in nature.

These kinds of rhetorical practices can also lead to the erasure of colonial agency in processes of language shift. Some work misstates the problem of language shift by leaving out sociohistorical dynamics that create and shape it: historical and ongoing colonialism and globalization (Davis 2017). In some cases, erasure of colonial agency can shift blame onto communities or individuals, essentially victim-blaming (Davis 2017). For example, Suslack (2011) examines the media discourse surrounding a popular story of two “last speakers” of Ayapaneco who “refuse to speak to each other.” The sensationalized and inaccurate news stories surrounding the speakers extract them from their lived experiences and sociohistorical context to imply that the loss of Ayapaneco can be attributed to the fact that the two speakers are “feuding” (Suslack 2011). Though it drew attention to the issue, the speakers faced media scrutiny and criticism from their community members due to these unfair media representations (Suslack 2011).

Another common rhetorical practice is to refer to Indigenous languages as “dying,” “dead,” or “extinct,” inaccurately implying a sort of finality. For example, Leonard (2012), Miami linguist and language activist, challenges this rhetoric through a discussion of his community’s reclamation of myaamia. The language was dormant for thirty years but has since been reclaimed and spoken once again using historical language documentation and revitalization programming (Leonard 2012). This example defies presumptions of extinction once the “last fluent speaker” passes away. When combined with the essentialist idea that “when a language dies, a culture dies,” these perspectives can work

to invalidate the cultural identities of communities and can even hinder their access to government resources essential to revitalization efforts (Schwartz 2018).

To combat harmful practices and rhetoric that perpetuate settler colonial desires to quantify, regulate, and erase Indigenous communities, Davis (2017) and Leonard (2012; 2019) provide us with some alternative frameworks and approaches to language revitalization that focus on survivance, reclamation, empowerment, and inclusion for all members of Indigenous language communities. First, to combat processes of extracting language from the lived contexts of the language community, Davis (2017) proposes centering languages within social contexts, embodied experiences and individual lives. Approaches to language revitalization should emphasize historical and social causes of language endangerment, including the personal effects for those community members often left out of extractive models of endangered language dynamics (Davis 2017). Davis (2017) says that communities are often eager to situate their languages within social, historical, and geopolitical contexts, pointing out the role of colonial government. Another important factor is the inclusion of participants who are not just first-language speakers (Davis 2017). One strategy of intentionally rooting language revitalization approaches to context is using a community's definitions for critical terms, as they are often different than accepted definitions from academia (Davis 2017). For example, Davis discusses how one language activist questions linguists' assumption that the body is separate from the mind, and that language is therefore a product of the mind (2017, 49). The community he worked with rejected this singular definition and framed language in multiple different ways, like as a basket, or a life narrative (Davis 2017, 49). It is essential to understand

these lived realities of language communities in order to reject colonial practices of extraction.

Attention to language community members' lived experiences also leads to locating languages within colonial processes and language shift. Davis recalls an interview with a Chickasaw woman who reflected upon how her mother never spoke Chickasaw to her as a child because of her mother's painful experiences being forced to speak English in school (2017, 51). Her mother did not speak Chickasaw at home because she wanted to spare her children the embarrassment and pain she experienced as a child from speaking her language (Davis 2017, 51). This story reflects this woman's experiences with language, the wider experiences of older generations in her community, and crucially, the real circumstances surrounding language shift and colonization. These kinds of stories counter narratives that blame communities for the purported random abandonment of their language.

To push back against limited definitions of speakers and "counting down" to the "inevitable end" of Indigenous languages, communities discuss how languages can become "dormant," then "awaken" (Davis 2017, 52). These terms counter the finality and inevitability of a 'countdown' to 'death,' and more accurately demonstrate that languages can be 'saved' and not simply 'lost' (Davis 2017, 52). Davis also emphasizes the use of alternative phrases like "language survivance," a combination of "survival" and "resistance", representing moving beyond narratives of Indigenous tragedy and colonial dominance (2017, 48). Crucially, community-based language reclamation efforts emphasize inclusion of a wide range of speakers, language learners and supporters of

language reclamation. In this way, all those invested in language reclamation are represented, supported, and validated—no one is left out of the conversation.

Leonard (2012; 2019) echoes many of Davis' (2017) suggestions for alternative approaches to revitalization. He says the “discourse of loss” limits what Indigenous languages and their communities are allowed to be (Leonard 2019). Leonard proposes a framework of “language reclamation,” which goes beyond revitalization to focus not only on the language itself, but also to intervene in the power structures and social factors that influence language shift. It involves the wider goal of communities claiming their right to speak the language (Leonard 2019). Stepping away from goals of linguistic fluency, language reclamation starts with addressing specific historical contexts and community needs and responds accordingly (Leonard 2019). Leonard shows how, in his own context as a member of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, language programming uses the theoretical approach of language reclamation which brings tribal members together to reinforce a positive Miami identity (Leonard 2019). These programs are guided by the principle of the importance of relationships to connect with other tribal members, tribal land, and Miami ways of knowing (Leonard 2019). Rather than focusing on defining and limiting speaker identities, reclamation-centered approaches seek to empower all community members and their multiple identities.

Leonard (2012) discusses how cultural essentialisms that contribute to the construction of identity in relation to authenticity are not just external pressures, but can persist from within communities as well. He discusses how, within the Miami context, he has seen potential myaamia learners and speakers struggle with wanting to reclaim their

Miami identities through learning the language, but becoming conflicted about the ways that “traditional” Miami cultural practices contradict with their own contemporary lived experiences and ways of knowing (Leonard 2012). The program in question empowers some participants but inhibits those who do not identify with these essentialized values promoted by the program, as they feel pressured to “act, think or speak in certain ways” deemed to be “traditional” and therefore “authentically” myaamia (Leonard 2012, 339). He uses the example of Miami perspectives on gender, which contradict the ways that many people, including himself, experience and perceive gender today (Leonard 2012). He says we should adopt new discourses and practices to counter these issues.

One way is to acknowledge community members’ shared history, language, kinship and cultural norms, while also recognizing the different ideas, abilities and interests that allow people to thrive in a contemporary context (Leonard 2012). Leonard (2012) says that the community’s power lies in capitalizing upon this diversity and maintaining a balance. More appropriate and accurate rhetoric recognizes the multifaceted identities that people possess. Connected to this is the acknowledgement that not all participants will fully identify with all the norms of any given group, which does not affect their authenticity or claim to that group’s shared identity (Leonard 2012). Another tenet of reclamation for Leonard (2012) is the idea that all Miamis can contribute to defining “Miami culture.” He states that “one way to institute this idea is to establish opportunities for participants to claim new practices and to influence existing ones—all of which will be myaamia since this is the shared tribal association around which these practices are organized” (Leonard 2012, 359-360). For example, youth camps adopted a

modern Miami greeting song, which spread to other Miami events and is now a “myaamia practice” despite the fact that it follows a Western melody (Leonard 2012, 360). These kinds of practices and rhetoric create a stronger sense of Miami identity, especially for people who may not identify with “traditional ways” and might therefore be seen as or feel less “authentically” Miami (Leonard 2012). Through these practices and rhetorics of reclamation and survivance, we resist colonial approaches, and all community members invested in language revitalization are empowered to participate and reclaim Indigenous languages and identities.

To work to alter harmful ideologies and support revitalization, the 2005 Canadian Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (TFALC) promotes the public recognition of the inherent value of Indigenous languages and the knowledges they embody. Many of their recommendations reflect the understanding that when a language is held in high regard, there is a greater interest in speaking and using it. They say, “some language planners go so far as to suggest that conferring power and prestige on a language is the surest way of reversing language decline” (TFALC 2005, 75). They cite the UNESCO Action Plan for Endangered Languages, which calls for governments to “create the conditions which facilitate the active use of and access to those languages, by, *inter alia*, assigning all relevant languages their rightful place in the educational system, media, and access to cyberspace, subject to the wishes of individual speech communities” (TFALC 2005, 82). Additionally, they call governments to “foster speech communities’ pride in their own languages and cultures, as well as secure equal prestige for all languages of a state” (TFALC 2005, 82). The TFALC generally calls for the

Canadian government to support these changes to create domains of Indigenous language use in society, and foster community pride and prestige of languages by granting official language status and rights. It is clear that addressing language ideology is a central tenet of language revitalization efforts, as language ideologies have the power to either support or hinder language revitalization. In order to assess language revitalization efforts within a community, it is imperative to examine the underlying beliefs and attitudes about Indigenous languages within the language community, which this study aims to do.

While other studies on Indigenous language revitalization touch on issues related to language ideology, it is rarely named as a concept or discussed explicitly, despite its significance to the revitalization process (Davis 2018; Hermes and King 2013; Morcom and Roy 2019; Pitawanakwat 2018; Spielmann 1998; Wesley 2012). As an exception, Wyman (2009) examines Yup'ik youth language ideologies and practices to determine how linguistic resources are shaped in daily life in the community and how schooling impacts Indigenous languages and knowledge systems. Her examination of youth language ideologies provides key insights into significant sociolinguistic changes in the community and has the potential to help language planners, educators, and community members reassess, refocus, and strategically rebuild language learning opportunities (Wyman 2009). Like Wyman's work, this study will bring language ideology to the forefront through a detailed examination of the perspectives and feelings of community members on the Ojibwe language. This approach allows for a deeper and more nuanced

understanding of the state of language revitalization within Neyaashiinigiing with the goal of aiding language revitalization strategies.

2 Chapter 2: Methods and Introduction to Language in Neyaashiinigiing

2.1 Methods

This project consists of four general steps: 1. Relationship Building and Project Planning, 2. Data Collection, 3. Data Analysis and Writing, and 4. Knowledge Mobilization. To collect the data, I employed the method of semi-structured interviews, conducted both online and over the phone, with community members who may or may not have participated in language programming. Initially, this research was meant to involve six weeks of participant observation in the community. Unfortunately, due to safety concerns arising from COVID-19, interviews had to be conducted virtually to maintain a safe physical distance. To answer my research question, I asked about participants' perspectives on and experiences with Ojibwe and revitalization.

2.1.1 Relationship Building and Project Planning

My relationship with the Nawash community at Neyaashiinigiing began in 2018, when I participated in the University of Guelph's Project Serve program. Alongside a handful of other undergraduate students, I travelled to Neyaashiinigiing over reading week where I stayed with a host family. During the trip, I met community members at various locations such as the Band Office, Seniors' Centre, Elementary School, Fisheries, and Firehall. At these places, I began learning about people's experiences and the history of the community. It was through Project Serve that I met Miptoon, an Elder and Band Councilor in Neyaashiinigiing. Miptoon acted as our guide during our visit, taking us for

walks on the land and sharing some of his teachings. The following year, I reached out to Miptoon to talk about potentially collaborating on a research project.

The process of applying to the Public Issues Anthropology program and obtaining funding for my project required me to create a Statement of Intent and a rough Project Proposal. At that early stage in the process, I had not yet established whether community members in Neyaashiinigiing were interested in participating in a project on language. As a settler undergraduate student with no experience conducting research, it felt counterintuitive to a decolonial research process to even attempt to identify a need for research in the community. This is one of the ways in which program and research requirements of the University can work against a decolonial research process. Nonetheless, with guidance from my advisor, Tad, I created a preliminary plan with the caveat that any part of the project, at any time, was subject to change based on guidance from the community.

My original proposal involved an analysis of the role that Indigenous language plays in the lives of youth on reserve, their perceptions of their Indigenous language, and the various ways in which Indigenous language is transmitted from generation to generation. I endeavoured to use a form of participant observation, spending time with youth on reserve to understand the role played by Ojibwe in their daily lives, as well as the more informal, traditional methods of language transmission. I had hoped to learn about more organizational forms of language transmission by spending time at the Language Nest. These methods were to be complemented by in-depth interviews with youth, Elders, and other community members.

When I reached out to Miptoon in late 2019, he expressed an interest in a project on language and invited me back to the community for a visit in February 2020. During that visit, Miptoon introduced me to Polly Keeshig-Tobias, the Community Language Development Worker at the Language Nest. During conversations with Polly, she shared her perspective on some of the challenges to language revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing. She noted that while language has been acknowledged as a priority in the community, there are still barriers that prevent people from attending language lessons and learning Ojibwe. Polly also advised me to broaden the scope of the project by discussing language with people of all ages, as opposed to speaking only with youth.

It was in later conversations with Miptoon and Polly that the vision for the project came together: an overview of the strengths and challenges of language revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing from the perspectives of community members of all ages. Polly expressed that this kind of review had never been done before in the community. As I previously mentioned, it was imperative that the research question, and entire project, be formulated by the community to ensure a decolonial research process as well as useful, meaningful results. Miptoon graciously agreed to act as my Elder guide and mentor throughout the research and to help me obtain ethics approval for the project from Chief and Council.

Just as plans for my summer 2020 stay in the community were beginning to take shape, everything came to a screeching halt. As the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, a research project on language was the last thing on anyone's mind. I held on to the original in-person plans for this project for as long as I could, but as weeks in lockdown

turned into months, it became increasingly clear that plans for this project would need to change. In the summer of 2020, Miptoon agreed that we should move forward with the project relying on phone and video call interviews.

2.1.2 Data Collection and COVID-19

After the revised project proposal received ethics approval from Chief and Council, Miptoon and his wife, Debbie, distributed the recruitment materials to people whom they thought may be interested. The materials included a letter of invitation and a researcher pledge (see Appendix B) which were reviewed and pre-approved by Miptoon.

I invited any member of the community above the age of 10 to participate in the study. It was important to include children of elementary school age, as they are deeply involved with language revitalization efforts in the community through their schooling. Since children cannot provide informed consent on their own, I obtained the consent of a parent or guardian for children under the age of 14. Guardians were also given the option to sit in on their child's interview and participate if they wished. I expected youth 14 and over to be able to understand the terms of their participation in the study.

In addition to youth, it was important that I speak with Elders and Ojibwe speakers, the keepers and teachers of the language. I spoke to these participants about their interpretations of the ways that people use Ojibwe, and how those uses may have changed over time. Their perspectives on language and revitalization are invaluable to a study of this kind. Also vital to this study was the perspective of Chastity Jenner-Keeshig,

the Ojibway Language Resource Teacher at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School, who provides language education to students from Kindergarten to Grade 8.

Miptoon and Debbie provided me with contact information for people who were interested in participating in the project. In February and March of 2021, I conducted 10 in-depth interviews with community members through phone and video calls, recording our conversations with an audio-recorder. I spoke with four youth aged 11-13; two young adults aged 18-21; the Ojibway Language Resource Teacher, Chastity; and three Elders. This diverse group of participants provided me with a wide range of perspectives to consider — those of children who take part in daily Ojibwe classes in school, young adults who participated in similar education in the recent past, the language educator at the school, and Elders — the language keepers and teachers.

In our conversations, I asked questions relating to how people learned Ojibwe, how they feel about the language, how they use Ojibwe in their everyday lives, and what barriers they may have experienced in their learning. The questions that I asked addressed each of my research goals (see Appendix A). The data collected encapsulated the experiences and perceptions of the contributors using semi-structured interviews from a purposive sample. Data saturation refers to the point in the data collection process in which no new themes or ideas are found in the data set (Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006). In their study of saturation for nonprobabilistic samples, Guest et al (2006) found that saturation is often achieved after 12 interviews. Conducting 10 interviews provided me with this point of saturation.

This study would have greatly benefitted from my spending time in the community, being present on the land, building relationships with community members face-to-face, and becoming immersed in language activities. Nonetheless, a revised interview-based approach allowed me to examine the same themes with an even more direct focus on the voices of community members, as individuals' perspectives comprised all of the data for this study. Without my physical presence in Neyaashiinigiing, maintaining community participation and guidance throughout the research process was logistically more difficult. Due to this distance, however, communication with my research partners was more important than ever. Before and after interviews, I invited all community members involved in the project to contact me at any time to continue our conversations, provide input on the project, or simply stay updated on its progress. I also stayed in contact with Miptoon when necessary.

As this research is community-based and collaborative, my methods were subject to change at any time based on consultation with the Band Council, Elders, and my community partners both before and during the research process.

2.1.3 Data Analysis and Writing

After transcribing the interviews using Otter.ai, I used NVivo and employed the method of grounded theory to identify and examine major themes from the conversations.

2.1.4 Knowledge Mobilization

In partnership with community leaders, I will formulate a plan to disseminate the results of the research. This plan will likely consist of a short document detailing the

study's findings for Council, as well as a more accessibly formatted document for community members, such as an infographic, that will be distributed throughout the community. Direction from my community partners will ensure that the results of this study are communicated appropriately and accessibly, and mobilized in a way that will directly benefit the community and contribute to their language revitalization strategies.

2.1.5 Ethical Considerations

There were various ethical issues to consider before beginning this research. The first relates to the fraught relationship between Indigenous peoples and researchers mentioned previously. I must be reflexive about the power dynamic present in being a settler researcher conducting research with an Indigenous community. To better understand the ethical implications of this context, I consulted Chapter 9 of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, which focuses on research involving First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada. Though the information in the chapter does not override the ethical guidelines outlined by Indigenous community partners, it can act as a framework to ensure research “is premised on respectful relationships,” and “encourages collaboration and engagement between researchers and participants” (TCPS 2 2018). I used this chapter to prepare for research with the people of Neyaashiinigiing. Most significantly, I sought guidance on research ethics and approval from my community partners, specifically the Band Council and Miptoon.

Tauri (2017) argues for the importance of ensuring not only individual consent, but community-informed consent in Indigenous contexts. He cites Piquemal, who states that

an ethical, decolonial approach requires an understanding that “free and informed consent is an ongoing process based on notions of authority and collectiveness and on a principle of confirmation” (Piquemal 2000, 49). Thus, it was important to gain approval from leadership in Neyaashiinigmiing and to ensure that consent was ongoing throughout the research process.

In place of requiring participants to sign a written consent form to participate in the project (which is the expected, standard practice for ethical research with humans according to Research Ethics Boards [REBs] at Western institutions), I opted to communicate consent information and obtain consent orally through a researcher pledge. Participants received the pledge as part of the recruitment package, and I read it to participants and guardians at the beginning of each interview. The researcher pledge came from Tad, who developed the idea through his own work with Indigenous communities. The concept of obtaining oral consent from participants contributes to a decolonial approach to research with Indigenous peoples, as it reflects the oral traditions of many Indigenous communities. Requiring participants to provide consent by signing a printed document supports a Eurocentric, formulaic approach to research rooted in a biomedical model of research ethics (Tauri 2017). The practice reinforces dominant Western ways of knowing and overlooks Indigenous ways of knowing and doing (Tauri 2017). Tauri (2017) problematizes the REB’s standard consent process in Indigenous research contexts, quoting one Indigenous research participant who says:

What is ethical about putting a piece of paper in my face? In the face of an elder who has invited you to speak to him about whatever? To the community? He has given consent and not likely on his own. If I tell you yes, then it is yes. It means I

know you, I trust you; give me that paper and I'll tell you no because you don't understand. Why would I trust you with something else, something more important (Tauri 2017, 7)?

As a decolonial tool and method, the researcher pledge used for this project rightfully places the responsibility on the researcher to respect and protect the identities and stories of those who are generous enough to share them for the sake of research.

Ownership and stewardship of the interview data was another significant ethical consideration for this project. In keeping with the OCAP® Principles, the First Nation has the right to own, control, access, and possess the information that was shared and recorded as part of this study (The First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2014). After discussing the issue of data storage with Miptoon, he advised that the community did not want to keep the research record. Therefore, I will be keeping the interview data indefinitely, with participants' identities attached to our conversations. This decision was an issue for the University of Guelph's REB, which asked us to deidentify the data if it was to be kept indefinitely. In our response, Tad and I explained the reasons why it is necessary in this case to retain identified data indefinitely. Firstly, this data contains Indigenous knowledge that rightfully belongs to the community of Neyaashiinigmiing. Since this is not my data, I do not have the right to destroy or modify it. My research partners are entrusting me to care for the data as a steward. Though they are not housing the data at this time, I will work with my research partners in the future to ensure that they can house the research record. Until then, I will remain the steward of their data. It is also important that data remains grounded in its context when working with Indigenous communities. To erase the identities of Indigenous participants from their knowledge,

stories, perspectives, and lived experiences is to undermine the decolonial approach of this study.

The REB also requested that Tad keep the research record, since he was listed as the “Principal Investigator” on the REB application for this project (which is standard practice for master's students conducting research with humans). However, when working with Indigenous communities, it is best practice for data to be kept by the researcher who has formed the relationship with the people sharing the information. The interview data are a result of my relationships with community members in Neyaashiinigiing. As Tad does not have a relationship with the community, it would be unethical for him to hold the material. Again, I am being trusted to care for this data which does not belong to me. Giving the data to Tad would require community consent. After receiving our responses to their concerns, the REB approved the project in December of 2020.

Another ethical consideration for the project, especially given the in-depth interviews with participants, was the possibility of information being brought up that would be uncomfortable for participants to talk about. For instance, it seemed likely that topics such as colonization and subsequent intergenerational trauma would come up during discussions related to language. To combat this potential challenge, I assured participants and guardians that they could remove themselves and/or their children from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable or no longer wanted to participate. I did my best not to probe or ask questions about sensitive subjects unless it applied to the research, or the participant expressed a willingness to share the information. The

parameters of the work were reviewed during the consent process so as to prevent surprises.

