

THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES LANGUAGE LESSON

Language Update

submitted by Myra Shawaway

Dear People:

The Education summit was put together well. With the involvement of School district Administrators and outside presenters, a wealth of information was shared. The conference was well attended by community people.

We have great appreciation for the words that were shared regarding the importance of our languages and culture being considered an integral part of our children's education. We feel that cultural curriculum is not a complete project if it does not include our languages. Both of those subjects are one in the same. And we believe that our children will benefit socially and academically with the teaching of language/cultural curriculum.

Culture and Heritage believes that, with the endangered status our languages are in, we need to focus on programs to strengthen our culture and languages here at Warm Springs. Our children are an important part of the process.

If one read the last Spilyay article, you would see the percentage of speakers we have left is clearly an issue to be concerned about. If we work harder on our development of fluent speakers in our children, we will have done our job to address our loss of languages. We feel that with the working relationship that has been developed with our local Elementary School we are moving towards that goal of student success within the public school system. As our children learn language/culture they also gain a greater sense of pride and will know that the survival of languages and cultural identity will be attributed to their carrying of the languages in the future.

Immersion projects is one of those programs we would like to move towards. So following is some information that supports what we are currently doing and how we feel about language and cultural education within our school systems: Language of learning; Indigenous language immersion enhances native education

Brian Stockes; c. *Indian Country Today*; September 3, 2000

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Fluency in American Indian or indigenous languages may improve the general academic success of Indian youth, witnesses told the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. However, they said, such fluency is in decline. "Over half of our languages are still with us after all these years of adversity," said Michael Krauss, director of the Alaska Native Language Center. "But unless there is radical change and success at the reversal of language shift, the next 60 years will see the extinction of 155 languages, with but 20 of the 175 remaining."

Many within Indian education and the federal government have said they believe this decline is tied not only to current problems facing Indian students, but to their future success. Overall, Native American students lag significantly behind their peers in educational performance. They rank lowest in many important categories, such as reading and dropout rates.

The Department of Education reports that 48 percent of American Indian fourth-graders scored "at or above the basic level" on a 1994 national reading assessment test, compared with 60 percent of all fourth-graders nationwide. In 1997, the annual dropout rate for American Indian teenagers was 5.9 percent, nearly twice the national average.

"There is strong cross-cultural evidence supporting the effectiveness of second-language immersion schooling," said Dr. Teresa McCarthy of the University of Arizona's American Indian Language Development Institute. "Indigenous students are

heavily over represented in special education programs, and experience the highest school failure and dropout rates in the nation. Thus, despite the transition to English, indigenous students are not, on the whole, doing better in school. This situation has motivated creative new approaches to indigenous education which emphasizes immersion in Native American language."

Throughout the early part of the 20th century, the federal government promoted a policy which aimed to wipe out native languages and its use by Indian youth. It was common for Indian children to be sent to boarding schools and punished for speaking their language. After years of ignoring the problem the U.S. government finally began to address native language loss through new federal policies at the close of the century.

In 1990, the Native American Languages Act was passed, declaring it "the official policy of the United States government to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop native languages."

The Senate is considering legislation (S. 2688) that would amend the law by establishing Native American language "survival schools" and "language nests." These schools would provide complete education using both Native American and English languages. The bill would support Native American "language nests," immersion programs for children aged 6 and younger. It would further provide authority for curriculum, teacher, staff and community resource development, rental, lease, purchase, construction, maintenance or repair of educational facilities and establishment of two Native American Language School support centers. They would be at the Native Language College in the University of Hawaii at Hilo and the Alaska Native Language Center of the University of Alaska.

In Hawaii, the opportunity for an education in and through Hawaiian extends from preschool to graduate school. Recent reports indicate approximately 1,800 children have learned to speak Hawaiian through immersion schooling.

In another long-range study of Hawaiian immersion, student achievement equaled or surpassed that of native Hawaiian children enrolled in English-only school.

"The University of Hawaii at Hilo began teaching Hawaiian in the 1970s and in 1982 developed a (bachelor of arts) program in the language," said Dr. Kalena Silva, director of the Ke'elik'i'ani College of Hawaiian Language. "At around the same time, a group of Hawaiian language teachers and speakers formed the 'Aha P'nana Leo organization to re-establish Hawaiian as a language of the family and of schools. There are now 2,000 children enrolled in such schools in Hawaii.

Another well-documented program in language immersion is at Fort Defiance, Ariz. When it began in 1987, fewer than a tenth of the 5-year-olds at the school were considered reasonable Navajo speakers. Fort Defiance established a voluntary Navajo immersion program that included initial literacy in Navajo, then English and math in both languages. The program also set a heavy emphasis on language and critical thinking.

By the fourth grade, Navajo immersion students were performing as well on tests of English as Navajo students in non-immersion classes. Immersion students did better on assessments of English writing, and were substantially ahead on standardized tests on English writing, and were well ahead on standardized tests of mathematics. Tested on Navajo language measures, they outperformed Navajo peers in non-immersion classes.

Immersion programs have also been documented for the Mohawk, Mississippi band of Choctaw, Northern Arapaho, Blackfeet, Cochiti Pueblo, Yup'ik and some California tribes.

Most language experts believe that immersion programs could not only reverse the poor academic rating of indigenous stu-

dents, but also turn the tide on the extinction of native languages.

The Senate is expected to consider the new bill before the end of the session.

CONNECTION: In the schools

A coalition of Washington state tribal educators is pushing the need for tribal languages in their children's schools. The First Peoples Language Committee meets regularly to put together a list of recommendations for the state school system. Participants include Colville and Spokane tribal members. Besides trying to get native languages taught in public schools, the committee is looking to establish standards for how those languages are taught. In the past, much of the burden has fallen upon tribal elders, and not every fluent speaker makes for a skilled teacher, the group says.

On the Spokane and Coeur d'Alene Indian reservations, fluent-speaking elders are at the core of tribal language programs. In the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, employees have access to college-level language courses on their reservation. The language is also taught in the public schools there, said Bob Bostwick, tribal press secretary. "The tribe's put a tremendous effort into keeping the language healthy," Bostwick said. Tribal employees often compete with other departments in good-natured games of saying words and phrases correctly. Elders act as judges. In Spokane, tribal elders can use computer programs that speak and help new students pronounce Salish words.

High school students in Wellpinit on the reservation also have the option of attending college language classes at a tribal college near their school.

— Rob McDonald



Watch for employment opportunities with Culture and Heritage Language Program.



Agency Language Classes

@ the Language Trailer behind the Old Boys Dorm

Paiute Language

will start again October 24

Wed. 3:30-4:30 PM

Sahaptin Language

will start again October 22

Tues. & Thurs. 3:30-4:30 PM

Wasco Language

Thurs. 5:00-6:30 PM



Simnasho Language Classes

Sahaptin Language

@ Simnasho Longhouse

Sahaptin Language

still going strong

Tues. & Thurs.

6:00 to 7:30

