

# OBSTACLES FACING TRIBAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN WARM SPRINGS, KLAMATH, AND GRAND RONDE\*

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The education system in the United States has historically repressed and marginalized Native cultures and languages. This has led to the alarming decline of Native language use, including the extinction of many languages. Current programs to revitalize these languages face a number of obstacles, many stemming from historical precedents of cultural genocide and negative attitudes toward Native cultures. This study examines the external issues that face language revitalization programs of Warm Springs, Grand Ronde, and Klamath in Oregon, and concludes that most originate from a dominant ideology that marginalizes Native histories and cultures by ignoring, patronizing, or actively resisting them.

## 1. Introduction

When European traders and settlers first arrived in what is now Oregon, there were 25 languages representing four distinct language families present in the region. Now, after more than a century of European-borne diseases, forced removal to reservations, and language and culture eradication policies by the United States government, many of these are extinct, and those that remain struggle to survive (Underriner 2000). Since the arrival of the first immigrants in North America, the nation's education policy has been that of cultural genocide ("assimilation"), aimed at eradicating Native Americans' unique identities by wiping out their languages and their cultures (Fordham 1998). Native peoples have thus suffered, and continue to suffer, from symbolic violence, as defined by Peter Burke in *History and Social Theory*: "symbolic violence... refers to the imposition of the culture of the ruling class on dominated groups, and especially to the process by which these dominated groups are forced to recognize the ruling culture as legitimate and their own culture as illegitimate" (1993:86).

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Because language is a vessel of culture, its loss can be detrimental to the continuation of cultural heritage. Language loss compromises tribal identity and sovereignty. Furthermore, it separates children from their culture and identity, preventing them from communicating with elders and from participating in their language community (Fordham 1998). The loss is severe for the rest of society as well. Peter Popham (1996:38) states, “What the rest of us lose when a language dies is the possibility of a unique way of perceiving and describing the world.” In Oregon, Native languages carry important information about the environment and history of the region. Eugene Hunn (1990:91) reports that the names of habitats and landforms in the middle Columbia region were important indicators of the plant and animal species found there. Indeed, many of the foods, locations for living, and habits that early settlers learned from Oregon Natives were dictated by a 10,000-year-old tradition directly informed by local indigenous languages (p.c. Tony Johnson, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003).

Some Oregon tribes are battling this loss, and have put together (or are in the process of putting together) language revitalization programs aimed at reinstating traditional languages in their communities. They are consulting elders (many of whom are in their 80’s or 90’s, and are the last fluent speakers of their language), training teachers, and instituting language classes in schools and community centers. Despite their Herculean efforts, however, they still must overcome many obstacles. Some of these obstacles are internal, but many come from the outside, and include relationships with local districts, funding, state and federal policies and standards, and issues of sovereignty.

This paper will outline some of these external obstacles as reported by members of the Warm Springs, Klamath, and Grand Ronde language revitalization programs.

## **2. Research Plan**

This study took place during the summer of 2003, and was conducted primarily at the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Culture and Heritage Department, a non-profit tribal organization dedicated to preserving and continuing the traditions of the three tribes present there<sup>1</sup>. Warm Springs has instituted an aggressive language revitalization program, funded in part by tribal funds and federal grants, to bring back the three languages originally spoken by its tribal members: Sahaptin, Wasco, and Paiute. The quantity and richness of materials that they have created in such a short time is impressive, and nearly overwhelming.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of the study, the author was also completing an internship with two other non-tribal interns. The object of the internship was to assist in the organization of the myriad of language materials that have been developed over the past decade for teaching children and other community members.

Many of the people involved in the program, including the language program director, language teachers, and elders, were interviewed, in both formal interviews and informal conversations. Information was also obtained from meetings pertaining to the language programs, including one with Susan Castillo, superintendent of the Oregon Department of Education. Formal interviews were also conducted with members of the Grand Ronde and Klamath language programs, and are included here.

Interviews were aimed at determining which were the greatest external obstacles facing these language programs. The study found that some of the most serious problems originate from a mainstream historic ideology that marginalizes Native histories and cultures by ignoring, patronizing, or actively resisting them. This finding is in opposition to a popular assumption that most major obstacles to Native language programs involve funding. Though funding is indeed pertinent, the most pressing issues have do with the attitudes and practices of non-tribal officials and educators, including ignorance, institutionalized racism, and a desire to see Native students conform to mainstream society (even at the cost of their traditional ways). These attitudes are not new, and stem from historical precedents of hundreds of years.