Participants were also at risk of having their personal thoughts and experiences exposed through the publishing of this research in the form of a thesis. To ensure confidentiality for those who wish to stay anonymous, I use pseudonyms when referencing people or specific places mentioned in our conversations and changed any identifying information. Personal information is kept on my password-protected, encrypted computer. As previously discussed, I obtained informed consent by distributing the researcher pledge to participants, discussing the consent information, and receiving verbal consent before the interviews began.

Another ethical consideration was the participation of people under the age of 18. As previously mentioned, for those under 14, a guardian was present to participate in the consent process and provide proxy consent alongside the participant. I used three versions of the researcher pledge: one for participants aged 14 and over (see Appendix B), one for kids aged 10-13 using language geared towards children (see Appendix C), and one for guardians to provide consent alongside their children (see Appendix D). Though REBs typically consider research with children to be higher risk than research with adults, it was important to provide an opportunity for interested youth to contribute their perspectives on the subject of language in their community. As I have mentioned, elementary school-aged children are deeply involved in language revitalization in Neyaashiinigmiing. Since there would presumably be no harm caused by their participation, I felt that children should have the right to share their perspectives on a topic

that is so relevant and important to them. The ethics protocol for this project recognized this right, as well as the right for children to consent to their own participation, as long as their guardians also provided consent.

Thirteen-year-old Kenneth reminded me of the significance of inviting youth to participate in projects of this kind when he shared this thought at the end of our interview: *“I’m actually, I’m really happy that I got to do this. Because usually people are, most recently people are asking for a lot more of opinion of children. But usually it’s not really seen as their opinion is as valid as older people.”*

2.2 Language Use in Neyaashiinigiing

2.2.1 The Ethnography of Speaking

This research was inspired in part by the ethnography of speaking, a salient body of literature that has helped me to consider the different contexts in which Ojibwe is spoken in Neyaashiinigiing. Conceived by Hymes (1962), the ethnography of speaking is often overlooked as an approach in language revitalization literature. Hymes describes it as a consideration of “the situations and uses, the patterns and function of speaking as an activity in its own right” (Hymes 1962, 16). He aims to bridge the gap between linguistic analysis and ethnography, proposing the ethnography of speaking as a descriptive and analytical method to understand the contexts in which people use language in any given speech community (Hymes 1962). Bauman and Sherzer (1989) update Hymes’ work, pointing out that society and culture are constituted by communication, and that no sphere of social or cultural life can be understood without an understanding of the ways in which

people speak. It is their view that all ethnographers should include a critical and reflective ethnography of speaking in their investigations (Bauman and Sherzer 1989).

Henderson's (2021) work emphasizes the importance of the ethnography of speaking to support language revitalization efforts in particular. He demonstrates the utility of the method in order to provide a picture of who is using Indigenous languages, how they do so, and why (Henderson 2021). The ethnography of speaking is useful in documenting the various sociocultural factors that influence language use and thus impact language revitalization efforts (Henderson 2021). Understanding these contexts can enable language educators and community leaders to identify and analyze the successes and challenges of specific revitalization efforts (Henderson 2021). This ability allows them to better support language revitalization in their own communities and possibly to inform other communities of best practices and potential barriers (Henderson 2021). Understanding everyday contexts of language use, as this study aims to do, is essential for ensuring the success of language revitalization efforts.

Another relevant conversation within the literature on the ethnography of speaking is a discussion of what it means to be a "speaker." Muehlmann highlights how linguistic anthropologists have historically framed language as an inherently social phenomenon, in opposition to the idea that language is simply the expression of individual identity and autonomy (Muehlmann 2011, 162). In this way, linguistic anthropology differs from structural linguistics, as it analyzes language through the lens of situated discourse and linguistic performance (Muehlmann 2011, 162). Language is both a product and resource for social interaction, and not an abstract, pure system of rules reproduced by a perfect

speaker (Muehlmann 2011, 162). As Muehlmann (2011) says, language must be understood as existing beyond this individual speaker, as a practice that is embedded in language communities within wider social contexts.

Muehlmann (2012) shows how the process of defining and counting speakers creates the inaccurate perception of a “unitary speaker” and ultimately helps delineate “authentic” Indigenous identity. Enumerating speakers presumes that speakers are individual and discrete entities, when the issue is in fact far more complex (Muehlmann 2012). Davis (2017) outlines the assumptions that are often made when people attempt to count the “last speakers” of a particular language. Speakers are narrowly defined as: native speakers (people who have spoken the language since childhood); monolingual (only speaking the language of interest); entirely fluent (able to participate in all domains of language use in the language); mentally sound; and with a particular heritage (ethnic and/or cultural origins within the communities associated with the language) (Davis 2017, 46). Many people do not fit into all of these narrow categories and are therefore erased or excluded from holding the identity of “speaker,” and thus from participating in discussions of language revitalization (Davis 2017). In keeping with this way of thinking, the aim of this study is not to draw boundaries around what it means to be a speaker, but to consider the various roles that people play in the community when teaching, learning, and speaking Ojibwe, and how those roles shift and change based on context.

2.2.2 Language in Use in Neyaashiinigiing

In this section, I will share some of the ways that participants described using their language in their day-to-day lives. While most people in Neyaashiinigiing would not

consider themselves to be fluent Ojibwe speakers within their community (although this identification is highly dependent on context), those I spoke with told me about many different places and contexts in which Ojibwe is used in the community today. Most frequently, people mentioned that they use or hear Ojibwe in their homes, at school, or during ceremony. People also reported hearing or using Ojibwe at community gatherings, while “out and about” in or around the community, while visiting with Elders, at the Language Nest, and out on the land. When asked who they speak Ojibwe with, most participants referenced family, friends, and Elders. People also told me about speaking Ojibwe to their ancestors, the Creator, and themselves.

When considering the ways that people in Neyaashiinigmiing use Ojibwe, it is clear that different groups of people tend to learn and speak the language in diverse ways, places, and contexts. For instance, an Elder is likely to use Ojibwe differently than a twelve-year-old elementary school student, and to have learned the language in a different way. In order to best represent these differences, I have divided the community members I spoke with into three different categories: Elders and Language Specialists; Young Adults; and Elementary School Students. It is important to note that these categories are not rigid, static, or binding, but are nonetheless useful to demonstrate the varying stages of language use and learning occupied by contributors at the time of our conversations. Since age seemed to be the most prominent factor denoting these stages, I categorized participants using age and life stage. However, through my conversations with community members, I learned that identities related to language use and learning are fluid and often change based on context.

In order to demonstrate these identities, I will also use three categories I conceptualized to describe the various roles people may occupy while participating in language revitalization. The categories are: Learner – a person in the process of learning a language; Mobilizer – a person actively using their knowledge of a language; and Teacher – a person sharing their knowledge of a language with others. One might assume that these roles coincide with the three age categories I use to describe the stages occupied by those who participated in the study. Though elementary school students are most often considered learners, while Elders and language specialists are most often considered teachers, I argue that each person I spoke with can become a learner, mobilizer, or teacher depending on context. It may be helpful to imagine these roles as part of a cycle— (see Figure 1 below) where one can shift through the different roles depending on various factors like where they are, who they are with, or the topic in question. It is also possible for a person to occupy multiple roles simultaneously. For example, Robert may consider himself to be an Ojibwe language learner when he is participating in Anishinaabemowin classes at university. However, when he sends his Ojibwe word-of-the-day texts to his family members, he becomes a mobilizer/teacher as he uses and shares his knowledge of the language with others. I will give more examples below.

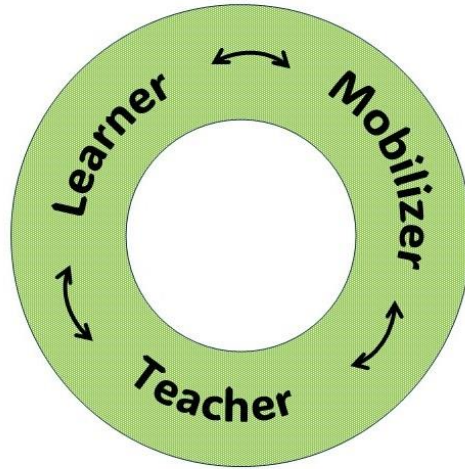


Figure 1: Learner, Mobilizer and Teacher Graphic

I also argue that the roles of learner, mobilizer, and teacher are all integral to the revitalization process. To revitalize a language, there must be people willing and able to learn, and people willing and able to teach. Mobilizing language is integral to both the learning and teaching process. In order to learn a language, one must actively use that language in as many everyday contexts as they can. This practice not only supports the individual's learning process, but may also support the learning process for others and promote language use for those around them. Teaching language also necessitates using one's language and their knowledge of their language in order to share it with others and enable and promote its use.

In this chapter, I will discuss how three participants from three different age categories use Ojibwe in their everyday lives: Justin, an Elder; Robert, a young adult; and Zoe, an elementary school student. I will also demonstrate how these community members occupy and shift between the roles of learner, mobilizer, and teacher throughout their daily lives.

2.2.2.1 Justin: Elders and Language Specialists

While Elders in Neyaashiinigiing described using Ojibwe in a variety of ways, all participants in this group reported certain common experiences. For instance, each Elder with whom I spoke recalled having heard Ojibwe in their home growing up. Additionally, many spoke of the impact of the Catholic Church's imposition in their community, and the ways in which the Church prevented them from speaking their language freely and passing it on to future generations. Despite the negative effects of these experiences, however, all of the Elders reported having retained their knowledge of Ojibwe and described the various contexts in which they continue to speak the language today .

Here, I will describe some of the places and contexts in which Justin uses Ojibwe on a regular basis—at home to himself and to his pets, in prayer, for ceremony, while visiting with others, at the Language Nest, and while out and about with friends.

Justin grew up hearing Ojibwe spoken in his home in Neyaashiinigiing. It is his first language. He learned Ojibwe from his parents and by listening to Elders speak when they visited his home.

“[I learned Ojibwe from] Mostly my parents, sometimes, you know, a lot of speakers, I used to go and sit and listen to them. And the old people used to come and visit my parents, they’d tell us kids, ‘Nmadbinmaa bzindom!’² Sit down there and listen!’ So that’s what we had to do sit and listen, you couldn’t play or anything or they would send us outside. You just had to sit and listen. And that’s how you learn, when you listen. And that’s how you can catch the meanings of those words as to what they’re saying and what they’re sharing with each other. Always listen. Very important. People might say something that you might need.”

Due to the imposition of the Catholic Church in education in Neyaashiinigmiing, Justin had to stop speaking Ojibwe.

“We couldn’t speak it when we were, when the nuns came into the community, and the priests. We had dropped, a lot of them lost their language. Yeah, my brother was a fluent Ojibwe speaker and he never knew what the teacher was saying to him in English. He responded that ‘Gaawii niin nistaataw: I don’t understand what you’re saying.’ And he got expelled for that. So, I had to learn English real fast. But I kept, I kept my Ojibwe up, I just kept it to myself.”

Justin retained much of his knowledge of the language by speaking it privately to himself. Today, he continues to use Ojibwe in this context. One of the primary ways that Justin uses the language is at home, speaking to himself and his pets. He said, *“I speak my language to my dog and cat! My dog understands. He just looks at me. He knows what I mean! ... I always say, ‘Aambe gojiing gibizhaamin, Nahow gi-bbaamsemin.’ I said, ‘Let’s go outside or go for a walk.’ And she’s up and her tail is wagging! I speak it when I’m home alone with them.”* He continued, *“That’s what I do in the house here too. ‘Endaayan: My home.’ If I’m doing dishes I say, ‘Nigziibiignaagane!’ I talk to myself, so I say, ‘I’m going to do the dishes. Nijishdagen mchisak: I’m going to sweep the floor.’ But that’s what I do, and the dog just sits there and looks at me. She knows what I’m up to!...*

² Chastity provided the transcriptions for the Ojibwe words spoken during interviews.

'Oh bow niibaakwe!: I'm gonna cook now.' When I cook, she's standing on her hind legs looking. Is it ever comical, holy jeez!" Since there are only a handful of fluent speakers in the community, Justin takes every opportunity he can to speak his language, which means speaking aloud to himself or to his pets. He finds these quiet moments to express himself with his language.

Prayer

Another important way that Justin uses Ojibwe is in prayer: *"When praying with the pipes, I always say to the Higher Up, 'Eснаа maanda pwaagan zagaswaa niin maanda asemaa wii toon maapii: I'm going to put the tobacco in the pipe. Mi isa maanda gwejjimin: I'm going to ask you...' I talk to the ancestors and give thanks. I always say chi-miigwech for allowing me to walk on this red road for sixty-eight years. And being allowed to speak in the language."* During prayer, Justin uses Ojibwe to connect with the Spirit World and to express gratitude, as Ojibwe is the language of the Creator and the ancestors. The language also connects Justin to the world around him and to Creation.

"Oh, I just speak to the Creator's Creation. Speak to the trees, to the stones, put the tobacco down and speak to the water. I offer the tobacco, speak to the fire, let that fire know I just, everything just comes right out. That's everything we believe is still, has a live spirit in them and that's how we speak, that's how I speak to Creator's Creation, all the land, give thanks to Mother Earth, give thanks to Father Sun, Grandmother Moon, all the stars. I give thanks to the cedar poles that I use when I have to do a shake tent [ceremony] and I give thanks for them just to let them know, and I pray. I do a lot of praying, a lot of prayers with the pipe."

Justin shared with me that the Creator gave him the gift of vision, allowing him to communicate with the Spirit World in a unique way. He described how he shares this gift with others by conducting Anishinaabe ceremonies.

Ceremony

Ceremony is one of the most significant ways that Justin uses Ojibwe in his life. Several times a year, he conducts sweat lodges and shake tents behind his home for others, both within and outside of his community. He uses Ojibwe in prayer when preparing for ceremonies, and when speaking to the ancestors, the Creator, and the materials that he uses as part of the ceremonies.

“I call them grandmothers and grandfathers, the rocks that I use. And when they come into the lodge I say, ‘Oh bindgen, Nokomis miinwaa mshoomis chi-miigwech!’ Whatever kind of a lodge it’s going to be, ‘Aabdig go kiim nin mina.’ Letting them know that we speak to them in the language and their language, they know [inaudible] they know what kind of a lodge it’s going to be.”

Using Ojibwe and his gift of vision, Justin helps members of his community connect to the Spirit World through ceremony. For instance, when conducting ceremonies in Ojibwe, Justin makes sure to repeat Ojibwe phrases in English to ensure they are understood by everyone in attendance. He explained, *“I do the language in ceremony. So, I speak the language there, but then I have to turn around and explain to everybody that’s in that circle as to what I had said in our language just so that they can get a better understanding of how things are pronounced and stuff like that.”* In this way, Justin also takes on the role of language teacher, providing those in attendance with opportunities to learn Ojibwe words while participating in ceremony. Additionally, Justin often helps

attendees communicate with the Spirit World by translating their messages into Ojibwe. He explained that it is important for ceremonies to be conducted in Ojibwe, so that the ancestral world understands what is being communicated.

“What Basil [Johnston] says, you get better, better results when you do the language. You’re doing ceremonies, everything is done in the language. And that’s [when everything will go] and you’ll come to understand people and the ancestral world will understand what you’re saying. And we’re not acknowledged on this side that our English name we’re acknowledged in the spirit, in the spiritual world by our Indian name. My Indian name is Chimanitooshkinini. In English, to translate that is Spirits Guideline, that’s my name. That’s how I do things is through the language.”

Teaching and Visiting

Justin also enjoys sharing his knowledge of the language with others when they visit him at his house. He told me:

“I keep everything very simple. You have to put them out. I explain everything to the people and people that [inaudible] understand and I’m sitting here visiting, visiting me, ‘Oh daaban bbaambiichge ode,’ means ‘There’s a car coming up the road.’ ‘Giidaaki gii-zhaa: He’s gone up the hill.’ Just, just to keep it simple like that. And they get on, they catch on easy once they know what the meaning is and once it flows out smoothly, eh? That’s how I do things.”

In this way, Justin is mobilizing and sharing the language in the same way that he learned it—through visiting and listening. Throughout our conversation, he emphasized the importance of young people learning Ojibwe through visiting, sitting, listening, and talking with Elders and speakers. He explained, *“Or if they see a grandmother, an Elder in the community that’s fluent in the language, they can also visit them and sit and talk. And listen.”* Oral teaching and learning is considered a culturally appropriate way to

acquire Ojibwe, as it was in this way that the language was originally used and passed on through the generations (Pitawanakwat 2018).

Language Nest

Despite Ojibwe being his first language, at times, Justin becomes a language learner himself. He told me about spending time at the Language Nest on Elder nights, where Elders, speakers, and learners may come together to speak and learn Ojibwe. He said, *“I go sprucing up on my language. I went to the Language Nest for a while. ‘Till all this virus hit and everything got shut down. But when I see people in the group that's what we speak, we speak the language.”* He continued:

“When you sit and you listen to the, there's I think three Elders and they're older than I am and they speak the language and we can sit there and listen to them all night. And then you come up and you can think of, say a word that hasn't been spoken anymore. And then you: ‘Oh yeah!’ Every time they say an old word my mind goes right back with my mom. It takes you back to those times and places where the language was spoken. And I really enjoy it. They're always so giving, they're so kind. And that's important, just being kind and being giving, always giving with themselves.”

For those in the community who speak Ojibwe, Elder nights provide a special space to gather, speak to one another in Ojibwe, tell stories, and collectively remember “old words” over tea and biscuits. The weekly event also provides an incredible opportunity for learners to hear Ojibwe being spoken, listen to storytelling, and ask the Elders any questions they may have about Ojibwe vocabulary or grammar. I was fortunate enough to be invited by Miptoon to one of these gatherings in February 2020. I remember the night to be full of storytelling, jokes, and laughter. The Elders were eager to share their knowledge with all in attendance. For some Elders, these nights were one of their

only opportunities to speak and hear their language. In a later chapter, I will discuss the impact of the loss of these gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Out and About with Friends

Justin also speaks Ojibwe when he is with friends—driving, at the grocery store, and running into each other in town. He said, *“If I’m in the grocery store, we speak it in there too. People think they probably don’t know what they’re talking about! ‘Miijin ngii-naadin: I’ve come to get some food.’”* When I asked who he speaks with at the store, he said, *“Oh, I usually travel out with a friend of mine. He speaks the language.”* He later continued, *“When we visit and stuff like that. When we see each other out on the street or in town, we speak it or if I’m driving with [my friend] Allison, we speak the language. And that’s good.”*

Justin takes every opportunity to speak his language, and to share his language and his gifts with others in his community. When I asked how he feels when he speaks Ojibwe, Justin said,

“I feel good! ...Oh yeah! I feel very good, I feel excellent. And then when they understand and communicate with me in the language, holy jeez, I am up on cloud nine. And then we laugh, we can tease each other and in a good way. Holy jeez. Like I say you can have a lot of fun without alcohol or drugs. You can sit and laugh and stuff like that. Because when we get too serious, things don’t go right. But if you let things happen the way they’re supposed to happen, things run smoothly.”

Throughout our conversation it became clear to me that Ojibwe is deeply important to Justin. He takes advantage of any opportunity to speak his language, maintain his knowledge, and share it with others, occupying each role of learner, mobilizer, and

teacher throughout his daily life. His story demonstrates the range of settings in which an Elder might use Ojibwe and helps to show why the language remains a significant link between people and cultural practices.

2.2.2.2 Robert: Young Adults

At the time of our interview, Robert was 21. He grew up in Neyaashiinigiing and attended Kikendaasogamig School as a child. At the time of our interview, he was a student at a university in Toronto. He called me on Zoom from university to talk about his experiences with Ojibwe.

Robert uses Ojibwe in many different contexts in his life. He speaks Ojibwe to himself, at home, with family and friends, during ceremony, and while out and about in the community. He started by telling me a bit about his journey learning and speaking Ojibwe.

“I started when we were in elementary school, mainly. So, we'd have like a half an hour class every day to, to learn Ojibwe. And my mom would speak a little bit with me, she knows like she was trying to learn like some words here and there when I was younger, so she would use, but it was more so just like the basic words like for animals and that sort of thing and like how to do things. So, I guess that was sort of fairly constant, through my life from like, Kindergarten to Grade 8, there was Ojibwe classes, we'd play like word searches, and bingo, and like, we do little lessons on all kinds of stuff. And then, I don't think it really, there wasn't really that much in high school, because there wasn't really a class in high school, but we were able to, like, sort of learn on our own, but I feel like I didn't really [inaudible] that much throughout those years. But then when I got to university, I started learning again more seriously. And there is little classes you could take and there was like an actual class I could take for my for my school as well. And so that's

kind of why I'm right now, I'm sort of just in that class and trying to do a lot more sort of on my own as well. Which has been really exciting."

He continued, *"I think as I got older, I realized how important it is to learn the language. And just sort of realizing that especially in the past, I would say year, I've been, I've been studying a lot like not just in class, but also just on my own and sort of being very driven and excited about each new word and all that sort of thing. So that's been yeah, hopefully, hopefully continue to keep getting better."* Since returning to learning Ojibwe as a university student, Robert told me about some of the ways that he uses Ojibwe as part of his learning process. He said, *"Mostly just like, try and learn the grammar, try and like, substitute the words in when I can, when I can, like throughout my day. And I have a few books that I'm like trying to go through but, I don't know, I'm not, I'm definitely not fluent. But I'm, I'm kind of doing a lot better than I was couple years ago, which is good."*

Self

Like Justin, Robert often speaks Ojibwe out loud to himself as part of his learning process. He explained:

"Yeah, just sort of, I'll pick like a few words. And then try out a few grammar I guess conjugations and then kind of go through and like to remember those words in those I guess forums. And it's definitely, it's definitely kind of slow, but I think it's been working a bit. And then so I'll just try to remember certain things and then so if, if I'm about to say something and it comes to my mind, if I can say it in Ojibwe I'll try and figure it out. I'll say something and try to figure out how to say it in Ojibwe."

