

Editorial Section

Save Our Dying Languages

by Mildred Quaempts

Indian and Alaska Native languages were usually taught first in the home because the parents either couldn't speak English, or they wanted the language to live. When this happened, the language was spoken fluently and the child became used to it, learning no other language but his own.

The Indian or Alaskan Native was placed in a school either close to home or hundreds of miles away (like here at Chemawa) so that he could be educated enough to be competitive in society, to hold a job and to help his people.

Years ago students became confused at Chemawa because of their inability to become adjusted to the new English language, after being so used to their own native tongue. People would try to help them overcome this problem by giving them interpreters or by not letting them speak their native language in class.

Today the English language is being used regularly by Indian and Alaskan students without the problems that they had a generation ago. This is usually because the child's parents know the language and teach it to him.

But at the same time the use of native languages is dying out. The child is often taught only English and the native language begins to die out.

Alaskans at Chemawa often speak their native language, but they also know English well, and it is no problem. Northwest students speak English all the time because they either weren't taught their native language or they only know a few words, not enough to carry on a conversation.

Some Northwest Indian leaders, such as the Yakima linguist Mr. Rudy Saluskin, are making efforts to revive some of the almost extinct languages.

As an Indian student, I then ask if there could be some native Indian language classes here at Chemawa in the near future, so that these languages won't go out of existence. It seems to me that these languages are dying out and we need teachers to keep them alive.

The administration is interested in having either introductory or advanced courses for those who want to learn from the beginning or polish what they already know.

There are four problems that will have to be met. One is finding teachers who know the languages well enough to teach them. Another problem is what languages will be taught, out of the hundreds of languages and dialects in the Northwest and Alaska alone.

The third question is whether or not the parents of Chemawa students will like the idea, and the fourth problem is where to find the money to begin the program.

I was brought up speaking my native language, but I can't use it here at school because there is no one else to speak with who understands it. This is why we need the language program, no matter what problems we might have with it.

Reader Opinion - 'Abide by Rules

To the Editor:

Many students, including myself, are proud of this school. These buildings standing here at Chemawa don't make up the school--it is we, the students. To make it a good school we should abide by the rules and show the people that it is a good school and they should come and see so for themselves.

Former students who did not like Chemawa have spread some bad stories and exaggerations about the school. I know because before I came here students told me about it, saying it was a bad place to go. I thought about it for awhile and then decided to see for myself.

When I came here, I soon realized that drinking was one of the main problems at Chemawa. If students do care about the school, themselves and others, they would try to set a good example, not only in following rules but to help others to see and understand what effect the education they are getting now will have on their lives in the future.

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The Chemawa American welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must be signed. We will print as many as space permits, but we reserve the right to edit for length and to delete any libelous or obscene material.

Some say other schools are better than Chemawa. I see it this way. No matter what school you get an education from, you can still get a good job. This school is no worse than any other school. It's just the way the students handle their subjects.

Here we really aren't forced to do our work. We have a choice either to work hard and pass the subject or just leave it and fail. Some teachers at other schools push the students on through their assignments. Here we have a great chance to learn to take care of our own responsibilities. Doing so, we will have an easier time taking care of similar responsibilities when we are on our own and making our living.

So I don't think it's the school that is bad. I think it's just the way the students put it. If you want a school to be proud of, try to be a reasonable person and learn while you have the chance and make the best of it. I say this for myself and for others who are proud of this school.

Anna Melovidov
Class of 1974