### **3. Results**

The goal of these Native language programs is to produce fluent language speakers among the youngest generation of tribal members, from whom the language can be passed to future generations. Observations of Warm Springs teachers revealed astounding dedication to their language, their students, and their culture. Though the other two tribes' teachers were not observed, interviews with all three groups revealed a sense that the interviewees regard the language programs as much more than subjects learned in school. Language is an intricate part of their communities and histories, and is more important than meeting CIM/CAM<sup>2</sup> and graduation requirements, or getting into a four-year university. The interviewees view these language programs as central to cultural continuation, and to strengthening their tribes' sense of identity and community.

#### **3.1 Sovereignty**

When Native Americans are treated as minorities, and their languages as minority languages, it marginalizes their sovereignty. "We're not a minority. We're a people", said Brenda Frank, director of Education and Employment for the Klamath Tribes. "Having our sovereignty minimized undermines our whole

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<sup>2</sup> Certificate of Initial Mastery and Certificate of Advanced Mastery

purpose.” Unlike foreign minority languages in the United States, tribal languages form the backbone of the sovereign nations that predate this country. Several interviewees from the language programs expressed frustration at having their languages lumped with non-Native minority languages in the United States’ educational policies. One teacher pointed out that though there may be thousands or millions of speakers of minority languages elsewhere, this is the only place in the world where his language exists. “People can go to Japan if they really want to learn Japanese”, he said, “but for us, this is it.”

Myra Johnson, Director of the Language Program at the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Culture and Heritage Department agreed, stating, “The biggest obstacle that our language program faces is educating people who don’t understand the importance of language and culture to the sovereignty of the tribe. People tend to think that we’re just a part of history, but we’re not. We’re a living nation within a nation. We’re citizens of the tribe, of the state, and of the United States.”

Several interviewees complained that in matters of education and language issues, they have not had the true government-to-government, or official-to-official representation that they deserve as sovereign nations. They pointed out that one or two “Native” representatives cannot represent the language and educational interests of all Native Americans in Oregon, much as a Danish person could not fairly represent all of the interests of Europe. Nor can tribal members who have been chosen by outside institutions, rather than by the tribe they are supposed to represent, give a fair appraisal of the tribe’s intent and needs. According to at least three language program members, the continuing practice of hand-picking Native representatives is condescending, and very reminiscent of federal practices of choosing “chiefs” to sign treaties and other important documents, rather than respecting the leaders the tribes had chosen by their own methods<sup>3</sup>.

Not having a voice in state and local educational policies has been a set-back for some Native language programs. As Myra Johnson stated, “The school system is a very strong institution, so it’s difficult to get into it. It’s difficult for us to work as equal partners within the system, to introduce our ideas and give our input.” She further emphasized that state and local education officials should ask tribes what they need rather than tell them, a patronizing practice that has precedence in early United States history, but continues regularly to this day.

### **3.2 Language as a Priority in Education**

Language programs need to be made a priority in educating Native children. “The children are part of the school community, and so they should have access to their language and culture there”, said Myra Johnson, “going to the museum won’t tell

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<sup>3</sup> Education officials in Oregon have chosen tribal members to represent “Native” interests on their advising panels, believing that the members of some tribes could speak for all. The author believes that this was done without the intention of excluding other tribes’ interests.

us how we live”<sup>4</sup>. Native American teachers watch with frustration as their languages are put on the back burner in public schools; as Tony Johnson, the Cultural Education Coordinator for the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, reports, “Our languages are endangered.” Time is of the essence, because many of these languages are spoken by only a few elders. In Chiloquin, for example, the remaining fluent speaker of Klamath is 92 years old<sup>5</sup>. “We’re losing our language and culture at an alarming rate”, said a Klamath language program member, “Where’s the support to preserve it?”

Language programs in other regions have had striking effects on Native American school children’s performance. In Hawaii for example, immersion schools teach children their Native language from preschool until they graduate from high school, and these children’s academic achievement has been found to equal or surpass that of Native Hawaiian children enrolled in English-speaking schools (Stockes 2000). Other studies have shown similar promise. In a Makah language school, where children were introduced to the Makah language, performance gaps between the Native and non-Native students dropped by 83.6%, and drop-out rates decreased. Navajo students instructed in Navajo made better transitions to English reading skills, and exceeded national standards in other scholastic areas (though they had tested two years behind national standards previous to their Navajo instruction) (Fordham 1998, Stockes 2000)<sup>6</sup>.

Though no such studies have yet been conducted in Warm Springs, teachers there testify to greater performance by their students in other school subjects. To provide an example, Radine Johnson, a Wasco teacher, related an event in a kindergarten class where students were doing double-digit addition and subtraction problems in their Native language, though they had not yet learned these concepts in English.