In conversation, Robert replaces English words with Ojibwe words as much as he can. By speaking Ojibwe words aloud in conversation, he mobilizes his language, making important connections between learning and his life. Applying what one has learned in an

educational setting to one's day-to-day life is a difficult, but essential, step of learning a language in a sustainable way.

At Home and with Family

One of the most significant ways that Robert uses his language today is when he is at home and/or talking with his family. He explained that some of his family members are on their own learning journeys with Ojibwe, and that they sometimes learn together. He said, *“My roommate’s trying to learn a little bit as well. So I’ll like teach him a couple of words. And we’ll try to speak and then my like family and brothers and sisters, I think they are trying to learn a little bit as well. So, if I call them on the phone or something we can, we can attempt it. Yeah, it’s definitely just little words, here and there.”* Robert also shared,

“My grandma speaks a little bit. And then my one grandma speaks quite a bit. And then my mom, like we’re all trying to like, learn together. Like she’s got a little, she’s trying to learn on her own. And then I’ll send them like some words that I like, or my aunt and uncle and their family as well, I’ll send them some stuff. So hopefully that will kind of keep progressing over, over the years. But I don’t think we really, like my one grandma was, was fluent but she didn’t speak that much. And she passed away a little while ago.”

Though Robert might see himself as primarily a language learner, he becomes a language mobilizer and teacher when he shares his knowledge of the language with his family members. When I asked how he feels about using Ojibwe in these ways, he said:

“I feel like it’s, you know, it’s definitely been more prevalent, I think, especially lately. I mean, when I’m at school, I can only really use it with my family when we’re, like over text or when I’m calling them and that sort of thing. So it’s a bit harder that way. But when I’m at home, I can, we sort of try to do like little, little practices, and we have like, a little lesson or something like that, learn a couple of words. So that’s been very nice. And just like, I think there’s some words where

they've become sort of, like, the commonplace expression or word for that, like everyday. So if we say like, 'Good morning,' 'Goodnight,' like, 'I love you,' and all these sorts of things, and 'Hello,' and 'How are you,' they just sort of you sort of almost permanently replaced certain words, which has been, and it sort of just it keeps growing from that. So I think that's one of the most important things is being able to use it with your family. And then so it's sort of you're fully immersed in that, in those words, and those expressions, and they actually mean a lot. Again, I think it's been a fairly healthy relationship with, with learning Ojibwe and I think I use it in a fairly good context.

By mobilizing and using Ojibwe whenever he can, Robert not only facilitates his own learning but supports his family to learn and mobilize the language in their own ways. Robert can see the positive impact this has had on his family, as more and more Ojibwe words and phrases are added to their collective vocabulary. As previously discussed, Hermes and King (2013) emphasize the importance of learning and speaking Ojibwe in the home to promote meaningful and sustainable learning and use.

Friends

Robert also takes on the role of language mobilizer and teacher when he speaks Ojibwe with his classmates and friends.

"All the like, the people in my [Anishinaabemowin] class, we sort of talk together and we'll have I don't know, especially when it was nicer out we could meet up and like, try to, try to speak I guess. And then I have a few friends back home who are also trying to learn a little bit. And so we try to like if we're texting or calling we can try to use it as much as we can just sort of like in the greetings or if you like gonna refer to a noun or something like that we can try to use it but yeah, I really like I feel like most people are all sort of around the same stage as me so it's just sort of also trying to get other friends motivated to want to try to learn as well which has been I think a process. Like some people take a little while, and some people are sort of very excited right away once you, once you bring the idea up."

Again, Robert is mobilizing the language by taking it out of the classroom setting and into real-world contexts, such as spending time with friends.

Ceremony

Ceremony is another setting where Robert uses Ojibwe. He explained:

“When we go to sweat lodges and stuff, we'll try to do like a little intro of like, when you're in the in the sweat lodge and sort of, say, greetings, greetings in Ojibwe. And then I'll try to, I'll try to only speak in Ojibwe, just [inaudible] and then try to make up sentences, like, with what I have, but I think outside of that, I try to do like, say in the mornings, if you, if I'm trying to pray or something, I'll try to say a little prayer in Ojibwe. We have, we have a lodge here in Toronto that we go to some [camps] near the Humber River. And so sometimes on the weekend, we'll go and like, stay the night there within with sort of an Elder who comes and sets it up and then and then we'll try to do little prayers or something, and if we, if we can try to implement Ojibwe somewhere in them.”

When I asked what it means to Robert to speak Ojibwe in those places, he replied,

“I don't know, it means a lot to me, I think I always hear people sort of, I guess saying that it's, it's more important in those spaces. Because you're sort of speaking to your ancestors or to, you know, various things that like, will listen to you more, and like, will be able to hear you fuller, I guess, if you speak in Ojibwe. So just like honoring that, your ancestors, and so the spirits and stuff. And I think, you know, even when we're in the lodges, sweat lodge, everybody sort of tries to speak in Ojibwe if they can, which is really, really wonderful. You know, if they don't know that much, they'll do at least like, their intro, and then aim and then and then try to, you know, say certain words for, for whatever they can, or whatever they know, I guess.”

Out and About

Robert also provided me with some insight about the common places that he hears

Ojibwe being spoken in Neyaashiinigmiing:

“I suppose it's just sort of a lot of, a lot of intros and a lot of prayers, I guess at like functions. And then I think people just trying to like speak to one another I think, you know, there's always like certain, certain words or expressions that people use that sort of become, I guess ingrained into, like, just the commonplace relationships. But I think that's sort of like just like, like those words like ‘aani’ or ‘Boozhoo’ or ‘aaniish na’ and that sort of thing. And I think that like, no matter what level you are in the language, you also have to know those, those core words.”

Future Plans

Looking ahead, Robert shared his plans for future learning:

“I’m very excited for I guess, the summer hopefully, if there’s no COVID, I can come back and, and try to engage with certain Elders, and teachers and stuff. And hopefully by then I’ll be able to sort of have sentence structure down and then it’s sort of it’ll be just getting vocabulary and hearing words, and, and sort of being able to process what they’re saying immediately as they’re saying it. So hopefully, sort of, every summer I come home from school, I can, I can keep sort of building on that, and talk to Elders and learn from them. You know, in a way that sort of, I don’t have to, because I feel like when you’re reading from a book, and you’re learning in, in class and stuff, you don’t get the same experience, because you’re not fully immersed in and hearing someone speak every day, so I feel like that’s something I’m looking forward to. And hopefully, you know, someday I become fluent. I think, if I have kids, I feel like I want to fully immerse them in the language and have them speak Ojibwe. Hopefully, my siblings and family will, will become sort of conversational and we can, like speak, just in our day to day lives. And if we go somewhere we can speak and, and that’ll be exciting. And then I, and then I know some older people who are like not who are not Elders, I’d say but they’re definitely a bit older who are pretty much fluent. And so I’m excited to go and, and to be able to sort of speak with them and to talk about different ideas with them in Ojibwe.”

Robert’s story provides an example of some of the ways that a young adult may use Ojibwe in the years after receiving formal Ojibwe lessons in elementary school. It also demonstrates that even if one is primarily a language learner, depending on setting and context, they may shift into the role of language mobilizer/teacher when they share their knowledge of Ojibwe with others.

2.2.2.3 Zoe: Elementary School Students

Children in Neyaashiinigmiing attend Kikendaasogamig Elementary School from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8. As part of its mission, the school aims to “[partner] with the community and parents [to] provide the best of our teachings and language to aid our students in developing Anishinaabe Pride” (Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation

2022). Typically, students receive about an hour of Ojibwe language instruction each day, taught by their Ojibway Language Resource Teacher, Chastity. The school is the primary source of formal Ojibwe language education in Neyaashiinigmiiing, which constitutes a large portion of the language revitalization efforts currently happening in the community. As part of my research, I spoke with four current students at the school and two young adults who are former students. Below, I will discuss how one current student, Zoe, learns and uses Ojibwe in her everyday life.

Zoe, aged twelve at the time of our interview, first told me about her journey learning Ojibwe in school and at home with family. She shared,

“It started when I was probably in Grade 1. We have an Ojibwe teacher. So we started off with the basics, just learning how to say hi. We’re, it’s definitely improved over the years. I’ve learned a lot more words. We’re still doing Ojibwe in online learning. My great grandma was a fluent Ojibwe speaker. She always used to speak to me in Ojibwe when I was younger, so I could better understand it. But I can definitely say I’ve come a long way since then.”

Zoe is committed to learning Ojibwe and hopes to become a fluent speaker one day. In the following section, I will describe some of the ways that Zoe learns and uses Ojibwe—at school, reading, visiting with Elders, at home with family, and through other Anishinaabe cultural activities.

School

Zoe told me that she began learning Ojibwe in Grade 1 from her teacher, Chastity. She described some of the ways that she learns Ojibwe at school:

“If we’re in Ojibwe class, we’ll go down to the teacher’s room. And we’ll play, we’ll play games where you only can use Ojibwe in it. So with Jeopardy!, you’re only

allowed to use Ojibwe if you want to ask a question. And when you're in her classroom, we'll play a few games where you sit in a circle and you have to ask questions in Ojibwe and the teacher will answer them. So that's probably the most that we've spoken Ojibwe, because they usually last forty-five minutes. There's different centers, you get to speak English for some of it, but the majority of it is in Ojibwe."

Jeopardy! is an all-around favourite—each student I spoke with mentioned the game in their interview. Zoe explained that she sometimes speaks Ojibwe at school with her friends, but mostly sticks to English. She said, *"We sometimes will, again, just like in Ojibwe classes, we'll also use aanii or miigwech with each other. But we can't, I can't say that we're always talking in Ojibwe with them. It's mostly English."*

Reading

Zoe also enjoys reading Ojibwe books at school and in her personal time.

"I've read a lot of books in Ojibwe. We get to read them back to our teacher. And just so she can know how far we've come...They're mostly just simple books that my great grandma Philomene Chegahno has wrote or edited. So she'll give the words, she'll give the words for that. I probably would, we have a few books in our, in our online classes that we use. So there are some about sledding, most just they're true stories about things that have happened to the Elders in the past or to the residents on Cape."

Visiting Elders

Outside of her formal learning during school hours, Zoe pursues other opportunities to learn and mobilize Ojibwe. For example, she told me about speaking Ojibwe with some Elders and fluent Speakers during visits at their homes.

"I do know a few Elders whose places I've visited. So we call her Auntie Chas, we visited her a couple times, and she teaches, teaches us about that. And a few other Elders' houses that I've been to. So the Maadookii [Seniors'] Centre that we have

here, there are some Elders there that are fluent and I'll go there to sometimes learn from them. And some Elders will come to the school often and teach us about it."

...

"[How do I] feel about the way I've used Ojibwe? I feel like it's good of me to, to use Ojibwe, even if you don't need to. Even if your family is speaking English, you can even use Ojibwe sometimes. I wish I could speak more. Maybe if we had a few fluent family members that were alive? It's good to know that we have, we still have fluent speakers, and that we go to their house. But it's hard with COVID now because we can't go to their houses and have them or ask them, 'Oh, can you teach me some more Ojibwe?'"

Zoe explained that she would make these visits often before the pandemic began.

"Yeah, a couple years ago, I would go to one of the fluent Ojibwe speakers house almost every week and before school, and we would always just talk, sit down and talk. She'd tell me some questions in Ojibwe and I'd answer as best as I could. Those were the days that I walked her dog, and I would always go in afterwards. And we would just talk with it."

Spending time with Elders is a wonderful way for young people to learn their language in a culturally appropriate way, as Justin described earlier. Learning Ojibwe through conversation and in real-world contexts also supports long-term learning (Pitawanakwat 2018). I will later discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on these important connections.

At Home, Family, Conversation

One of the most significant contexts in which Zoe uses Ojibwe is when she is learning at home from her family members. When I asked who taught her what she knows about Ojibwe, she told me about her Great Grandmother and her Papa.

"My great grandma was a fluent Ojibwe speaker. She always used to speak to me in Ojibwe when I was younger so I could better understand it... My Papa has also taught me a few words. He always asks me, 'What does this mean?' and I'll try to

answer it as best as I can. So he's sort of fluent in the language. He was my great grandma's son. So he is fluent in language as well. So yeah, he can understand it. He has a little trouble speaking it. But he's, he's, he can understand what I'm saying.

Zoe uses Ojibwe with her Papa when he comes over to her house. He quizzes her on her Ojibwe vocabulary. She explained, *“My Papa will come here sometimes and have me speak some Ojibwe, maybe ask what that bird is called, or what that animal is called. Or some certain foods. So he'll come over and do that sometimes. And I mean, we always we always say aanii in our family when we're- when we come across family we'll say, ‘Aanii!’ So we use that in everyday life.”* Though Zoe is primarily a language learner, she also becomes a mobilizer when she uses her knowledge of Ojibwe to speak the language with her Papa.

Activities

Zoe also reminded me of the ways in which language can be inherently linked to other culturally significant activities like craft-making. She said, *“Yeah, so actually, there is one more thing that I think is important to Ojibwe language, and [part of] Ojibwe is just carrying on the traditions and the making of crafts, like birch baskets, and earrings, quilling. So I'm starting an earring business now. So I'm making earrings.”* Zoe enjoys attending workshops where she can learn these traditional Anishinaabe craft-making practices, but also to learn her language, to hear it being spoken, and to speak it. During our video call, Zoe and her grandma told me about the tedious process of sorting porcupine quills and showed me some of the beautiful earrings Zoe had made.

Favourite Word

When I asked Zoe about her favourite Ojibwe word or phrase, she said, “*Probably bamapii. It's not ‘goodbye,’ but ‘see you later.’ I think that means a lot. Just to say you know, it's not goodbye. I'm not leaving you forever. I'll see you later. Probably that and Gnaajiwikwe. That's my Ojibwe name that my grandma gave to me, my great grandma. So, it means a lot to know that I have a piece of her with me always.*”

Zoe’s story shows some of the ways in which young people in Neyaashiinigiing are learning and using their language on a daily basis. She supplements her structured learning in a school environment by mobilizing her knowledge of the language outside of school, creating connections with Elders and Ojibwe speakers in her community. Her story is an example of the enthusiasm young people in the community have for their language, and the responsibility and commitment they feel to their learning journeys.

3 Chapter 3: Strengths of Language Revitalization in Neyaashiinigmiing

3.1 Linguistic Biographies

Throughout this thesis, I have included linguistic biographies for each community member who contributed to this study. These biographies support the people-centered approach of this project, honouring each individual's unique history and experiences with their language. The biographies also aim to provide a snapshot of the myriad places and ways that Ojibwe is learned, mobilized, and taught today in the community. During their interviews, I asked each person how they would rate their fluency on a scale of 1-10, 1 meaning they do not know any Ojibwe words at all, and 10 meaning they are fully fluent in Ojibwe. I asked this question not to attempt to define or quantify fluency, or to overemphasize its importance in discussions around language revitalization, but to gain insight into people's perceptions of their own knowledge of Ojibwe. It is also important to note that answers to this question would likely change based on context—just as some people may consider themselves teachers in one context, and learners in another, so too may people rate their fluency differently from one context to another. Each person has a unique relationship with their language. The biographies, which will introduce the following two chapters, attempt to capture each person's experience with learning, mobilizing, and teaching Ojibwe in their lives.

3.1.1 Sam

Sam is a student at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School. On a scale of 1-10, she rated her fluency in Ojibwe as 4.5. Sam learned most of what she knows about Ojibwe

from her teacher at school, Chastity. Every school day, Sam participates in an hour of Ojibwe lessons. Her favourite language activity in school is *Jeopardy!*. She also learns the language from her grandmother, who is a fluent Ojibwe speaker. Although Sam's grandmother lives far away, they often talk over phone or video calls. She described their conversations as being like "a puzzle"—her grandmother speaks to her in Ojibwe and Sam deciphers what she is saying. When she has the opportunity, Sam speaks a few Ojibwe words with her friends and family. For example, she says "aanii," (a greeting that Miptoon translates to "I see your light") when she sees her friends, and her grandmother always calls her for dinner in Ojibwe. Sometimes, Sam shifts from a language learner to a mobilizer/teacher when she teaches Ojibwe words to visitors to the community. Sam is enthusiastic about learning Ojibwe and plans to make a workbook compiling all of her Ojibwe lessons from school so that she can continue learning the language in her own time. She hopes to become a fluent speaker one day. Sam's favourite Ojibwe word is "zhigaak," meaning "skunk," which reminds her of a Nanabush story that she learned at school. Nanabush is a mischievous trickster from many Ojibwe legends, who was sent to teach the Anishinaabeg how to live through stories about his often-humorous escapades and adventures (Ojibwe Cultural Foundation 2023). The story "Nanabush Gaa-zhi-debnaang Zhigaak Mishkoziwin" (Nanabush Gets Power from the Skunk), tells the tale

of how Nanabush, looking for an easier way to hunt, convinces Zhigaak to share his skunk powers with him (Ojibwe Cultural Foundation 2023).³

3.1.2 Helen

Helen is an Elder and described her fluency as a 10. She says that when she was young, she understood a lot but did not often speak it with people. If people spoke to her in Ojibwe, she would usually answer in English. Her parents and grandparents spoke Ojibwe when she was growing up, but they did not actively teach her the language because they felt that it was more important for her to speak English at the time. Incredibly, Helen learned Ojibwe by listening to those around her and asking questions. She would help her dad at work, eagerly attending to the older patrons so that she could ask them questions about Ojibwe. While Helen enjoyed learning and hearing Ojibwe, she was not able to use or hear the language very much after moving away when she was young. Despite this, she says she kept it “*in [her] heart.*” When she eventually moved to Cape Croker, Helen enjoyed hearing so many people speaking Ojibwe again. Nowadays, she rarely speaks Ojibwe but loves hearing her friends speak it. When asked about her favourite Ojibwe word, Helen said she could not choose one because she likes them all!

3.1.3 Gregor

Gregor, who was eleven years old at the time of our interview, grew up in Neyaashiinigiing and is a student at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School. He rated his

³ The Ojibwe Cultural Foundation’s website, “Nish Tales: Walking and Talking with Nanabush” shares Ojibwe stories and language learning activities for children and adults. The video of the Nanabush story Sam references can be found here: <http://nanabush.ca/Video.aspx?Name=Nanabush-Gets-Power-From-The-Skunk&Language=Ojibwe#jumpdown> (Ojibwe Cultural Foundation 2023).

fluency in Ojibwe as a 4 out of 10, saying he knows “*the basics.*” Gregor enjoys learning Ojibwe at school, largely because his teacher makes learning and speaking Ojibwe fun through language activities such as songs, worksheets, and *Jeopardy!* (Gregor’s favourite). When he is not learning at school, Gregor “[*tries*] to incorporate Ojibwe into [*his*] everyday life” at home. For instance, he explained how his family encourages the use of Ojibwe by placing Ojibwe labels on household objects such as dishes, keys, and pictures. His family always says, “I love you,” and “Goodnight,” in Ojibwe. Gregor attributed much of his knowledge to the efforts of his brother, Robert, who also participated in this project. Gregor goes for jogs with Robert, who studies Anishinaabemowin at university. During their jogs, Robert shifts from a learner to a mobilizer/teacher when he teaches Gregor Ojibwe phrases. Gregor hopes to be a fluent speaker one day. His favourite Ojibwe word is “memengwaa,” which means butterfly.

3.2 Introduction

In this section, I will outline what I have found to be some of the strengths of Ojibwe language revitalization strategies in Neyaashiinigmiiing, according to the community members who contributed to the project. First, I will describe the overwhelmingly positive language ideologies expressed in my conversations with community members. I will then discuss the language education that is taking place at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School.

3.3 Positive Language Ideology

One of the greatest strengths of language revitalization activities in Neyaashiinigmiiing that I have recognized through speaking with community members is positive language ideology. As previously discussed, the significance of language ideology to language revitalization efforts cannot be understated. Understanding how people think and feel about a language is fundamental to creating meaningful and effective revitalization strategies.

Community members described how Ojibwe connects them to important things in their lives, such as their culture and spirituality, Anishinaabe worldviews and Indigenous knowledge, their histories and ancestors, each other, and their identities. They also discussed how learning, speaking, and hearing Ojibwe brings laughter and fun, and feelings of pride, joy, happiness, and fulfillment. Many expressed feelings of hope for the future of Ojibwe in their community, and a desire to continue learning, teaching, and sharing the language.

3.3.1 Ojibwe Fosters Connection

3.3.1.1 Culture and Spirituality

Many participants who contributed to this project expressed that their language serves to connect them to significant facets of their lives, including their Anishinaabe culture, spirituality, and worldview. Participants described their language as a vessel for Indigenous and community knowledge, and a way to explore their histories, ancestors, and personal identities. Several participants stated that speaking and learning Ojibwe promotes feelings of interconnectedness among themselves. Chastity explained:

“Anishinaabemowin... you know, Anishinaabemowin, Ojibwe means a lot to me, because it was given, you know, given to us by the Creator. It connects us to the land, the water, our teachings, our ceremonies, our culture, our relationship with the animals, the fish, with each other, with our ancestors, our history, all of that, right. It's a part of me, besides being Scottish, which is a big part of my heritage too, right. But I grew up in in Neyaashiinigmiing, my grandparents raised me right so that's part of my family. It gives me connection to my, my, my Anishinaabe family. Right. So yeah, all of that history and everything... it connects me... my mind, body and spirit. It gives me balance. That's all I can, peace, balance and happiness, my language gives me.”

