I Am Not A Linguist: Language Revitalization in (non-Academic) Action

I am not a linguist – but my husband is. As second language speakers of Kanien’ké:ha (Mohawk), we frequently come at the often arduous task at hand from seemingly opposing perspectives. Throughout our journey to continue growing our language skills after our completion of the first portion of a two-year Kanien’ké:ha immersion program, I have found a variety of tools, as a non-linguist mother, crucial to moving beyond the category of “intermediate-advanced“, crucial to moving towards true fluency, and saving not simply the words of our language, but our language. During this presentation, I endeavor to first and foremost bring a non-linguist perspective to the table. I wish to highlight some of my own tools, as well as those produced by other second language speakers, that make speaking our originals languages possible in the modern day. These range from a full digitization of our first year curriculum into digital flashcards with spoken text via Anki that I produced as a capstone project for the immersion program, to something as simple as a Google plus hangout. Through Facebook groups, Youtube videos and simple Bitsboard games (a customizable learning game based application for children), we make space in our busy lives to overcome the often vast geographic distance between the islands of the Haudenosaunee archipelago, and to do the best we can, with the time and resources available. These technological resources and interactions prove invaluable not simply for keeping up Mohawk skills, not simply for helping pass along Kanien’ké:ha to our children, but have also highlighted that despite the fact that there are roughly 3,000 speakers of Kanien’ké:ha, many words are still being lost, many of them pertaining to medicines and gendered realms (i.e.- midwifery,
child birth, etc). In utilizing the technology available to us, we can help reinvigorate much of the language that falls to wayside, through play, through communal virtual conversations, and by combining our shared knowledge across great distances.