Ojibwe can also serve a spiritual purpose, connecting speakers to the Creator. For instance, Chastity emphasizes the significance of speaking and understanding Ojibwe during prayers and in ceremony:

“In ceremony, it's been awesome it just, I don't know, gives more meaning and connection to Creator, Creation, to be able to speak in my own language to the Creator, just fills me up in my heart. To be able to talk in my own language and be able to pray, whether that be for the water, for the food, you know, all the different ceremonies that we have the right to be able to do that, to talk to the creator of my own language is, has more meaning for me, and my connection to, to the Creator. So for me, that has been like a really powerful, amazing, humble thing to be able to experience and then, and to hear and listen to the Elders, if they pray that I understand, like to know what they're saying, like you, I understand and to understand why we acknowledge, you know, in our prayers, all those different parts of it, of Creation. So yeah, a big significance for me, around ceremony.”

As discussed in Chapter 2, both Justin and Robert also highlighted the role played by Ojibwe in ceremonial and spiritual contexts.

3.3.1.2 Worldview and Indigenous Knowledge

Certain participants spoke of a connection between the Ojibwe language and Indigenous or community knowledge. When asked what motivated him to start learning Ojibwe again, Robert described the embodiment of a distinct Anishinaabe worldview

within the language. By immersing himself in that worldview, Robert has contributed to the revitalization of his own cultural identity.

“Um, I think it's a sort of like the realization that there is so much you can gain from it and you can sort of find this this sort of culture that sort of encoded within it, which is really nice. And then just sort of like being more involved in a lot of different Indigenous practices. I think in the last few years or so, I've been able to, you know, get involved in, in sort of trying to drum and do sort of ceremonial things, spiritual things. And then also, just like the worldview, I think I've been more immersed in that. And so that's sort of driven me to want to sort of revitalize in my own life.”

...

“Even I think you just sort of feel very proud if I'm, if I'm watching, like a lecture or if I'm watching a whatever it is, and I and I hear the person come and like introduce themselves in Anishinaabemowin and then and then use that language to sort of display their, their worldviews and what they're trying to, to teach, I guess, you know, then you can really find that each word has that sort of worldview and like a teaching and a stories, and it's kind of ingrained into it.”

Robert described to me how learning and speaking Ojibwe can connect one to an Anishinaabe worldview and Anishinaabe ways of thinking and doing.

“I think as you learn Ojibwe, then you also sort of get involved and you sort of uphold those, those cultural practices as well, which have also not been as essential to the community as well, I think of late. And so just sort of like these land-based practices, trying to live more sustainably and trying to live, because it's kind of in that sort of symbiotic relationship with nature and that sort of thing. I feel like inevitably, if you learn the language, you sort of kind of flow into that.”

Robert continued, *“I feel like, eventually, if we're able to speak in the language, I feel like that'd be so great to be able to speak to people and, and to sort of see the world in that way with that worldview that's associated with the language.”*

Chastity described how spending time at the Language Nest learning Ojibwe from the Elders has connected her to community knowledge. She said, *“[I have gained] a lot*

of knowledge about the community history in the language, both in English and Ojibwe. The culture, about families, about community members... Just a lot of knowledge about you know, different things. Sports, you name it. Fishing, hunting, basket-making. Funny stories about people.” She later continued, *“There's so many things that are explained in the language. You understand more than English. When things are explained, when explained in Ojibwe, there's so much more meaning, so much knowledge. It's like when you read a book, right, when you read a, when you're reading a novel and you can see in your mind the whole picture? That's how Ojibwe is.”*

Justin echoed Chastity's thoughts on Ojibwe's ability to foster a deeper understanding. He told me that when someone speaks Ojibwe to him, he can *“get the full picture of what they're saying.”* Similarly, Kenneth described a sense of heightened significance to his words when speaking Ojibwe with family and friends: *“It can mean more to say some things like in Ojibwe. I don't really know how to explain it but sometimes it can just feel better to say something like, ‘I love you,’ in Ojibwe.”* Wyman describes a similar idea from an interview with an educator at a Yup'ik school. The teacher explained that at times, students would struggle with certain concepts in English, but when the same concept was explained in Yup'ik, it seemed to “get them in the heart more” (Wyman 2012, 80).

3.3.1.3 Histories

Kenneth expanded on the idea of inherent cultural significance, describing how Ojibwe connects him to his ancestors and to the past. He said,

“Sometimes like words in Ojibwe can have way more meaning than words in English...It's because we traditionally lived here and that, I guess they can carry more weight when you can recollect and think to the past... it can make you think about how things change and different ways of expressing ourselves because we're so used to speaking in English and then when you speak in Ojibwe it can make you think more or feel closer to ones who have passed away.”

When I asked Sam what it meant to her to speak to her grandma and her friends in Ojibwe, she shared a similar idea: *“Like, it just feels original. Like it feels, it brings me a proud feeling to be able to talk to them in that way... Like, our ancestors, the way they used to, like talk in an Anishinaabe language. And it makes me feel like, it brings me a good feeling to my heart.”*

Mary Alice described how hearing people speak or sing in Ojibwe connects her to her own past: *“Oh especially when they sing they hymns, it brings back a lot of memories when I was a little girl. Memories that I will probably never hear again.”* Chastity shared that speaking Ojibwe makes her feel blessed to know the language of her ancestors.

“I just feel really humble. I feel really happy. It fills my heart. It is, it's healing. That's how I would describe it. It's for me, it's healing because of what I went through through day school... I'm trying to think of how you say this in English. It gives me peace. Peace, and I feel blessed. That's what it is. I feel so blessed. So blessed that I got to know my mother's language and my grandfather's and my great grandfather and my grandmother's, like, I got to know my ancestors language, you know? And that I fought to hold on to it. So yeah, I feel blessed.”

For many community members, Ojibwe brings feelings of connectedness to their ancestors and personal and collective histories. This sentiment is especially significant given that many community members endured forced practices of assimilation that were intentionally designed to disrupt ties to family and ancestral histories. Speaking and

hearing Ojibwe, the language spoken by the ancestors and the Spirit World, offers a means to reclaim these deeply meaningful connections.

3.3.1.4 Connection to One Another

Many people also expressed how Ojibwe has helped them to connect with family, friends, and others in their community. For example, Zoe recalled connections she has made through visiting and learning Ojibwe from Elders in her community. She said, *“What would I have gained [from learning Ojibwe]? Well, I’ve gained Elder friends who are my closest Elder friends today. I’ve earned a few dog friends. I know that might sound silly, but I get to walk the Elders’ dogs, one of their dogs is named Animosh. So that means dog in Ojibwe. I’ve definitely gained a lot of friends from Ojibwe. And that’s pretty important to me.”* When asked what it means to her to speak to family and friends in Ojibwe, Zoe said, *“To me it means, it sounds, it might sound a little bit weird, but it just means that it brings me closer to my family, just to speak a completely different language with them. And maybe if we wanted it to be a little bit more private with family, we could speak that language. And some people might not understand [if they’re not fluent] so it means bringing family closer to me and friends.”*

Chastity explained that part of the reason she began learning and speaking Ojibwe again was to build relationships with Elders and her community as a whole. She explained, *“[I wanted to learn] to like build a relationship with my Elders. ‘Cause their first language is Ojibwe, right? And it’s better if you come first in Ojibwe than English. They understand Ojibwe more, right?”* She continued, *“Just to be able to be in your own community and ... get to know your own community members, and some of them are*

related to you that you never got to really, you know you get to know through there, right? And hear the stories and the history and funny stories and laugh and, you know? Have some serious conversations too sometimes, but you know, just to have that connection with your own community, right?" Learning and teaching Ojibwe is ideally a social act (Pitawanakwat 2018) which can foster and enhance interpersonal relationships.

Justin also expressed that Ojibwe has allowed him to build meaningful relationships with others. He described the impacts of the language on his relationship with another Elder in the community with whom he does ceremonial work: *"Him and I do a lot of work together. We share a lot or sometimes we're not doing a lodge, it's just a sacred fire out at the back and I take tobacco and that's what I do. We do tobacco and then we sit there and sometimes we just speak. We share with one another. You sit there and you feel quite light by the time you're done. Language seems to enhance you."* As Justin shares, speaking Ojibwe allows community members to connect with each other in different and meaningful ways.

3.3.1.5 Identities

As well as fostering interpersonal relationships, many people feel that their language connects them to their Ojibwe and/or Anishinaabe identities. When I inquired about participants' reasons for learning Ojibwe, Indigenous identity emerged as a consistent theme. For instance, Justin listed the following reasons why he believes it is important for people to learn Ojibwe: *"That's our language. That's who we are. We are Ojibwe people. We'd be blessed if we had the Ojibwe language and the English language."* Similarly, Sam alluded to a fundamental interconnection between her

language and her identity as an Indigenous person: *“It brings that feeling to my heart and that it's gonna stay in my heart for the rest of my life. But like, I don't ever want to lose, or feel like I'm not Indigenous. I don't want to ever lose the language. I want the language to last forever.”* She explained that it is important for people to learn Ojibwe *“because we're Indigenous, and we need to learn and speak our language as much as we can.”*

Halle also shared how Ojibwe relates to her sense of self. To her, speaking Ojibwe *“means like just to show who I am. And that we haven't lost our language. Showing that we're still here.”* Speaking Ojibwe is also an act of resilience for Halle. Likewise, Robert cited Indigenous identity as a motive for learning Ojibwe, describing the language as *“integral to our identity.”* He elaborated on this connection: *“I sort of associate [Ojibwe] with, like, an Indigenous identity. And I guess, if I'm trying to learn it, it's just sort of to keep that, that legacy going and sort of claim that identity more fully. And then also, I feel like it's just like a very, very special thing that's sort of associated with being proud that you're Indigenous.”*

These perspectives echo Davis' (2017) conception of the Chickasaw language as central to Chickasaw culture and identity. Davis describes how, within the Chickasaw Nation, the language is often seen by community members as a core part of Chickasaw culture and a marker of Chickasaw identity. Within this ideology, she found that one's knowledge of Chickasaw was used only to affirm one's identity, and never to deny it. This is partly because language is only one part of a Chickasaw identity, which is multifaceted and varies amongst individuals and contexts. Thus, as Robert noted when recalling his experience with learning Ojibwe, Davis finds that speaking or not speaking Chickasaw

“neither grants nor negates being Chickasaw, but it can, for some, serve as a point of solidifying it” (Davis 2017, 22).

3.3.2 Hearing and Speaking Ojibwe Evokes Positive Feelings

When I asked community members about the feelings they experience when hearing or speaking Ojibwe, each person described a range of positive emotions. The most frequently mentioned feelings were pride, enjoyment, laughter, fun, joy, happiness, and fulfillment.

3.3.2.1 Pride

As I have previously stated, the significance of feeling pride in one’s language and culture cannot be overstated in the context of language revitalization efforts. Pride serves to challenge and dismantle colonial language ideologies imposed by the Canadian government, particularly through the operation of day and residential schools. Morcom and Roy (2019) demonstrate the importance of cultural and linguistic pride to the success of Indigenous language learners in Canada. They note that learners who feel a sense of pride in their language are more likely to mobilize that language and pass it on to future generations. In nearly all of our interviews, community members expressed that they are proud to be Anishinaabe. Participants consistently associated their Anishinaabe pride with a sense of pride in learning and speaking Ojibwe.

Chastity’s sense of linguistic pride was complicated by her traumatic experiences at federal day school. She recalled the extensive personal healing that was necessary for her to regain a sense of pride in her identity and language: *“I was just starting to feel, feel*

it again, that language inside of me, right? So like, 'cause I had to do a lot of healing to get through all of that. To feel proud of being Anishinaabe, feel proud about my language and that it was valued and important.” Mary Alice also made a connection between cultural and linguistic pride. She explained that it is important for people to learn Ojibwe *“to identify their, who they are. And I'm proud to be a Native person, and that I can speak the language also.”*

Helen described feeling proud of her family for their interest in learning Ojibwe and for being proud of their own identities. She shared, *“My children are, they know words here, my grandchildren are learning. They don't live on the reserve, most of them... But they're all interested, and they love being who they are. They're proud of it and I'm proud of that for them.”* Justin explained the importance of language contributing to a sense of pride in oneself and one's identity, especially for young people. He shared, *“I think language is very important in the community. For the young people to start learning so that they can understand what our way of life [and how there is more] meaning. And they can feel proud of who they are. And carry on a conversation with other youths and stuff like that.”*

Multiple elementary school students I spoke with described feeling a sense of pride when learning and speaking Ojibwe, and eliciting pride in family members and Elders through using the language. When I asked what it means to her to speak Ojibwe at home and at school, Sam explained: *“It means a lot. Because like I said earlier, I'm trying to like, learn to become a fluent speaker. So every time I get to learn, like a couple of words, at least, I'm proud of myself. And my grandma, last year, my Ojibwe report card was pretty*

good. And my grandma was pretty happy. I'm pretty sure I made her night that day.” Zoe echoed the notion of being proud of herself for learning and speaking Ojibwe, while also making others proud: *“I think it's important [to learn Ojibwe] because for the Elders, to know that we're speaking Ojibwe, and I think it just makes them proud. And just to even, I'm very proud of my heritage, and that I'm part of Ojibwe and that I can carry on the language.”*

On the topic of linguistic pride, numerous participants described experiences of their own pride being interconnected with feelings of pride in others. Notably, some community members attributed an intergenerational element to their linguistic pride. Younger participants expressed a desire to make older generations proud by learning and speaking Ojibwe. Some younger participants seemed to derive feelings of pride in themselves from their ability to make Elders proud of their language learning efforts. Conversely, certain Elders with whom I spoke expressed feeling proud of younger relatives and community members for maintaining their language.

3.3.2.2 Laughter and Fun

Many of those I spoke with associated learning and speaking Ojibwe with humour, laughter, and fun. Kenneth explained that his family uses Ojibwe to joke with each other: *“My parents still speak it and lots of like, Gregor's family, we actually live right beside each other. So yeah, but it's, it's not always used in like a serious way. Like we joke a lot using it. And it's, it's a nice way to express ourselves.”* Others identified humour as an important part of the language itself. Mary Alice explained, *“The Native language, there's a lot of laughter in it... It is a fun language. There's things you can say, people would say it in*

English, then they wouldn't think it was very funny. But when you speak the language to someone, that's where all the laughter comes from.” Helen echoed the idea that humour is an important part of the language and an Indigenous worldview: *“And the Native, our people are so hilarious. You know, we have a completely different kind of outlook on humour and laughter and music and love and you know, that kind of thing... And it's so different like our humour is so different than the other societies, you know.”*

Some of the Elders told me about how much fun they have speaking and hearing Ojibwe at language nights. For example, Mary Alice described having *“lots of fun”* talking about *“the old days, the old people we knew,”* while Justin told me: *“There are some words we forgot so that's where I have a lot of fun at the Language Nest just listening to those old words that aren't spoken anymore and when you hear them you catch on. Most of the harder to pronounce and stuff like that. It's good.”* Kenneth shared similar sentiments to the Elders when asked about his own experiences learning Ojibwe, emphasizing the sense of enjoyment and fun he derives from speaking the language. *“Well, I feel mostly positive. I've been like, I've had lots of fun learning Ojibwe. And it's been nice and different ways to connect with people to talk to them in Ojibwe.”*

Chastity emphasized the value of incorporating laughter and fun into the Ojibwe learning process, suggesting that positive emotions can serve as a valuable tool to encourage and support language learning. She shared, *“Anyone can acquire Ojibwe, you just have to commit. And you don't have, don't worry about what anybody says or anything and you gotta remember, you know, we have to laugh too when you're learning the language. You have to have fun.”* As discussed in Chapter 1, language education is most

effective when it is fun and engaging (Pitawanakwat 2018). Thus, participants' positive associations of Ojibwe with feelings of enjoyment and humour can be viewed as a potential strength of language revitalization efforts in the community.

Nanabush stories are also great examples of the intersection between humour and Ojibwe. These stories often use humour to communicate moral teachings, like the Zhigaak story that Sam shared with me. In the story, Nanabush ignores Zhigaak's warning about wasting the gift of his skunk powers. When Nanabush finally tries to use the powers to hunt caribou, he realizes too late that they have run out and he bungles the hunt. The story teaches listeners that "there is no easy meal for the foolish and lazy" (Ojibwe Cultural Foundation 2023). Engaging with the story, especially through the website's interactive language activities, also serves as a means of learning Ojibwe. Under a similar theme, Chastity and Polly told me about a card game they use called "Boogidi," which means "he or she farts." Using the funny verb as an example, the game teaches players how to conjugate verbs in Ojibwe. Chastity shared that her students loved the game and were excited to mobilize their new knowledge to conjugate other verbs. Later in this chapter, I will examine how having fun while learning contributes to successful language education in the community. Specifically, I will explore Chastity's use of fun as a tool to facilitate learning among her students.

3.3.2.3 Happiness and Fulfillment

When I asked people how speaking or hearing Ojibwe makes them feel, many responded that it brings them feelings of joy and happiness. When Halle speaks Ojibwe, she feels "*fulfilled*." For Zoe, speaking Ojibwe evokes feelings happiness and freedom: "*I*

feel like I feel happy. I feel kind of free to know that I have a language of my own and just of our country, or of our nation.” Helen explained how she feels when she hears the language spoken: *“I feel good. It feels good. It’s a hard thing to describe exactly how you feel. But you just feel, your heart is just, I don’t know. Your heart seems to just absorb what’s going on, what they’re talking about and it makes you feel good.”*

For some participants, the emotions evoked by hearing Ojibwe encourage them to speak the language more themselves. Justin and Helen each framed their personal experiences in this way. Justin shared, *“Oh jeez. I feel all fuzzy inside listening to them [speak Ojibwe]. It gets me thinking, ‘Holy jeez, I should start speaking it a lot more!’ It builds you up, it lifts you up to a good level.”* Helen explained, *“[Ojibwe] means a lot [to me]. I mean, I’m proud of it and it’s in my heart. It just blooms, like when people are speaking the language, you just, you feel a vibration in your heart or in your body, you know? It’s so wonderful and you think, ‘Oh gee, I wish I could do that better,’ you know?... But it’s wonderful just to hear the language. It’s a good feeling! It’s a good feeling when you hear your own language, you know. It’s hard to describe the vibes you get from, you know, people talking.”* These responses exemplify how simply speaking Ojibwe can contribute to a sense of wellbeing, while also supporting revitalization. When people express themselves in Ojibwe, others can feel inspired to use the language more in their own lives, creating a ripple effect within the community.

3.3.3 Motivation to Learn, Mobilize, and Teach Ojibwe

Encouragingly, each community member who took part in this project expressed a strong desire to keep learning, speaking, and sharing Ojibwe, with a hopeful eye towards

the future of the language in their community. It is important to keep in mind that those who were invited by Miptoon and agreed to participate in a project on language revitalization are more likely to be interested in learning, mobilizing and teaching Ojibwe.

3.3.3.1 Desire to Learn

Many of the community members I spoke with shared a desire to continue their language learning with the goal of one day becoming fluent. This sentiment was particularly consistent among younger participants. Optimistically, three elementary school students—Sam, Gregor, and Zoe—expressed these aspirations for the future. Sam shared, *“I want to get to know the language because our language is slowly like going away. So my goal is to like, learn from Chas as much as I can, and take what I learned from her, and put it all together in like, a book or whatever. And then maybe, like, just read it once a day, just to like, get to know the language more... I just hope I get to like, become a fluent speaker.”* Similarly, Gregor explained, *“Well, I hope to be like a fluent speaker. I hope that, that like I was saying, like the community will start to speak, will be able to start speaking Ojibwe again.”* Zoe said, *“[I wanted to learn Ojibwe] because my great grandma was fluent. And also because I just wanted to keep the tradition of the Anishinaabe language alive, so I can teach it to my children, and they can teach it to their children and so on. Just, we were always taught that it was important to carry on the language. That's why I wanted to learn Ojibwe.”*

The language experts I spoke with also expressed a desire to continue their language learning. Helen shared her feelings about learning Ojibwe from her family and people in her community: *“It meant a lot. It means a lot to me. I respect the language and*

I'm proud to be that. I'm still learning. I'm [in my eighties], but I love life so much... I like people and I like to learn." On a more urgent note, Chastity highlighted the pressing need to learn as much Ojibwe as possible from the Elders, who are aging and becoming less able to pass on the language. She said, *"So that's why we committed to a Monday evening, a Wednesday evening and a Friday afternoon to work with Elders... Because we have to, that's been our mission in the last couple of years is just learn, learn, learn as much as we can, speak with them as much as we can."* According to Chastity, the best way to learn Ojibwe is to sit and speak with Elders. In the following chapter, I will discuss community members' concerns about the low number of speakers in Neyaashiinigiing.

3.3.3.2 Responsibility to Learn

Some participants not only expressed a personal desire to learn Ojibwe, but also a sense of responsibility to preserve and pass on the language to future generations. Chastity, for instance, discussed how her son has motivated her learning journey, revealing an underlying sense of duty to maintain the language.

"So when my son was born – he's twenty-two now – I knew that I needed to teach him and I knew that language was important and that y'know, I wanted him to know it. Right? It was important, right? And then when I started to work in like daycare – I was a language teacher at daycare – I seen the importance of it. And I didn't realize how much I knew or how much I could speak because I hadn't been, I had mostly just been talking to my own son, right? And so, when I went to work there, that job came up and nobody was applying, and I thought, 'Y'know, I could do that. I think I could do that.' Y'know, and I think it's really important that the children know their language, so I applied."

She continued, *"And [I wanted to learn] for my, and for my students. The kids I worked with, right? And my community 'cause it's important, it's part of our history. Our ancestors,*

they fought hard to keep their language, so I want to keep that alive as much as I can and do my part. I can't do everything, but I can only do what I can."

Some of the elementary school students also expressed a feeling of responsibility to learn Ojibwe. Kenneth explained, *"Well, I really think it would be important [to learn Ojibwe] because people who spoke Ojibwe were the people who first lived here, right? And so in my opinion, I think it would almost be disrespectful, right? To lose that part."* Zoe shared a similar idea: *"Well, Ojibwe means to me, again, to carry on that language, that from the Elders that have passed. We don't have a lot of Elders living that speak fluently. So it means that we get to learn that language and make the Elders happy. I heard in a few places that if the Elders can't teach the children the Ojibwe language before they are sick or passed away, it becomes a burden for them... So it's the children's job to lift the burden off the Elders to learn Ojibwe."* Though Zoe's sense of responsibility may seem like a heavy burden for a child to bear, it is encouraging to hear a young person so committed to learning their language. In that sense, Zoe's feeling of responsibility is a strength of language revitalization in the community.

3.3.3.3 Desire to Mobilize and Teach

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who were most excited about learning Ojibwe also showed strong interest in mobilizing and sharing their knowledge of the language with others. Sam told me that she enjoys sharing Ojibwe with newcomers to the community. She said, *"For example, my [family member], she's from out West... And when she first came to the reserve, she was speaking a whole different language that we did not know. So we helped her through every little thing. And she's now learned a lot from us. So for*

example, like the food, greeting.” She continued, “There’s not many of us out there that are interested, into learning. But I want to make people like become more interested because they need to learn how to like, speak our language that instead of like, just playing video games, speaking English, like it’s kind of lame to me.” Zoe also shared her interest in teaching the language to others: *“I think it’s very important for people to learn Ojibwe, even if people have never heard of it, or if they’re not [aware], even to ask them, ‘Hey, you want to learn a new language?’ and try and teach them that. I think it’s very important to have other people and to just learn the language.”* She went on to explain, *“I hope in the future, that I’m able to be fluent enough to teach my kids and maybe to teach other kids that as well, if their family maybe didn’t know, or maybe if the kid that the child who had the family, you know, wasn’t a fluent speaker at all, and didn’t know very much Ojibwe so they couldn’t teach their kids. So I’m hoping that I’m able to be fluent one day and to teach my kids and other kids.”*

Justin outlined his approach and willingness to work with others to share his knowledge of the language and ceremony:

“But like I say I keep things as simple as possible because I know our peoples don’t understand and might be afraid of it. That’s okay too. I said if you don’t wanna go in to the lodge, sit around the fire and I’ll teach you to put tobacco in the fire if you need to. All these things have meaning, positive, trying to reinforce them to get that language out. And if you keep speaking it it’s gonna come pouring out real smoothly, fluently. But I like to take my time, I don’t consider myself a teacher, I’m just an Elder trying to do what will the benefit the community in that way. In a good way.”

It became clear from my conversations with community members that those who took part in this project were willing to step into the various roles of learner, mobilizer, and

teacher. The desire to teach Ojibwe to others may act as a motivator to continue learning the language oneself, and can therefore be seen as a strength of revitalization efforts in the community.

3.3.3.4 Hope For the Future

Near the end of each interview, I asked community members about their hopes for the future of Ojibwe in Neyaashiinigiing. Responses were generally optimistic, with community members sharing what they hope to see moving forward. From her perspective as a language expert and educator, Chastity shared:

“I hope for immersion. Full immersion for not just the students, but to have that Anishinaabe pane immersion for the adults and, you know, we can teach our kids but their parents and families, they have to be able to converse and understand their kids or their grandkids! You know what I mean, like, yeah, I hope for that, that I hope to see before I leave this earth, to see our people speaking Ojibwe. I know it's going to take a lot of work. It's not a quick fix. It's going to take a lot of work and time... I know that and I understand that. Yeah, I hope to see you know, my grandchildren speaking Ojibwe. So like when I'm teaching them, I'm hoping to create little fluent speakers! That's what I'd like to see, you know, speakers and for them to feel proud of their language and, you know, feel proud of it. That they'll get to learn, you know, to speak like our ancestors and our Elders. That's what I, that's what I, that's what I hope. And I, that's why I'm, I'm putting it out there in the universe that that's what I'll see.”

Similarly, Justin described his hopes: *“I hope it survives and it thrives, all the young people to speak it, feel good about themselves, learn to communicate the Creator, with the Creator's creation, to learn these things that have a lot of meanings, be sociable, visiting people and circles and stuff like that... But I think if they keep teaching the Ojibwe language in the schools, I think that sooner or later the young people will catch on and speak it at home.”*

Young adults, learners, and mobilizers shared their thoughts on the future of the language. Robert said,

“I hope that there's a lot more fluent speakers in the future. Hopefully there will be people learning who are my age or a bit older, who are just growing up now, who will be sort of motivated to learn and become fluent, and then teach their kids and then there'll be a whole kind of new wave. And I feel like it's happening sort of, in a lot of places. Now, there's this kind of wave of, of second generation, native speakers who are kind of growing up and like learning language on their own and then teaching their kids. And so hopefully, eventually, I feel like in a couple generations, that'd be sort of a reality.”

Halle explained, *“I hope that they keep with it. A lot of the younger generation keeps on with their language. And they keep it going.”*

Some participants acknowledged the challenges facing revitalization while maintaining hope for the future of the language in Neyaashiinigmiing. Kenneth said, *“Well, I hope that there's more people that learn it and more speakers and stuff like that. That's a really optimistic look. But it will definitely be a challenge to try and accomplish that.”* Similarly, Helen shared her thoughts: *“Well I hope it survives. It looks pretty grim. But the people seem to keep coming back and trying more so now... I feel sad for our young people today. And we just all have to hope and pray that things will start happening more. In our in our lives and their lives. And look forward to the sunny side.”* In the face of various challenges, which we will explore in the following chapter, community members' sentiments of hope and resilience evoke the sense of an optimistic future for revitalization in the community.

3.3.4 Conclusion

This section illustrates how positive language ideology bolsters language revitalization efforts in Neyaashiinigiing. Community members expressed how Ojibwe fosters connection to culture and spirituality, Anishinaabe worldviews, Indigenous knowledge, personal and collective histories, and personal identities. Ojibwe can also play a pivotal role in shaping one's Ojibwe and Anishinaabe identities, anchoring people to their heritage. Ojibwe language revitalization is an integral part of a broader effort to revitalize Ojibwe/Anishinaabe culture in Neyaashiinigiing. Community members also shared how learning and teaching Ojibwe is a social act that can foster and enhance interpersonal relationships with family, friends, and other community members. Learning, speaking, and hearing Ojibwe can bring joy, laughter, pride, and fulfillment. Clearly, many community members feel that Ojibwe is deeply significant to themselves and their community and that speaking and hearing the language contributes to a sense of wellbeing. This positive language ideology inspires hope for the future of Ojibwe, and a commitment to continued learning, sharing, and teaching the language.

3.4 Engaging Education

Another major strength of the community's approach to revitalization, as discussed in my conversations with community members, is the language education at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School. Below, I consider how Chastity's work as the Ojibway Language Resource Teacher has created a safe, nurturing environment for students to learn Ojibwe in an engaging and sustainable way.

3.4.1 Chastity's Language Journey

At the time of our conversation, Chastity was the Ojibway Language Resource Teacher at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School. She described her journey with Ojibwe as a “*difficult one*” which both required and facilitated a great deal of healing. Chastity shared that she “*had to fight really hard to keep [her] language.*” While she grew up hearing Ojibwe spoken in her home, she attended federal day school and was forced to hide her language. When her son was born, she knew she wanted him to know Ojibwe, so she began the healing process of waking up the language. To start this process, she accepted a job at the daycare in Neyaashiinigmiing and started working with Elders at the Language Nest. She became ECE certified and spent four years completing the Anishinaabemowin Pane Immersion Program at Bay Mills Community College. She told me this about her experience in that program:

“All you do is listen – you listen to the language. And they told stories and... it was really good and uhm, those ladies from Wiiki... They were so funny and they just made it, it was about real life, about real life conversation. And they say it takes a hundred hours to wake, understand or wake up your language, right? You have to have like a hundred hours of that. So when I went there and when I started to understand I just cried. Because I understood everything, it just had been so suppressed y’know, sleeping for awhile because of the impact of my experience with federal day school and the things that happened, right?”

After ten years of working with her Elder language mentors, Chastity decided to pursue a Native Language Instructor's certificate at Lakehead University. She took some time to build confidence in her abilities, but her mentors encouraged her to apply to the program. She graduated with honours and achieved the William West Medal in her program. At that time, she had begun her job at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School teaching Ojibwe to students from Kindergarten to Grade 8. Chastity explained that funding

her education was a challenging part of her language journey, and shared how some struggles she faced in her learning journey helped her to become a better educator for her students. Chastity is still constantly learning Ojibwe, speaking with Elder mentors, studying language resources, attending language camps, and networking with other language educators. She is deeply grateful to all of the Elders and speakers who have taught and supported her over the years. After our conversation, she sent me the following message:

“I am very passionate about Ojibway. It fills me up...it healed alot of my hurt. I am so grateful to those who have taught me and shared with me their language knowledge and continue too. One of my greatest fluent speakers was my father in law Donald Keeshig and elder and friend John Nadjiwon. John told me before he passed dont ever give up keep moving forward in the language. That stays with me always. But also my faith and belief in Gizhe Manidoo the Creator that he gives us a great gift our language and so did our ancestors. How can i not honor that gift. It connects me to all of Creation and to the Spirit. That is important to me and my family.”

Chastity’s immense passion for her language, her students, and her community is undeniable. In the following section, I will explore some of her approaches to teaching and sharing Ojibwe, and her students’ experiences learning the language at school.

3.4.2 Language Education at Kikendaasogamig Elementary School

Chastity works hard to create a safe, positive space for her students to learn Ojibwe, and to make a fun and engaging curriculum tailored to her students’ needs. She expressed that her approach to teaching is informed by her care for her students, whom she treats as family. She said,

“That’s the one thing I really like when I teach language is teaching the kids songs. I know a lot of songs, I know lots like... hand drum songs, what do you call it like, [inaudible] nursery rhymes and like all the songs, I know a lot of the songs. And Christmas songs and the kids always, they love to sing... I try to make, y’know, make it interactive, right, and y’know when I think about my own self or think about my own son, I think about, y’know my nieces and nephews and, I think of them all as my nieces and nephews. And that their families, their parents trust me to treat them with love and respect and kindness and y’know the seven grandfathers. And that this would be a really good experience for them, so I was always trying to find, ‘Okay. How can I teach this? I gotta make a game, or,’ y’know. Make it fun, right?”

My conversations with students revealed that having fun is a big part of their language learning at school. Robert reflected on his time learning from Chastity in elementary school, saying:

“I think they’ve done it very well throughout, throughout my childhood. You get that sort of foundational set of words that you can then build upon. We do play a lot of little games and stuff I think which is important, makes it kind of fun for you so you never, like, it’s like so many people I talk to hate French and, and that sort of thing, because oftentimes, it’s very dry and very, very boring. But I don’t think we ever really had that with Ojibwe because we’d like learn but then we’d play like a game of bingo or something at the end of the day. And I think now it’s been, it’s been fairly good.”

Likewise, Gregor told me about what sets his language classes apart from his other classes in school. He shared, *“Our teacher Chas, kind of, like she would not make it like, just like a class. I remember sometimes she’d play like Ojibwe music and stuff. In Kindergarten and stuff, and then that kinda and just made it fun. And so I think it does just made me, it just was like, pretty fun to speak after a while and stuff.”* Gregor told me *“I think the way we learn is like a fun and memorable way of learning.”* He described how the class plays his favourite language activity, *Jeopardy!*.

“So what it is is like there’s five different categories and they’ll be like actions, emotions and stuff like that. And ones like everyday Ojibwe or birds and you know that kind of thing. And then so that will be like. So if you pick one, it’ll show, show

like the word in Ojibwe or something. I mean, it will show the word and they'll say like, how do you say the word and then you have to guess it. And then, and then if you press the spacebar, it will show the, it will reveal the answer."

Chastity finds unique ways to keep her students engaged and shares any resources she acquires or creates. She said, *"I learned a lot of stuff about making language interesting and fun for my students and for anyone who y'know, wants to learn. And I just share all my resources because y'know how are we supposed to revitalize a language if we're not gonna share it? It doesn't belong to one person; it belongs to everybody."*

Kenneth described his experiences in Chastity's class: *"She really can make learning more interesting, because we'll playing like Jeopardy! but with Ojibwe, and stuff like that, and we don't always just learn about Ojibwe, we've been doing like, Native authors study. So we've been reading some books and the book we're reading is actually pretty interesting. Talking about lots of issues that were in the 30s. Which is nice."* He continued, *"Chas gives us lots of resources. Like she, which is really nice, she'll spend a lot more time to give us different ways of learning instead of just, we mostly use Google Classroom for online learning, but she's given us like a bunch of other stuff like Seesaw, Quizlets, like other things to learn, and resources, like Ojibwe dictionaries and stuff like that."*

Part of Chastity's creation of a safe, positive space for her students has to do with her approach to teaching. She supports her students' confidence by encouraging participation above all and by tailoring her teaching to students' needs and learning styles, providing a wide range of ways for them to learn. She explained,

“Some people are good with, y’know, hands-on, some of them are with writing, some are with, y’know, seeing or hearing, right, you just have to try and meet all of those and make it enjoyable. Not, y’know, stressful... I just don’t tell them when I’m evaluating them! Yeah, so I just tell them, ‘All I want is participation. Participation. Participation is number one, you participate.’ That’s awesome, right? You know, when you have [inaudible] like, if they’re having a good day, bad day, you know when you ask them, ‘How are you doing?’ And you could tell if you want, y’know you have to ask them, y’know, ‘Do you think you could do this? Okay, would you like to try this? Or would you like to do this?’ Yeah. So then you just move them to somewhere else where they feel good about themselves and feel confident in the language. Right? That’s what I learned as a teacher. But I’m glad that I had ECE training before I became a teacher, like a teacher-teacher, because it helped me to understand kids’ learning styles and the emotional, mental, social, all that really is helpful as a teacher. And my son has Asperger’s. He has autism, and OCD. And so do three other my nephews. So, yeah, so you like y’know, you learn to accommodate and you learn to make things interesting, how you’re going to engage them.”

Kenneth told me about some of these “hands-on” methods of learning Ojibwe:

“Sometimes like, we did this one, like outdoor project, or not project but kind of like a group. So a bunch of us would go on Fridays, and the school would have a bus to bring us out to the park. And we did learn some Ojibwe, but it was primarily focused on like outdoor stuff like fire building, like different things like that like just knowledge and that. So that was pretty cool. And we got to do lots of hands-on stuff, which was nice. And we did actually learn a decent amount of Ojibwe... It was really nice to learn some skills, and things like that, but also learning some Ojibwe while we would do those things... They would teach us about, say, like a plant or a medicine or something while we’re out. And then, like saying what the name in Ojibwe is... It’s actually really nice because you get to be outside and you get to be able to do more things that you can’t always do with pen and paper at school.”

As mentioned earlier, land-based language activities like the ones that Kenneth described work to situate language in real-world contexts for learners while also facilitating important connections to the land, Indigenous knowledge, and cultural practices (Moore and MacDonald 2014; Pitawanakwat 2018). Zoe described some conversation-based/oral methods of learning in the classroom: *“And some Elders will*

come to the school often and teach us about it. And even some, like younger, people are fluent in Ojibwe, and they'll come and teach it to us. They'll read books, and we'll have movies about it. And we can learn more about that that way." Bringing speakers into learning spaces allows students to hear Ojibwe in conversation, which helps to promote language mobilization outside of the classroom (Morcom and Roy 2019; Pitawanakwat 2018).

Chastity does not correct students, allowing them to learn through listening.

"Share, share, share. Share as much as you can to make it a really positive experience learning language. Right, and I don't ever correct anybody... I don't think I should. Because I believe that if they hear, the more you hear it, you're: 'Oh! No, I didn't say that right.' Or you're gonna say, next time you say, say, 'm-shii-MIN?' And then next you hear somebody talking, 'Oh no, oh no, m-SHII-min!' Right? You're gonna hear it. You don't need to, I don't believe in that and it never was never helpful for me. It didn't make me feel better 'cause they're eventually going to hear, and they're going to understand it."

This approach is in line with Johnston and Nolan's perspectives on the importance of oral teaching and learning (Pitawanakwat 2018). Nolan's method of teaching Anishinaabemowin, mentioned in Chapter 1, also stresses the significance of learning Ojibwe through listening to the language being spoken. This emphasis on listening leads to understanding the language, and then speaking it (Pitawanakwat 2018).

It is clear that Chastity cares deeply about her students and works to cultivate a safe space for them to learn. She said,

"I speak to my students! Kindergarten to Grade 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. It's just really awesome to hear them, these little wee kids, y'know, speak back to me, or to understand me, just gives me, I just feel so proud of them. Just feel so, that I'm, you know, making an impact in their life with language and that they can learn their

language and that they're in a safe place they can learn their language, and they have a right to learn the language. So to me, that means so much. And that, that it's encouraged. And it's a positive experience for them, to have their language that.. means a lot to me. For them to come up to me and say stuff to me in Ojibwe, and just to hear them.. that I'm doing, I'm doing the best I can and I'm doing a good job. And it just to me that's.. I guess a gift to me from them is that when I'm teaching them that they're loud, and that they love it. And we have fun. No, we have a lot of laughter and a lot of fun around language. And they feel confident and they feel good about it. And that's, I'm just so grateful to see that in my time in that school has changed. That language has changed. So yeah. For me, that's what that means to me."

Notably, Chastity's students all expressed a sense of comfort and safety when learning Ojibwe at school. Gregor said, *"I feel safe around [Chas] kind of because it's like at a school and like, it's at a school. So it's like a safe environment that I trust and know. So that's nice."* Similarly, Sam explained, *"I mean, I feel like our language is safe [at school], like nobody was going to judge us in the way we talk and learn. So, I mean, I feel pretty good learning [at school]."* Kenneth shared, *"Well, for some people like it's more like you're forced to because you have to take it in school, it's not really like an option. So for some people, I guess it could be kind of negative, or, 'Oh, I don't like Ojibwe, because I'm not very good, or it's hard to understand.' But, I don't know, it's been pretty nice. Like, they're good environments to learn, and things like that."* Chastity's students feel comfortable and confident enough to learn their language without fear of making mistakes. Zoe said, *"Well at home, it means a lot again, just to know that I'm in a protective environment, and we won't get that we won't get bullied or abused for using our own language. So at school, it's nice to also know that we're in a safe environment that we can be ourselves And, y'know, just know, it's not a big worry to mess up. It's a part of learning the language."*

3.4.3 Conclusion

Chastity's work through Kikendaasogamig Elementary School is a major strength of the community's approach to revitalization. Her students are able to learn Ojibwe in engaging and sustainable ways, in a safe, welcoming, and nurturing environment. The students I spoke with all felt that it was important for them to learn Ojibwe, and wished to continue their learning in the future in the hopes of becoming fluent Ojibwe speakers. Chastity's students are also all language mobilizers as well as learners, as they speak and share their language with family members and friends outside of the classroom. In these ways, Chastity and her students offer a positive and hopeful contribution to revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing.

4 Chapter 4: Challenges of Language Revitalization in Neyaashiinigmiing

4.1 Linguistic Biographies

4.1.1 Halle

Eighteen years old at the time of our interview, Halle was quite fluent in Ojibwe as a child as she spoke the language with her grandparents. When she entered elementary school, however, she found it challenging to learn Ojibwe as she was used to a different dialect spoken by her paternal grandparents. Unfortunately, Halle “lost” her language after beginning high school in Owen Sound, where there were no Ojibwe classes offered. She now knows the Ojibwe words for colours, foods, and animals and ranks her fluency at a 4. While growing up, Halle also learned Mi'kmawi'simk, the language spoken by her maternal grandparents, which she finds a little bit more difficult than Ojibwe. Halle learned much of what she knows about Ojibwe from Polly at the Language Nest. Polly shared teachings with Halle, showing her how to make and keep traditional medicines and weave black ash baskets. Halle was able to learn Ojibwe hand-in-hand with these teachings, as they were in full immersion. Most often, Halle uses Ojibwe at home with her family, while joking around or to say short phrases like, “I’m hungry.” Halle enjoys sharing her language and culture with her friends from off-reserve school. She also uses Ojibwe in ceremony to introduce herself. Halle hopes to continue her learning so that she can use Ojibwe in her work when she becomes a paramedic. She would like to be able to maintain her knowledge of “*the basics*” and to pass that knowledge on to her children. Halle’s favourite Ojibwe word is “*jiingis*,” meaning “pest,” which she uses with her sister to tease each other.

4.1.2 Mary Alice

Mary Alice, an Elder, remembers learning Ojibwe at home as a child from her family members and her peers outside of school time. She rated her fluency at an 8. Mary Alice grew up in Neyaashiinigiing but lived away from the community for many years. During this time, she had no one to speak Ojibwe with except when she visited home on occasion. After returning to the community, Mary Alice began attending language classes at the Language Nest where she was able to speak Ojibwe again with other Elders and speakers. These classes are the only setting in which Mary Alice speaks Ojibwe, reminiscing about “*the old days*.” She enjoyed the couple hours a week she was able to speak Ojibwe, and said she misses the classes now that they aren’t running. Sometimes she speaks Ojibwe aloud to herself when “*a word will come to [her] mind*.” Mary Alice told me that Ojibwe is a gift that “*means everything to [her]*.” She misses speaking Ojibwe with her friends who are no longer with us. Mary Alice appreciates that there is “*a lot of laughter*” in Ojibwe. Her favourite phrase is the greeting, “How are you?”.

4.1.3 Kenneth

Kenneth, who was thirteen years old at the time of our conversation, spoke of his experiences learning Ojibwe at school and with his family. On a scale of 1-10, Kenneth rated his fluency as a 4. He can ask and answer some common questions in Ojibwe and knows Ojibwe words for lots of animals. Kenneth enjoys learning languages and wishes there were more opportunities to learn Ojibwe in his community outside of elementary school. At the time of our interview, he was about to enter high school in nearby Owen Sound. While he expressed a desire to continue learning Ojibwe, he told me he did not

have a clear means of doing so. Kenneth mostly uses Ojibwe while at home, and while joking around with his family and friends. He also enjoys sharing Ojibwe words he learns at school with his parents. He loves to learn about the history of his community and had recently completed a final project at school about Anishinaabe clothing and regalia. Kenneth told me his favourite Ojibwe phrase is, “*Gii biidoon na zhonyaa?*” which means “*Did you bring the money?*” His parents say this to tease him when they are out to dinner and the bill arrives. And his response – he left his wallet at home!

4.2 Introduction

The community members of Neyaashiinigiing face several challenges to revitalization. Many of the barriers discussed were not unlike challenges facing other Indigenous communities working to revitalize languages. Below, I will explore some of the barriers that came up in my conversations with community members, including historical and ongoing colonization and government policy, lack of speakers, concerns about dialect, lack of language educators and resources, lack of domains of language use, lack of viable/accessible formal learning opportunities, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a lack of hope for the future.

4.3 Colonization and Government Policy

The actions of the colonial government are the root cause of widespread Indigenous language loss, and colonization remains the central driving force behind of each of the challenges to language learning identified by community members in our interviews. Many of those with whom I spoke shared how colonization has directly affected their

relationships with language, and the state of language in the wider community. Language keepers and teachers shared their experiences with practices of forced assimilation. Chastity, for instance, shared her experiences attending federal day school as a child and the direct impact of those experiences on her journey with language.

"It's been a very, very hard [journey with Ojibwe], a difficult one. I grew up with the language in my house at home, but I also went to a federal day school. So... We were told not to speak our language. We were told that it was the Devil's language, not just by the nuns and the priests, but by the other children, right? 'Cause they're affected by that. They're affected all by that colonized thinking and that colonized behaviour, right? So that's really difficult to keep in my language 'cause I, even my grandparents used to tell me [inaudible] you know... to hide it. Right? So I did. I hid it. Because the other kids, the other students were not nice. They were abusive. Because whatever experiencing was happening in their lives, right, all around that both federal day school and residential school were still affected by residential school and day school. So it was really hard, I had to fight really hard to keep my language."

Like Chastity, Justin recalled being forced to hide his culture and spirituality. He said, *"At times we had to keep the language hidden on account of the priest up here and the nuns. We have to hide our ceremonies, we couldn't do ceremonies. It's their way or the highway. I'd sooner take the highway. I could still do what I want, I could still speak the language."* Justin found ways to maintain his knowledge of the language and ceremonies despite persecution from the Church.

Helen explained how intergenerational impacts of colonization led to the interruption of language transmission from her parents' generation to her own.

"Well, I'll tell you, I was raised in the city [in north-central Ontario]. And my parents both spoke the language fluently. And at that age ... things were pretty, pretty down for a lot of the Native people at that time. My parents and my grandparents all spoke their language, fluently. And, but they never taught us to speak it. At that

time, they sort of felt that English was the most important thing to learn in the world at that, at that time. Therefore, I heard it spoken, but they never spoke it to us.”

Further, in Chapter 3, I identified pride in language and identity as a major strength of language revitalization in the community, in opposition to hegemonic colonial narratives of shame. In my conversation with Helen, she explained some of the racism she experienced which perpetuates the marginalization of Indigenous identities and languages:

“It was kind of a sad thing too that happened to us, you know, in the day... people sort of made you feel ashamed, or tried to make you feel ashamed of who you were, y’know. Like, they call you names and stuff like that. But that never bothered me. I’d just walk away and say ‘Well, they’re not too bright,’ or something like that. I would think in my heart, ‘I’m not gunna waste my time here.’ So I’d just move on and go about what I was doing.”

Helen’s resilience in the face of racism allowed her to maintain pride in her identity and language. As Chastity mentioned, racism and colonial mentality can also be perpetuated by those within the community. Though one’s relationship to language often works to affirm one’s identity, some may use language as a means to contest others’ claims to identity. Chastity shared:

“Yeah, I had a lot of judgment too through, I y’know, I felt that I had a lot of judgment, ‘cause I’m, I’m half. My dad is Scottish and my mom is Ojibwe and Oneida, so my mom is from the Neyaashiinigiing and my dad is from Scotland, right? Yeah, so I felt like it really had to like... Push hard because of, you know, and that’s just from colonization and people’s experience, and I understand that, but that’s been a real, it’s been not an easy road in the beginning, but it’s gotten easier, but it’s made me more aware of how to make it easier for my students and other people that are learning is to share.”

She explained that her experiences with exclusion have influenced her approach to teaching, which includes sharing all of her resources and empowering anyone who wishes to learn Ojibwe.

When I met with Polly in 2020 to discuss research possibilities, she shared some of her experiences as a language educator in the community. During our conversation, Polly identified intergenerational trauma caused by colonization as a major barrier for language learners. She explained that when people attend language classes, they can experience intense feelings of frustration regarding the traumatic histories of colonization and the ways that language was taken from them. These feelings can be overwhelming and may prevent people from returning to class and continuing their learning. Language learning can be triggering for some people because language is inextricable from their traumatic experiences. People are not able to simply learn the language. A trauma-informed approach to language teaching and learning could be helpful to individuals who face trauma-related barriers to learning.

Kenneth expressed his frustrations not only at the atrocities of the past, but the ways in which the settler-colonial government fails to fully acknowledge the past and continued harm caused by colonization. He said, *“But when settlers came here, they really didn’t know lots about like living here. And people who spoke Ojibwe taught lots of settlers how to do that, right? And then it, it’s hard not to get frustrated when you look back at history, and how sometimes Canada tries to polish it up or make it look better or not talk about things or not even educate like, people going to school about any of these terrible things that happen.”* There is no recognition of the past, making it difficult to look

towards the future. Kenneth's frustrations are reflected in one of the most central tenets of the TRC—there must be truth before there is reconciliation. In *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future (2015)*, the TRC writes that reconciliation requires creating a relationship of mutual respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. For this to occur, "there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour" (2015, 6-7). Truth-telling is an essential first step towards reconciliation, yet, as Kenneth states, many Canadians are uneducated and unaware of our country's shameful history. This lack of knowledge leads to the creation of poor public policies and reinforces racist attitudes and distrust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians (TRC 2015, 8). As the TRC states, "to build for the future, Canadians must look to, and learn from, the past" (2015, 8).

Justin discussed the impact of the Church on those within his community. He said, "*A lot of people way back then you know, when you're dealing with abuse from the Church or when certain people, when they lost that. When they pick up the Catholic way, y'know. It would be difficult for them. But you just have to remember that they lost that a long time ago through residential school. They lost that through the religion.*" He continued, "*But that language spirit can be brought up to life again, when you keep talking it, when you keep speaking it you know, you may not know a lot of words, but if you can use those words and put them in a sentence, you know, some way or another....*" He explained how speaking and (re)learning language can contribute to healing. This was also the case for Chastity, who expressed how healing from her traumatic experiences went hand-in-hand

with reawakening her language. She said, “...*part of it was my own healing journey, was to heal that part that was taken from me... So it was really important to me to know my language. It's a very healing journey.*” For Chastity, working closely with the Elders and speakers to reawaken her language contributed to healing.

The elementary school students I spoke with talked about how colonization and intergenerational trauma affects their relationship with Ojibwe as well. Kenneth described how colonization directly impacts his ability to learn Ojibwe from his family. When I asked about the biggest challenges to his learning, he said, “*Well, definitely since things like residential schools and the Sixties Scoop, right, children being taken away from their homes and not learning, really any Ojibwe, it's really hard to learn Ojibwe. Because not lots of people like know, like, in my direct family, right? No one can really speak Ojibwe, except a few things. So that's why I think it's really important to try and revitalize it.*” He also explained that he has few connections to Elders, the language keepers. “*I don't really talk to lots of Elders, like my mom's dad grew up in Toronto, right? And she grew up in Toronto, and her mom, right? So her mom was Native and she can't really remember much Ojibwe. And my grandma, right, doesn't remember lots of Ojibwe. So my dad doesn't. So it's actually it's pretty hard, I guess you would say to try and learn Ojibwe.*” Kenneth also pointed to how his family’s physical displacement from the community affected language transmission in his family.

Helen noted how difficult it can be to connect with one’s Indigenous culture or language in a monolithic, settler-colonial society where English and French dominate public spaces, education, and the media. She said, “*So many people live in a white*

society too. So therefore you don't hear the language. And the life is different." The limited visibility of Ojibwe in Canadian society makes it more challenging for members to hear it spoken in everyday life, resulting in fewer opportunities for learners and mobilizers to speak Ojibwe and retain their knowledge of the language.

4.4 Lack of Speakers

There is a sense of urgency in Neyaashiinigmiing to learn from the handful of fluent speakers while they are still well and able to pass on the language to future generations. This is a serious concern in the community, which came up in most of our conversations. Mary Alice, an Elder in her eighties, told me about the Maadookii Seniors' Centre, a place where the Maadookii Seniors Group can gather to participate in a wide range of activities, including language classes. She said, *"we have the Maadookii Seniors, and there's only about three... that can talk the language."* She explained, *"people my age or even younger are slowly going."* Chastity expressed gratitude for her experiences working on language with Elders who have since passed away or lost the capacity to share their knowledge.

"I'm just really grateful for them that you know. They believed in me. I'm just so grateful. And that I got to spend time with them 'cause, you know, I was, I made a list of all the Elders that I worked with and one of them was my father-in-law. They're gone. I made a list of them. There's over ten of them that I worked with that they're not here no more... And that there is, I have five, six of them that I work with now, I was working with before COVID. Those are the only ones we have left right now. So I'm just grateful that I got to work with them and I got to learn as much as I could, and I'm grateful for the people I have now. My mentors and their support because you need someone to talk to. It's not fun talking to yourself... To have somebody to converse with is really what we need. And we need, we need to be able to do that now, 'cause, you know what, what compromises them is their health, their hearing. Big time. And they're getting old. They're really a lot older. I think they're all over the age of eighty. I think Jean's the only one that's seventy. And...Justin. The rest of

them are over eighty. So we don't have time. We don't have time to argue about language we need to like move now."

As Chastity mentioned, one of the community's greatest needs is to have speakers to converse with in Ojibwe. As it is an oral language, many language educators, like Mary Young and Basil Johnston, emphasize that Anishinaabemowin is best acquired through first developing oral comprehension and producing speech (Pitawanakwat 2018, 470).

The Maadookii Seniors' Centre webpage describes Elders in Neyaashiinigiing as "*bridges to the old way*" and "*custodians of the culture*" (Nawash 2023). It goes on to state that, "*it is by the language and the stories that a people's culture and history are known*" (Nawash 2023). This sentiment is reflected in Robert's account of his own experiences learning Ojibwe. He shared how, in teaching the language, his teachers are also sharing their culture, stories and unique perspectives.

"I think really getting as you kind of, you get the language, obviously, but then you also get a lot of stories, and a lot of cultural information as well. So I think, I think it's kind of like, I've never really been in a class where you were you sort of just like, it's very dry, and you're only learning the language, you always sort of get little stories about, about the culture and, and just from [inaudible] and that sort of thing, which is, I think, very good and it really kind of depends on the person as well. And so like sometimes they have like, different like perspectives and stories, and a different perspective on language. And so you kind of get all that, you kind of get a very personalized experience, depending on who your teacher is."

Some members also mentioned the unique dialect that differentiates Neyaashiinigiing from other Anishinaabemowin-speaking communities. As Kenneth told me, "*In the Ojibwe we learn, there's small differences from other communities.*" Chastity

referenced the significance of speaking and learning the language from those within one's own community. She said,

"I feel grateful, I feel happy. Because I get, I've gotten the chance to sit with all those fluent speakers, and that I get to now, still get to sit with them. So yeah, I'm just grateful that that I get to, because some Indigenous people don't because they have no speakers. They're gone. And they have to bring in other people from other communities that are not from their community. But that's good. But I'm grateful that I get to hear the people here. In Neyaashiinigiing right, I'm blessed to be able to do that."

Thus, as the number of speakers in Neyaashiinigiing declines, so does the number of community members to pass on aspects of language and culture that are specific and significant to the community. Some participants expressed concerns about differences in dialect when learning Ojibwe from speakers outside of Neyaashiinigiing.

4.4.1 Concerns about Dialect

Halle recalled her experiences growing up in Neyaashiinigiing and speaking Ojibwe, which she learned from her grandparents. She explained, *"...they spoke more the older Ojibwe than it is now. Now, it's more modern and different objects that are newer and wouldn't have been used back then. It's [along] a different dialect. So that kind of confused me growing older and learning the language."* She explained that as people in Neyaashiinigiing learn Ojibwe from people in other Anishinaabemowin-speaking communities, she has noticed some changes in the spoken language, including the pronunciation of different vowel sounds. On her time learning Ojibwe in school, Halle said, *"I learned like from old-school to new-school, which was really hard to grasp. But after a while, I was like, 'Okay, it makes sense.' Now, like I was trying to pick it up. It's just different*

I guess.” She continued, “It’s pretty interesting. Just to see it grow into something bigger I guess and more modern.” Despite the positives, she said she still misses hearing the dialect spoken by her grandparents. “It’s like, you still kind of miss hearing the older, the teachings and how they spoke it. I know a certain few who do speak it still. So hearing that it’s like, ‘Oh, that’s really nice to hear.’”

For some members, concerns about dialects have acted as a barrier to language revitalization over the years. In an email following our interview, Chastity added her perspective on the issue:

“We have no time to argue about dialect. Are fluent speakers leaving very fast. There are not many fluent speakers that are here with us now. Many, many have passed. And we will need help from other First Nations communities to revive our language. Many communities have had to do this because they have no speakers. When our fluent speakers speak to one another from other communities they can understand each other. I have seen and experienced that first hand at little NHL, pow-wows, ceremonial gatherings, and other events. Long ago you would know who was from which area by the way they structured their language. Or what they did, whether they were fishermen, iron workers, farmers, basket makers, medicine people, hunters, and so on. I learned this by sitting with the fluent speakers from Neyaashiinigiing and other First Nation communities. It is great to learn our dialect.. But don’t let that stop us from acquiring Anishinaabemowin from others. All of it is valuable. Many of us have families and great-grandparents, and ancestors come or came from other First Nations: Like Wikwemikong (Manitoulin Island), West Bay, Georgia Island, Rama, Walpole, Muncey, Shawanaga, Parry Sound, Christian Island, Saugeen, Cutler, Whitefish Bay, and so on. I see it as important and valuable to know each other also. It only adds to our Anishinaabemowin knowledge for understanding and speaking.”

As Chastity mentions, the lack of Ojibwe speakers and teachers in Neyaashiinigiing is a matter of urgency. A pragmatic approach to revitalizing Ojibwe in Neyaashiinigiing necessitates turning to speakers from other communities for support, which may result in some changes to dialect. As we have discussed, it is

counterproductive to imagine languages as static, unchanging entities, frozen in time. All languages are dynamic systems of communication which shift in response to the contexts of their communities of speakers. Though regional dialects hold immense cultural and historical significance, a focus on dialect can hinder the greater goal of preserving, speaking, teaching, and revitalizing the core language. As Chastity explains, revitalization in any form is valuable. Changes to dialect may even signal that people are using the language in new ways. This is positive and supports the goal of making Ojibwe relevant and functional in more contemporary contexts.

4.5 Lack of Language Educators and Resources

There is a distinct lack of speakers in the community, as well as a lack of language teachers who are trained to teach Ojibwe. Chastity shared that it can be challenging to be one of the sole Ojibwe educators in the community: *“Being the only teacher, language teacher by yourself is a barrier. It's been a challenge.”* For many years, Chastity got by working almost entirely on her own.

“So as a language teacher... I have to do had to do a ton, but it's getting better now. I have an EA now. And she helps me make resources. Before I did all my resources, all my language lessons, all my research, everything, I did everything. And it's really important to have support, another person or a team of people, and I'm really grateful to Polly because she supported me through all through school when I didn't have, you know, somebody, she helped me and she's made my, a lot of my, she, we went through the curriculum together, we go through it all the time, she was making a lot of my resources. So that that would take, y'know, that extra heaviness off my shoulders so that I could focus on them, teaching them to speak and use the resources to, y'know, I wasn't taking all evening after work to make stuff. And that's what I did. I said, 'I can't do this anymore. I'm gonna get a burnout.' You know, I had to reach out to people and reach out, network with other teachers and asking, 'What are you doing? How is it working? Like, what can I do?' You know, asking them for advice. And you know, I did a lot of that, I've done, and I still do, right?”

Through networking with educators from other communities, Chastity has learned a lot about what it takes to create successful revitalization programming. To start, it is necessary that more people are involved.

“...you need a team of people, not one person or two people, there has to be a team of people who have the knowledge of Ojibwe language or linguistics who have, who can speak or are almost there or are y’know, committed, right to their learning, right. That’s really important... We’ve done a lot of workshops in the community for immersion, how immersion, what’s working in other communities, right. So we have a lot of, you know, evidence: M’Chigeeng, West Bay, [inaudible] Island, Wiiki, [inaudible] and that’s in Minnesota, right, but amazing program, you know, all these people have done that, all that work. So let’s look at what they did. And how can we do that. But I’m really amazed with West Bay, what they did. It took them a long time, I think, five or seven years just to create the curriculum. And they’re still- they have teams of people, it’s not just one people. So there’s one people that does resources, there’s a team of people who does resources, that’s their job. There’s a team of people, there’s a person that does administration, there’s a, there’s a head teacher, that’s the head of the other language teachers. So their job is that they’re getting what they need. They’re doing what they’re supposed to right, they support, supporting them, lifting them up. So it’s really important to lift people up to do their, their job.”

Though Chastity works with speakers from Neyaashiinigiimiing, many have health and mobility issues due to their advanced ages, which can impede their ability to participate in language programming. Chastity shared, *“It’s really important that we create more speakers. That, that people who have the desire to wanna learn the language be given that chance.”* She explained that in order to create more speakers as soon as possible, the community may need to bring in people from other communities who are trained to teach Ojibwe, as speakers need training and support to pass on the language to others through language programming. She said, *“...we would have to bring speakers from other communities possibly because you have to have people that can actually, y’know, have to be trained, right. See part of the Anishinaabe Pane Immersion program*

is they train, they had a program just for fluent speakers, to train them to transfer language on to people, they had to learn that. They're fluent speakers, but they didn't, they needed help. So that's, you know, that's really important."

Chastity described funding as essential to the creation of more fluent speakers and teachers in the community. *"To be able to do that, money, money is the number one thing is funding. Yeah, because we can't go from, we have to start at the beginning, you start at number one, you can't go to number ten. It's not going to work, we have to create, give people an opportunity to learn the language, and pay them! Give them, because they have bills to pay, they have children. And that's what other communities have done is they give them funding. They give them like a like a salary, honorarium, what do you want to call it? So their job is just go learn the language from that fluent speaker."* Chastity believes that anyone working to acquire Ojibwe through immersion or master-apprentice programs should be compensated for their time and work. In pursuing her own formal language education, finances were a major barrier for Chastity. In addition to her responsibilities at work and home, she had to fundraise relentlessly to pay for various academic programs, and the travel and accommodations required to attend them. *"So the number one thing is you know, you have to train, you have to give people the opportunity to learn the language. And to support them to do that, and funding and support. People who want to go to school, they should have funding, they shouldn't have to have a challenge with getting funding to go. Y'know, if they decide to go to an immersion program or, they have to have that support."* Therefore, support from community leadership is essential.

“Yeah, the biggest thing is commitment from leadership to make a commitment to revitalization of the language, and around money, and supporting language projects, because that's been the biggest thing is finding the money... And I've done a lot of stuff. This is... I actually network with other programs to say, ‘This is my idea. What can you do? Give me more money? Do you have any money you need to spend?’ Like, I did that, I did that because I wanted the kids to have something that they could have. So like I brought in a guest drummer or you know, guest speakers or Elders and then you know, and on, and then after that, Language Nest started to pay for, so Language Nest has helped me to pay for like a speaker to come in. Right? What if there was a big project say a drum project, a drum, hand drum project, then I would, y’know, talk to people. I got really good at it! After I was, ‘I can't do this by myself and I don't have enough money in my budget.’ My budget, like there needs to be more language, money put into the language budget for the school. So yeah, that would be very helpful. I think I could do so much more!”

As Chastity gets creative with the resources available to her, she has also been developing other ideas for revitalization strategies that aim to help those who wish to learn the language but are not able to attend language classes.

“There's lots of things that we could do. Like, even like an Ojibwe app. Like, one, y’know, there's training, the [Meek Lake] and we can do an Ojibwe app, like Wiiki has done like, Wiikwemkoong has done this amazing app, and y’know and create it for here. So that, y’know, to have that time to be able to go and get the training and to do it. So we could make it and then it could be given to the community. Y’know, that would be, that's something that we had talked about before. And I think was, y’know, because people want to know the language, okay? And they can't always come to language class or, y’know, just because of everyday life, and I understand that, so let's create something that they can use, you know? It's a start, right?”

She was also excited to share other possibilities for immersion workshops that other communities have created. She told me about a working group that hosted workshops in the community about language and immersion. She said:

“...we did those in the community to show people what immersion looks like, or how it- So there's a group of people, these young people... they would go to a house and they would meet for a weekend with all the speakers, right? And then that, they have to speak Ojibwe! And you had to leave all your devices, nothing, no phones, nothing, no computers, but you had to listen to Ojibwe, you had to speak in Ojibwe and they said there are lots of times where, they had a room where they could go if you need

to have a breakdown. But they came and did, they came and did a presentation. So they've done a lot of work around what needs to be, what can be done. And what we could do, you know? So we're showing like, 'Look at all these amazing things that people are doing,' like, you know, Barb Nolan and Helen Roy. And you know, those young people... So it can be done. It's just doing it. It's just doing it! And, you know, if we make, and this is what they had said, and I heard them saying this at the conference up at Sioux Sainte Marie, and I remember those people from Wisconsin and Minnesota said, y'know, 'Yeah, you're gonna make, there's gonna be good times and then there's going to be bumps! But you learn from it.' Right? And so they talked about what they learned through their, their journey through the immersion, the revitalization of language and that, yeah, y'know, everything's not gonna be perfect, we're gonna make mistakes. But it's like, don't give up! Just keep pushing forward. And that's what our community needs to do. Yeah, don't kibosh anything. Don't give up. Just keep going for it. 'Okay, well, let's find a resolution. This isn't working, how can we do this?' Or, you know, I mean, like, you, you have to do that you can't just give up, just gotta keep moving forward. That's all I have to say!"

Chastity requires more than just financial assistance, however; she also requires the confidence and support of decision-makers who hold "*the purse strings*." She shared, "*And the other thing is listen to the people that are the experts in language, who have the answers! Who know what needs to be done. Trust them, support them, right, to make those things happen.*"

4.6 Lack of Domains of Use

Perhaps one of the greatest barriers to revitalization is the lack of contexts where language is used in the community. While participants reported hearing Ojibwe spoken in a variety of settings in their community (as discussed in Chapter 2), they identified the school, Language Nest, and Maadookii Seniors' Centre as the places where language is most often used. However, it is important to note that these places primarily serve as

learning environments. The challenge lies in expanding language usage beyond explicit learning spaces and integrating it into real-world contexts. It is not common to hear the language spoken conversationally throughout the community. Gregor explained that a challenge for his learning is: *“Probably not having an area...where we have people who speak the language regularly.”* He continued, *“But like, if, like, if they could, would speak more regularly, I think we could probably learn a little bit more and more and it would motivate people who weren't learning to learn more.”* Gregor's observation underscores the significance of mobilizing and normalizing everyday use of the language in various contexts, which can serve as a catalyst for further language mobilization and learning.

Chastity also noted that Ojibwe is typically used in more formal contexts, such as in ceremony. One of the reasons why she wanted to (re)learn Ojibwe was because, *“when I went to ceremonies, a lot of it was in the language and there was some stuff I did not understand. Because it's only used in ceremonies. It's not used in everyday conversation.”* She also acknowledged the need to support more everyday use of Ojibwe. Individuals who wish to use Ojibwe in additional contexts often struggle to find conversational partners. Kenneth shared:

“Not lots of people can speak much Ojibwe in my life and in my family. Like my mom doesn't know that much or my dad. And his grandma spoke quite a bit, but... it's a lot harder, especially when, like not lots of your family knows much Ojibwe. So it can be a lot harder, especially to try and learn once you get past your secondary learning, like high school and going to college and that, because there aren't very many fluent speakers, mostly older people, and then not even many of them at that.”

Most of the learners/mobilizers I spoke with stated that their families do not speak very much Ojibwe. As a result, young learners have few opportunities to speak Ojibwe conversationally or to learn and speak the language at home. Mary Alice expressed the importance of speaking Ojibwe in one's home and being taught the language by family members: *"That means everything to be taught by your parents that talk the language. Nowadays, the children learn the language, some language in school, they go home, they can't [speak to their] parents, because the parents don't know. Or don't wanna learn."* When asked how she uses Ojibwe at home, Mary Alice lamented the lack of people in her life with whom she can converse. She said, *"I can't even talk to any, even my family because they don't speak the language. Like my children or my husband. Or some people that I know. Some people can say a few words, but they could never put the words together to make a conversation."* The only place that she had been able to speak the language in recent years was the Language Nest, which she informed me was not in operation at the time of our interview due to a lack of funding. When I asked about Mary Alice's experiences at the Language Nest, she told me:

"Since we don't have that anymore, I really miss it. It brought, I was away from the reserve for [many] years, and I never spoke the language while I was out. There was nobody to speak to in the city. So when I came home, they had language classes, but I was too busy settling down and never attended any till [recently]. So all that time, I didn't speak the language... It is a long time. And sometimes I will talk to myself, a word will come to my mind. See what it means. And that's the way it is we don't, I don't talk the language, maybe only when we have the classes once a week, if at that. And it's only for about a couple of hours."

Some other Elders also identified the Language Nest as one of the only places they could regularly speak their language with others and hear it being spoken. The loss of this domain of use was felt deeply by the speakers who attended classes there.

However, Mary Alice went on to explain that even when the Language Nest was open, there were not many regular attendees.

“People come and go, they don't seem to stay. Like [the young] people come in for a couple of sessions, then they drop off. So it's really, it's really hard to get the people together to speak the language. They don't know, I know, they learned a few words at the school. But like I say when they go home, they have no one to converse with. And we don't see the young people. There's no get-togethers or anything to speak the language only the, when we have the classes.”

Mary Alice also pointed out the absence of opportunities for Elders and knowledge keepers to connect with young community members. As previously discussed, these are important connections that have been intentionally disrupted by colonization, which continues to negatively impact oral traditions and the transmission of language, knowledge systems, and cultural practices between generations (Wyman 2012, 38). Mary Alice mentioned that she enjoys hearing students singing songs in Ojibwe. However, when I asked if she gets to hear them sing often, she said, *“No. I have no one that goes to school.”* Kenneth also commented on the lack of connections to speakers within his life. He told me, *“It can be very hard, especially like Robbie's lucky that he like knows Chas and has some good connections, right? So it makes it easier for him to learn and to find ways to learn and stuff like that.”* It was apparent from my conversations with community members that the learners and mobilizers are eager to learn, and Elders and language keepers are interested in speaking and hearing Ojibwe more often. A space or context where Elders and youth can connect and speak Ojibwe in an informal, conversational setting would help to foster these important connections, thereby contributing to cultural and language transmission and revitalization. When Indigenous

children spend time with Elders, they are more likely to thrive in school (Nawash 2023). This was the case for an Alaskan Yup'ik village, where a counselor and influential Elder was hired as an “elder consultant” to speak Yup'ik and share teachings with the students (Wyman 2012, 90). Students, teachers, and staff reported an improved learning environment at the school due to his presence and work (Wyman 2012, 90).

The process of creating language materials can also support relationship-building and revitalization. As Galla (2016) explains, the use of technology in revitalization efforts can provide opportunities for youth—experts in technology, and Elders —experts in language, to come together to create language resources. For example, the creation and implementation of the community-based language app that Chastity discussed could provide a means to empower youth to get involved in language revitalization efforts, and to form connections with Elders and language educators. Creating additional domains of language use would also encourage people to use Ojibwe outside of formal learning settings. Reestablishing the Language Nest would be an excellent starting point in achieving these goals. As Chastity suggested, incentives for participation in language programs may also encourage active engagement.

4.7 Lack of Viable/Accessible Formal Learning Opportunities

Another serious barrier that arose in my conversations with community members was a lack of viable, accessible learning opportunities in the community. As previously mentioned, once students graduate from elementary school, they are suddenly left with no formal language education. Halle said, “*We have to go to either Wiarton or Owen*

Sound for high school. So that's where it's really lost." She shared how the lack of formal Ojibwe education beyond elementary school has affected her own language journey:

"Learning Ojibwe, I lost it when I went to high school off-reserve. I spoke it kind of fluently when I was younger with my grandparents... And then once I left Grade 8, I went to off-reserve school in Owen Sound which is about an hour and forty-five minutes away. They didn't offer, they offered a Native language, like not Native language, but Native cultural class. I wasn't interested in it, because it wasn't a First Nations woman teaching it. It was like, I don't really want to learn that way. With someone who is not familiar with it. So I just lost the language after that. So it's kind of, it was kind of sad losing it, but I know some like colours and animals, foods."

Kenneth also expressed concerns about his future learning, as he will have limited access to speakers, teachers, and language resources after elementary school. Because Kenneth does not have many Ojibwe speakers in his life or family, he relies on formal educational opportunities to learn Ojibwe. Because of this, he said, *"my parents don't know that much Ojibwe. So it is harder for sure to learn outside of schools and programs and stuff like that."* He shared,

"Well, definitely, if there was like classes past Grade 8, I know I would love to take those. During high school, like even if it was on my own, like I had to go take that, like, after school or on days where I didn't have school. But it can get pretty hard. Like if you want to be in any clubs or sports or involved with that stuff, going to school and you don't get to learn it at your high school, right? They're taking lots of your time away, like five days a week, right? Especially if it's quadmesters, that's going to be like even more draining when you have like English all week, or stuff like that."

Kenneth also expressed concerns about finding the time to dedicate to learning with an already busy schedule. He continued, *"I really hope that I can remember a lot or continue to learn once I've graduated Grade 8. But like if I don't put in a lot of effort, I don't think I will really like remember a lot or it won't be as like put in my face or easy to learn."* Kenneth points out that the effort required to learn Ojibwe is often placed on learners,

who are required to seek out resources and take responsibility for their own learning. Helen shared a similar sentiment about finding the time to speak and learn Ojibwe: *"...I think we just maybe don't take the time or we don't see those people often enough to sort of keep up to it. Everybody's busy, busy, busy. Busy world we're living in."* As Chastity stated earlier, people like Kenneth who wish to learn should be compensated for their time and efforts. For high school students, there are further possibilities for incentives to participate in language programming. For example, since all high school students in Ontario are required to spend forty hours volunteering, perhaps hours spent participating in language programming could help to fulfill this graduation requirement. There may also be opportunities for the community to partner with neighbouring high schools to offer language classes for course credits. As Halle shared, *"It would be nice to keep someone who is Indigenous in the school and speaking it with the students who want to learn it."* Though there might not be enough demand at each school individually, an online class shared between the schools could allow resources to stretch even further. The students I spoke with were clearly eager to continue their learning but discouraged by the lack of options to do so after elementary school. Kenneth shared, *"if I did have the option though, to, if there was a Language Nest or there was like a camp or some kind of extra way, I would take it because me personally, I find learning like languages in general very fun and interesting. Especially because it's my language like from here."* Creating these opportunities and incentives could help students to maintain and build upon their language knowledge from Kikendaasogamig, while also drawing in other students who may not otherwise prioritize language learning.

Halle also mentioned logistical barriers for community members who wish to attend the few language classes available. When I asked how learning in the community could be improved, she said, *“I feel like just more classes and more put out there at reasonable times, I guess, for people. And for different, for different age groups. Because they'd be different levels, I guess, more advanced for like the Elders and older. Different levels, I guess for people who want to learn it again.”* She continued, *“They [have] a lot of the language [classes] like later so dinnertime kind of. Like seven to eight and a lot of people are having dinner at that time... it would be better if it were right after school or something.”* A few logistical changes could help with attendance. One possibility is to include dinner as part of the program. Providing a meal could serve as an incentive to participate and an accommodation for those who otherwise are not able to take the time to attend classes.

4.8 COVID-19

It is widely understood that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated preexisting systemic inequities for marginalized communities around the world. Particularly, Indigenous communities in Canada were disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to systemic inequities such as inadequate access to healthcare, underlying health conditions, high rates of poverty, inadequate housing, and intergenerational trauma (Sekercioglu and Spence 2023). My interviews with community members in Neyaashiinigmiing occurred in February and March of 2021, when the pandemic was still affecting every part of daily life. Unsurprisingly, the pandemic greatly impacted language

revitalization efforts in the community. Many students shared their experiences with learning Ojibwe in an online format during lockdowns. Kenneth explained that students at Kikendaasogamig were learning in-person at school for two days of the week, and at home learning online for the rest of the week. He said, *“We learn Ojibwe, so we’ll use Ojibwe during the Ojibwe class, but since we’re doing a hybrid, there hasn’t been a crazy amount of focus on Ojibwe, because we’re two days in school and then have some work to do at home. So it’s sometimes harder, especially because Chas is only seeing one class. She’s the only teacher at our school, that would be at multiple classes.”* This shift to online learning has undoubtedly hindered the speed and quality of students’ learning. When I asked about his experiences learning online, Kenneth shared, *“Well, it’s, it’s not that bad. For me personally, I do have a tutor that I spend time with. So that’s very nice to have a good working environment. So I think it’s a lot harder for other kids, because they don’t have that. But it definitely can be harder to learn online than to learn in person.”* Zoe felt that it was more difficult to learn online, but that the videos assigned for Ojibwe class were still helpful for her learning. *“Yeah, it’s definitely harder not having somebody right there just to correct you when you’re wrong. I wouldn’t say it’s easier online, it’s definitely harder. But with the videos they give us they really choose hard on what videos to give you just so you get a better explanation on it. So they’ll have a few videos for the younger kids where it’s separating the words, and making sure they understand it.”*

Robert stressed the significance of hearing the language spoken in person as opposed to learning online by himself and expressed his hopes for future in-person learning.

“Hopefully once COVID's done, I can go to the Language Nest more for the little programs to also learn from the Elders and learn from those, those people who are still able to speak the language on a day-to-day basis. It's definitely one thing to learn, to write it down and to, like, say to yourself, and like, say it with people who are also learning but I feel like when you hear someone who is who is speaking fluently, and like quickly, I, my ear is, would probably take a little while to adjust to that.”

Halle said she missed spending time with Polly in-person doing immersion sessions. *“With Polly, it's with COVID too, it's hard to see her. It was really nice, because I kept a lot of the teachings. She taught a lot of like, how to make traditional medicines and how to properly package them and keep them.”* Chastity was very careful with social distancing due to concerns about the health of her family members.

“...with COVID right now, there's not been a lot of, not a lot of, y'know, gathering or anything, so. And I don't really, I try to keep, keep my circle very small, because my dad has cancer and my grandma's eighty-eight. You know, we take care of her. So, and my husband's older, so we have, and my nephews have rare kidney diseases, so we have to be really careful. So it's not like before. Yeah. When it's over, then we can go back to doing all that stuff.”

She also described interactions she used to have with people in public that were no longer possible during lockdowns.

“[Ojibwe would normally be spoken] at Language Nest, at the school and community events. You know, at the gas station, we see somebody, y'know, you always speak Ojibwe. Yep! [Right over.] Talk to them. Yeah, like, and, you know, like, if you seen them at the powwow, or, you know, at... at community events, right. If you go to, you know, go talk to them. And you always ask the Elder if they need anything, right? Or just go and talk to them and visit them, or a speaker or someone you know, who speaks Ojibwe.”

With community events no longer taking place during the pandemic, these sorts of casual interactions became non-existent. The lack of spontaneous in-person encounters

hindered the regular use of Ojibwe, and disrupted the ability of community members to engage and connect with one another. This was especially true for Elders, who were most at-risk during the pandemic and perhaps more reliant on casual in-person interactions for support and connection. Although Chastity tried to maintain her connections with the Elders in the face of COVID-19, speaking over the phone presented another barrier to communication. She said that she hoped *“to continue to be able to continue to sit with the Elders. You know, to have someone to converse with in with in Ojibwe is my, y’know, the greatest thing that I could have all the time, right? So yeah. So I’m going to try and create that more like, you know that we’re at home, like, on the phone, but sometimes they can’t hear that well.”* I experienced this communication barrier first-hand through my phone conversations with Elders. While technology played a crucial role in bridging physical distances during lockdowns, for some, it also introduced new barriers to maintaining meaningful connections. The transition to phone conversations and other forms of digital communication posed challenges for Elders. Some Elders may not be as comfortable or proficient with technology, making it hard for them to engage in virtual conversations effectively. Other issues like poor audio quality or difficulty hearing can further hinder communication.

Justin shared how he was managing through periods of isolation. He said, *“...an Elder told me once, ‘You get back up, you keep going, you don’t look back, just keep going straight ahead.’ And so that’s, that’s what I’m trying to do in this day and age with all this virus and stuff like that that’s happening. All the self-isolation.”* He was anxious for the community to return to normal so that language revitalization could continue. *“I think*

it'd be very important if the Language Nest was up and running again, providing we didn't have this virus. I think a lot of people, a lot of the young people would really benefit from it."

4.9 Lack of Hope for the Future

Though most of my conversations with community members suggested optimism and hope for the future of the language, some participants also shared their fears about the future of Ojibwe. Kenneth said, *"It's kind of sad to think that one day I bet it will, right? No one will speak it and that's the sad truth to think but that's probably what's going to happen, right?"* Mary Alice also expressed worry about what will happen to Ojibwe if revitalization efforts are unsuccessful. *"I think it's gonna be a dying language. Sorry to say. That's my, that's my feeling. Because no one's really wanting to pick it up and learn it."* She continued, *"...we have classes, but no one is attending them. So you know, it's there for them to learn, but they don't seem to want to, or what, I don't know what their problem is. It's there."* This perception of a lack of care from other community members may result from the gap in connection between Elders and youth. Indigenous people, and especially youth, are sometimes blamed for the decline in language use. However, all of the young participants were passionate about Ojibwe, and the barriers they face to their learning are not for lack of trying. In reality, the decline in language use and the ongoing barriers to revitalization of Indigenous languages are directly caused by historical and ongoing processes of colonization and cannot be attributed to the choices of individuals (Davis 2017).

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the various challenges faced by individuals and the wider community in the pursuit of language revitalization. The deep-rooted impacts of historical and ongoing colonization have established formidable barriers to learning and preserving the Ojibwe language. Recognizing the profound impact of intergenerational trauma necessitates a trauma-informed approach to language education. Learning and speaking Ojibwe can contribute to healing trauma, as Chastity shared was part of her journey reawakening her language. From Chastity's perspective as a language expert, one of the most pressing challenges in revitalization is securing the necessary funding and support from community leadership. If language educators had greater access to financial resources, perhaps they could hire speakers from other communities to help create more speakers in Neyaashiinigiing. This would also allow educators to compensate learners for their time and efforts. Greater financial resources would also open the door to a wide array of innovative revitalization strategies, as suggested by Chastity. Initiatives such as immersion programming and the development of a community-based language app could expand learning opportunities and domains of language use. This approach would address a major challenge identified by community members—the limited chances for practical language use in their daily lives. Though some expressed their fears for the future of the language, community members were generally enthusiastic about revitalizing Ojibwe in their own lives and within the wider community. With a growing number of people able to dedicate more time and effort to

revitalization, many exciting possibilities emerge for the future of language revitalization in Neyaashiinigmiing.

5 Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Arguments

Throughout this thesis, I have used an analysis of interviews with ten participants to address the following research questions: What are the opportunities for language revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing and the challenges faced by language learners? How do people in Neyaashiinigiing perceive Ojibwe? What is the role of Ojibwe in their lives and how do they think and feel about the language? How do people in Neyaashiinigiing use Ojibwe in their everyday lives? What are the strengths and barriers of language learning in Neyaashiinigiing?

Chapter 2 introduces language use in Neyaashiinigiing from the perspectives of community members. Rooted in the ethnography of speaking, the chapter aims to provide an overview of the various contexts in which Ojibwe is used in the community in order to inform the community's future approaches to revitalization. I argue against the use of rigid designations of what it means to be a "speaker" in place of a more flexible perspective on the various roles one may occupy throughout revitalization processes, like learner, mobilizer, and teacher. These roles are not static but rather form a fluid cycle influenced by context, allowing individuals to shift among them based on where they are, who they are with, and various other factors. I underscore that these roles are crucial for language revitalization, as learning, mobilizing, and teaching all play essential roles in revitalization processes. I then explore the detailed narratives of language use by three community members; Justin, an Elder; Robert, a young adult; and Zoe, an elementary school student. Their stories exemplify how individuals of varying ages and life stages may utilize Ojibwe

in their daily lives and illustrate how each person occupies the roles of learner, mobilizer, and teacher within different contexts. Ultimately, the stories of Justin, Robert, and Zoe demonstrate that community members are learning, speaking, and teaching Ojibwe in a multitude of places and contexts in the community on a daily basis, and the language serves an essential purpose in each of their lives.

Chapter 3 explores the strengths of language revitalization from the perspectives of the community members who participated in this project. One of the greatest strengths of Ojibwe revitalization is the overwhelmingly positive language ideology that community members expressed through our conversations. People feel that Ojibwe is deeply important to themselves and their community, as it provides a means for people to connect to their Anishinaabe culture and spirituality, Anishinaabe worldviews and Indigenous knowledge, personal and collective histories, and one's personal identities. Learning and teaching Ojibwe also supports people's connections with one another. Speaking and hearing Ojibwe can invoke feelings of pride, laughter, fun, happiness, and fulfillment, contributing to a sense of wellbeing and countering colonial narratives of shame. Community members also shared feeling a desire and a responsibility to continue learning, teaching, and sharing the language with others, with a hopeful eye towards the future. Another strength of the community's approach to revitalization is the language education at Kikendaasogamig, headed by Chastity. Chasity has created a safe and positive learning environment for her students, where they are able to learn Ojibwe in engaging and sustainable ways. Her students are eager to continue their learning, and to

mobilize their language knowledge outside of the classroom, contributing to language revitalization in the wider community.

Chapter 4 examines the challenges to language revitalization in the community from the perspective of those living in Neyaashiinigiing. Community members shared how colonization and government policy have impacted their personal and collective relationships with the language. These legacies underpin each of the barriers to language revitalization. I argue for a trauma-informed approach to language education in order to support community members whose intergenerational trauma prevents them from participating in revitalization. As Chastity shared, learning or reawakening one's language can contribute to healing. The dwindling number of fluent speakers in Neyaashiinigiing is a major concern for community members, as there are fewer knowledge keepers in the community able to pass on the language to future generations. Some community members shared that a lack of connection to other community members creates a barrier to learning or teaching the language. To encourage these important connections, I suggest the creation of a space or context for Elders and language keepers to connect with fellow community members, especially youth. As one of the sole language educators in the community, Chastity expressed the need for increased funding to allow the community to invite speakers from other communities to support their revitalization efforts. Increased funding would also allow language learners to be compensated for their time and efforts, creating more speakers and teachers within the community to support revitalization. Funding would also allow for the implementation of more revitalization strategies, like immersion programs, offering more formal learning opportunities. This

would help take the pressure off of individuals to pursue language learning on their own and create more places and contexts where the language can be used in daily life. Another major barrier identified by youth is the lack of formal learning opportunities after elementary school. Incorporating language education into existing forms of education at the high schools neighbouring the community would support students' continued learning and incentivize language learning for others.

5.2 Contributions

This research has contributed to the anthropological body of literature on Indigenous language and revitalization in Canada by providing a case study on Indigenous language revitalization efforts from the perspective of community members. With a focus on perceptions and everyday use of Indigenous language, this study takes a new approach to examine and consider language revitalization efforts not previously found in the literature (Davis 2018; Hermes and King 2013; Morcom and Roy 2019; Pitawanakwat 2018; Spielmann 1998; Wesley 2012). In this way, this work also contributes to the emerging sub-field of the ethnography of speaking with a focus on language ideology. In addition, as much of the past anthropological and sociological research focuses on organized language revitalization programs (Davis 2018; Galla 2016; Hermes and King 2013; Johnson 2017; Moore and Macdonald 2013; Morcom and Roy 2019), this study has aimed to provide a more holistic understanding of language revitalization through also analyzing informal, community-based, and traditional methods of language transmission and revitalization. The outcome has the potential to provide a

model for other communities and researchers working to revitalize Indigenous languages through ethnographic, community-based approaches.

Most significantly, this research is intended to be directly beneficial to the community of Neyaashiinigiing and contribute to their language revitalization strategies. This project has explored community members' perspectives and experiences related to Ojibwe and language revitalization in their community. This information can help community leadership and language educators at the Language Nest and Kikendaasogamig Elementary School understand why people may or may not participate in language revitalization, and what they hope to get out of their language learning. These insights may enable community leaders to better understand and address the strengths and challenges to their current revitalization strategies, with the goal of breaking down barriers to language learning in Neyaashiinigiing. An understanding of the ways that people use Ojibwe today might also help language programmers to support these domains of language use more effectively, and to make learning more relevant and engaging for learners by tailoring teaching strategies to learners' individual interests and desires. Thus, all community stakeholders, including language learners and Ojibwe speakers and teachers, stand to benefit from a shared understanding of how the new generation of potential speakers perceives and uses Ojibwe.

The final stage of this project is knowledge mobilization. After consultations with Miptoon, I will create a short document that summarizes the results of this project for Band Council. This information will act as a helpful tool for community leaders and language educators to inform their approach to revitalization and address any barriers to language

learning. Furthermore, I will also create a document, likely an infographic, that can be widely distributed throughout the community. The format of these materials will be directed by Miptoon and Council, ensuring that the results of this project are mobilized in appropriate and accessible ways.

5.3 Limitations and Future Possibilities

As previously mentioned, the greatest limitation of this project was my absence in the community during the research process, and the lack of face-to-face engagement with community members. A future project of this kind would greatly benefit from researchers spending time in the community, on the land, and building relationships with community members before, during, and after the research process. This process is an essential part of creating decolonial, community-based research. In-person interaction would have allowed for community members to be more involved and to take the lead throughout each stage of the research process. The project would have also benefitted from my engagement in the community and participation in daily life and language activities. My first-hand experiences through participant observation could have contributed to the results of the project. However, by basing the results of this project solely on my conversations with community members, their voices truly became the focus of this project, which was always the intention.

Future community-based ethnographic research on language revitalization would also benefit from a wider representation of different age groups. Though this project involved people of a wide range of ages, noticeably absent were community members older than young adults and younger than Elders. This a substantial proportion of the

population whose perspectives are also invaluable to language revitalization efforts. The community's current approaches to revitalization seemingly cater to youth and Elders, through the daycare, elementary school, Language Nest, and Seniors' Centre. It would be useful to understand how this demographic of adults uses Ojibwe in their daily lives, how they engage with language revitalization activities, and how they feel about their language. This group bridges the two generations who contributed to the project. They are important stakeholders as they are raising the next generation of language learners, speakers, and teachers, and will become the next generation of Elders. Future research on language revitalization in the community would also benefit from a larger and more random sample of community members. This would offer a wider range of perspectives and may include people who are currently less involved and/or interested in language revitalization in the community. These perspectives would also be valuable to language educators and leadership.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your journey learning Ojibwe?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 meaning you don't know any Ojibwe words at all, and 10 meaning you are fully fluent in Ojibwe, where would you place yourself?
3. What made you want to learn Ojibwe?
4. How have you learned what you know about Ojibwe?
 - a. Who are the people who have taught you Ojibwe?
 - i. What does it mean to be taught by those people?
 - b. Where are the places you have learned Ojibwe?
 - i. What does it mean to learn in those places?
5. Who in your life speaks Ojibwe?
6. Have you attended any language classes or camps in Neyaashiinigmiing? (i.e. At school, Language Nest)
 - a. What have you gained from your experiences at the school/Language Nest?
7. How do you use Ojibwe in your everyday life?
 - a. How do you use Ojibwe at school?
 - b. How do you use Ojibwe at home?
 - c. How do you use Ojibwe at work?
 - d. How do you use Ojibwe with your family?
 - e. How do you use Ojibwe with your friends?
 - f. How do you use Ojibwe in ceremony?
 - g. Do you use Ojibwe in any other places or contexts that I haven't mentioned?
 - h. What does it mean to speak Ojibwe in those places?
8. Who do you speak Ojibwe to?

- a. What does it mean to speak to those people in Ojibwe?
9. When do you speak Ojibwe?
 - a. What does it mean to speak Ojibwe during those times?
10. Where do you speak Ojibwe?
 - a. What does it mean to speak Ojibwe in those places?
11. In what spaces in the community is Ojibwe used?
12. At what times is Ojibwe spoken in the community?
13. What does Ojibwe mean to you?
 - a. How do you feel when you speak Ojibwe?
 - b. How do you feel when you hear other people speak Ojibwe?
 - c. How do you feel about the way you have been taught Ojibwe?
 - d. How do you feel about the way that you use Ojibwe?
14. What are the biggest challenges to learning Ojibwe?
15. What can the Language Nest do to make learning Ojibwe better for you?
16. What do you hope for your own journey in learning Ojibwe?
17. What do you hope for the future of Ojibwe in your community?
18. Do you think it is important for people to learn Ojibwe? Why?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share? Or, any other questions I should be asking?
20. What is your favourite Ojibwe word or phrase?

Appendix B: Researcher Pledge for Ages 14+



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

RESEARCHER PLEDGE TO PARTICIPANTS

Documenting the Strengths and Challenges of Ojibwe Language Revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing

My name is Olivia Flegg. I am a Master of Arts student in Public Issues Anthropology at the University of Guelph, in Guelph, Ontario. With guidance from Miptoon and Council, I am working to document the strengths and challenges of Ojibwe language revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing. I am particularly interested in how you use Ojibwe in your everyday life, how you think and feel about the language, and your experiences with language learning in the community. I would like to invite you to contribute to this project by speaking with me about your experiences with Ojibwe in your community. This will take place through a 1-hour interview done over the phone or through a virtual call. I would like to speak to any community member, youth, adult or Elder, who is age 10 and up. If you are under 14, you will need a guardian to also agree for you to be part of the study.

If you agree to be interviewed by me, I pledge to:

- Show respect to you as a person
- Show respect to your history, ancestry, and the Ojibwe culture
- Accept that what you tell me is your information
- Only record your information with a recorder with your permission
- Give you a chance to discuss the results of the study
- Pay you \$30 if you are age 10-13, or \$50 if you are 14 and over, as a token of thanks for your time

Please Note

- The goal of this study is to create a document which explores the perspectives and experiences of community members related to Ojibwe and revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing, which will help inform the community's approach to language revitalization. Your information may be included in a report to be shared with the Band Council. You can choose to be identified by name in this final report, or have your information remain anonymized.
- I will keep copies of your interview indefinitely. I do this to be able to use what you say after the interview is done. I also keep copies to make sure you can always have a copy of your interview.
- I may make notes about our conversation during the interview. I will probably make notes about our conversation after we talk.
- I may publish your words in a thesis project about language revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing. If I do, I will give you full credit and I will not claim copyright or ownership of your words. You can choose to be identified by name in the thesis, or have your information remain anonymized.
- I will not use your words if you tell me not to, now or in the future.
- I will give you copies of any audio or video recordings that include you or your words.
- I will keep your personal information safe on my password-protected, encrypted computer. My research advisor, Thomas McIlwraith, and I will be the only people to have access to this information.
- If we speak over video-chat, please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data are in transit over the internet.
- You can ask questions about this project. During the interview, you can refuse to answer any question I ask. During our interview, information may come up that is difficult for you to talk about. If you feel uncomfortable, please let me know and we can talk about it or stop the interview right away. And, you can opt out of this study at any time. If you would like to withdraw your information from this study, please contact me within 2 weeks after our interview date.
- I will send your honorarium via E-transfer following our interview.
- If you are interested in staying involved with the project after your interview, you are welcome to keep in touch with me to continue to provide input and share your thoughts on this project.

- If you would like to learn about the results of this study, please contact me directly by phone or email. Additionally, I will be working with Miptoon and Council to communicate the findings of this study to the rest of the community. This is likely to be in the form of a short pamphlet.
- The goal of this study is to provide information that will help community leaders and language educators in Neyaashiinigmiing to revitalize Ojibwe. The results of this project may also provide a model for other communities and researchers working to revitalize Indigenous languages. Most importantly, I hope that you will be able to see and experience the benefits of a revised approach to revitalization in your community.
- This study is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Recording

Please choose 1:

I agree to be recorded.

I do not agree to be recorded.

Confidentiality

I do not agree to have my name associated with the information I give in a written report for Band Council and a thesis project.

I agree to have my name associated with the information I give in a written report for Band Council and a thesis project.

For More Information

You do not waive any legal rights by agreeing to take part in this study. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board for compliance with federal guidelines for research involving human participants. If you have questions regarding your rights and welfare as a research participant in this study (REB# 20-08-019), please contact: Manager, Research Ethics; University of Guelph; reb@uoguelph.ca; (519) 824-4120 (ext. 56606). You can also contact my research advisor at: Thomas McIlwraith, PhD;

Department of Sociology and Anthropology; University of Guelph;
tmcilwra@uoguelph.ca; (778) 230-6072.

Thank you for your trust and confidence in me. I hope that this work will be useful to you and to your community.

Olivia Flegg

oflegg@uoguelph.ca

519-949-1826

Appendix C: Researcher Pledge for Ages 10-13



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

RESEARCHER PLEDGE TO PARTICIPANTS AGES 10-13

Documenting the Strengths and Challenges of Ojibwe Language Revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing

Hello, my name is Olivia. I go to school at the University of Guelph, in Guelph, Ontario. Miptoon and Council are helping me to organize a project about the Ojibwe language in your community. I want to find out: what are the good things about language learning, and what are some things that make language learning hard. I want to hear from you! I'm inviting you to help me with this project by doing an interview with me. This means talking to me for less than one hour on the phone or over video chat. I'll ask you questions about things like how you use Ojibwe in your everyday life, how you think and feel about it, and what kinds of things you have experienced with learning Ojibwe in your community. Since you are between 10 and 13, your [guardian] will also have to give permission for you to talk to me.

I'm going to tell you some important things about the project and about our interview that you should know. You can stop me at any time and ask questions about anything you don't understand. Does that sound good?

If you say yes to doing an interview with me, I promise to:

- Show respect to you as a person
- Show respect to your history, ancestry, and the Ojibwe culture
- Accept that what you tell me is your information
- Only record our conversation with a recorder if you tell me it is okay
- Give you a chance to talk to me about the results of the project, if you'd like
- Pay you \$30 to say thank you for your time

Does that make sense so far?

Here are some things you need to know before you agree to the interview:

- The goal of this project is to figure out how people in your community think and feel about learning Ojibwe in Neyaashiinigiing. This is supposed to help the leaders in your community to make language learning better for everyone. After I'm done interviews with about 15 other people, I'm going to write a report for Council to tell them what we found. I might include some of your ideas that you share with me during our interview in this final report. You can choose if you want to have your name in the report, or if you want me to leave your name out.
- I will keep copies of your interview forever. I do this to be able to write about what you say after the interview is done. I also keep copies to make sure you can always have a copy of your interview.
- While we talk, I may make notes about our conversation. I will probably make notes about our conversation after we talk too.
- I might also write about your words in a thesis project that I am doing for school about language learning in Neyaashiinigiing. If I do, I will say that the words belong to you and I will never say that they are mine. You can also choose if you want me to have your name in this report, or if you want me to leave your name out.
- I will not use your words if you tell me not to, now or in the future.
- I will give you copies of any audio or video recordings that include you or your words.
- I will keep your information that you share with me safe on my computer. At school, a professor named Thomas McIlwraith is giving me advice on the project. He and I will be the only people allowed to see your information.
- You can ask questions about this project at any time. During the interview, you can say no to answering any question I ask. During our interview, information may come up that is hard for you to talk about. If you feel uncomfortable, please let me know and we can talk about it or stop the interview right away. You can change your mind and decide that you want to leave the interview or the project at any time. You don't have to be part of the project if you don't want to. All you have to do is tell me or [guardian]. We won't be upset if you don't want to do it anymore. Later, if you decide you don't want me to use your information for the project, let your [guardian] know. They can tell me to take your information out.
- I will send your \$30 through E-transfer after our interview.

- If you would like to hear about how the project turns out, you or your [guardian] can contact me directly by phone or email. I will be working with Miptoon and Council to show the final report to the rest of the community too. This is will probably be something like a flyer.
- The goal of this project is to tell the leaders in your community what YOU think about Ojibwe, so that they can help to make language learning better for everyone. This project might give an example to other communities who are trying to make language learning better too. Most importantly, I hope that this project will help make language learning better for you.
- This government is giving me some money to help pay for this project.

Do you understand? Do you have any questions for me?

Now I have a couple quick questions for you before we get started...

Recording

Please choose 1:

- I agree to be recorded during our interview.
- I do not agree to be recorded during our interview.

Confidentiality

- I do not agree to have my name included in a written report for Band Council and a thesis project.
- I agree to have my name included in a written report for Band Council and a thesis project.

For More Information

You do not waive any legal rights by agreeing to take part in this study. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board at my school to make sure it is safe for you to participate. If you have questions regarding your rights and welfare as a research

participant in this study (REB# 20-08-019), please contact: Manager, Research Ethics; University of Guelph; reb@uoguelph.ca; (519) 824-4120 (ext. 56606). You can also contact my professor at: Thomas McIlwraith, PhD; Department of Sociology and Anthropology; University of Guelph; tmcilwra@uoguelph.ca; (778) 230-6072.

Thank you for you trusting me. I hope that this work will be useful to you and to your community.

Olivia Flegg

oflegg@uoguelph.ca

519-949-1826

Appendix D: Researcher Pledge for Guardians



COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

RESEARCHER PLEDGE TO GUARDIANS

Documenting the Strengths and Challenges of Ojibwe Language Revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing

My name is Olivia Flegg. I am a Master of Arts student in Public Issues Anthropology at the University of Guelph, in Guelph, Ontario. With guidance from Miptoon and Council, I am working to document the strengths and challenges of Ojibwe language revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing. I am particularly interested in how you use Ojibwe in your everyday life, how you think and feel about the language, and your experiences with language learning in the community. I would like to invite the child in your care to contribute to this project by speaking with me about their experiences with Ojibwe in your community. This will take place through a 1-hour interview done over the phone or through a virtual call. I would like to speak to any community member, youth, adult or Elder, who is age 10 and up. Since the child in your care is under 14, you will need to also agree for them to be part of the study.

If you agree for the child in your care to be interviewed by me, I pledge to:

- Show respect to your child as a person
- Show respect to your child's history, ancestry, and the Ojibwe culture
- Accept that what your child tells me is their information
- Only record your child's information with a recorder with permission from you and your child
- Give your child a chance to discuss the results of the study
- Pay your child \$30 as a token of thanks for their time

Please Note

- The goal of this study is to create a document which explores the perspectives and experiences of community members related to Ojibwe and revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing, which will help inform the community's approach to language revitalization. Your child's information may be included in a report to be shared with the Band Council. You and your child can choose for them to be identified by name in this final report, or have their information remain anonymized.
- I will keep copies of your child's interview indefinitely. I do this to be able to use what your child says after the interview is done. I also keep copies to make sure your child can always have a copy of their interview.
- I may make notes about our conversation during the interview. I will probably make notes about our conversation after we talk.
- I may publish your child's words in a thesis project about language revitalization in Neyaashiinigiing. If I do, I will give your child full credit and I will not claim copyright or ownership of their words. You and your child can choose for them to be identified by name in the thesis, or have their information remain anonymized.
- I will not use your child's words if you or your child tell me not to, now or in the future.
- I will give your child copies of any audio or video recordings that include them or their words.
- I will keep your child's personal information safe on my password-protected, encrypted computer. My research advisor, Thomas McIlwraith, and I will be the only people to have access to this information.
- If we speak over video-chat, please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data are in transit over the internet.
- You and your child can ask questions about this project. During the interview, your child can refuse to answer any question I ask. During our interview, information may come up that is difficult for your child to talk about. If they feel uncomfortable, they can let me know and we can talk about it or stop the interview right away. And, you and your child can opt out of this study at any time. If you or your child would like to withdraw your child's information from this study, please contact me within 2 weeks after our interview date.
- If you would like, you are welcome to sit in on and participate in the interview with your child. In that case, it will still be your child's interview so the honorarium will still belong to them.

- I will send your child's honorarium via E-transfer following our interview.
- If you or your child are interested in staying involved with the project after the interview, you are both welcome to keep in touch with me to continue to provide input and share your thoughts on this project.
- If you or your child would like to learn about the results of this study, please contact me directly by phone or email. Additionally, I will be working with Miptoon and Council to communicate the findings of this study to the rest of the community. This is likely to be in the form of a short pamphlet.
- The goal of this study is to provide information that will help community leaders and language educators in Neyaashiingmiing to revitalize Ojibwe. The results of this project may also provide a model for other communities and researchers working to revitalize Indigenous languages. Most importantly, I hope that you and your child will be able to see and experience the benefits of a revised approach to revitalization in your community.
- This study is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Recording

Please choose 1:

- I agree for my child to be recorded.
- I do not agree for my child to be recorded.

Confidentiality

- I do not agree to have my child's name associated with the information they give in a written report for Band Council and a thesis project.
- I agree to have my child's name associated with the information I give in a written report for Band Council and a thesis project.

Honorarium

- I agree for the honorarium to be given directly to my child.

I do not agree for the honorarium to be given directly to my child. I will accept the honorarium on behalf of my child and pass it to them myself.

For More Information

You or your child do not waive any legal rights by agreeing to take part in this study. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board for compliance with federal guidelines for research involving human participants. If you have questions regarding your rights and welfare as a research participant in this study, please contact: Manager, Research Ethics; University of Guelph; reb@uoguelph.ca; (519) 824-4120 (ext. 56606). You can also contact my research advisor at: Thomas McIlwraith, PhD; Department of Sociology and Anthropology; University of Guelph; tmcilwra@uoguelph.ca; (778) 230-6072.

Thank you for your trust and confidence in me. I hope that this work will be useful to you, your child and your community.

Olivia Flegg

oflegg@uoguelph.ca

519-949-1826