Improving test scores in other scholastic areas is not the only benefit of learning Native languages. Many Native educators observed that their language students exhibited a better sense of identity and self-worth. Most importantly, the teachers noted that the children’s language skills have provided a bridge to their culture and traditions. “Our kids may be plugged into their culture in three or four ways, but they can’t be completely integrated into their culture until they learn the language. It fills in the gaps”, said one Klamath educator. Radine Johnson said, “I don’t want our children to have to make up their traditions [because they were lost with this generation].” Fears of such identity loss are echoed far beyond

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<sup>4</sup> One option may be to set up a private school or a charter school centered around the Native language. However, at present these options do not exist for Native students in Oregon, and Native language educators are working with what they currently have support for.

<sup>5</sup> According to the Klamath Falls, OR *Herald and News* (Sept 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003), Mabie “Neva” Eggstrom, the last remaining fluent speaker of Klamath, died on Sept. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Further descriptions of the correlation between Native language programs and academic success are reported by Jerry Lipka (2002).

Oregon's Native communities. In "Running the Gauntlet of an Indigenous Language Program" (1999:6), Stephen Greymorning voices an identical fear: "I am really worried if we lose our language we won't be able to think in the Arapaho way. If we lose our language we will lose our ceremonies and ourselves because our life is our language, and it is our language that makes us strong."<sup>7</sup>

Speakers of Klamath, Sahaptin, Wasco, and Chinook-wawa have stated over and over that their languages carry much more than just words and complex grammars, but rather a unique way of perceiving the world. This concept is supported by a weak version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which is explained by Jerry Gill (1997) who argues that "the structure of our native language can and does strongly influence our perceptual and conceptual patterns, and thus contributes significantly to the make up and contour of reality as experienced." Tony Johnson of Grand Ronde stated that Oregon's original languages carry important information about the history of this region, including foods, plants, locations, and attitudes. In addition, he reported that sensibilities are different in Chinook-wawa, so that a story that seems inappropriate in English would carry more innocent connotations in that language. Arlita Rhoan, a Sahaptin teacher at Warm Springs, reported that Sahaptin teaches children self-control and positive attitudes about themselves in a gentle way.

Nonetheless, language programs struggle to gain priority in public schools. An anonymous Klamath educator said, "They force our kids into a public forum, then we have to fight tooth and nail to get into that forum to teach them." She advocated bringing language and culture into other subjects, especially math, science, art, and local area studies. In Warm Springs, children are regularly pulled from their language classes for extra math and reading help, and even for extra-curricular Christian groups. The teachers wonder why these activities are more important than their classes. They point out that their classes are already short enough, and they don't have their own space in which to teach them. This takes away the children's sense of ownership of their language, Rhoan argues.

Stephen Greymorning (1999) reports that lack of sufficient classroom time is a reoccurring problem for Native language programs throughout the United States. On average, public school districts allot fifteen minutes of classroom time each day to Native language instruction. As the director of the Arapaho language program in the Wyoming Indian Public School District #14, he revealed that this amount of time is insufficient, adding up to only 45 hours each school year, and is therefore ineffective. It further leaves Native language teachers open to criticism for failing to effectively teach their subject. Greymorning was able to demonstrate vast

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<sup>7</sup> In a study of northern Canadian First Peoples, Louis-Jacques Dorais (1995) reports that language is not an essential element of identity. However, he reports that it "plays a crucial role", and many of the interviewees in this study stressed the importance of language to Native identity.

language improvements in a Kindergarten pilot program in which children received an hour of language instruction each day.

Language programs further face the fear that English-only initiatives, such as the ones that have been passed in California (Proposition 227), Arizona (Proposition 203), and Massachusetts (Question 2), will disrupt their ability to speak the Native languages in schools (ANA 2003). Native languages have been largely ignored in these debates, and some of the interviewees expressed apprehension that the effects might be disastrous to their programs. According to Doug Smith, Director of Curriculum at Klamath County Public School District, another danger to language programs is the No Child Left Behind Act. This act further marginalizes the importance of Native languages, because time is so rigidly apportioned to certain “important” subjects that there is no time left in the day to add Native language curriculum. School districts risk losing federal funding if they choose to oppose its mandates.

### **3.3 Fitting into the “Western Box”**

Further hindering the programs’ progress is a general lack of flexibility within the public school system, which expects the languages to use Western methods and meet Western standards. While some Native language educators agreed that they must fit the Western model to some degree in order for their languages to gain the credibility that they need to become permanent fixtures in the school system, they noted the difficulty of convincing elders and traditional teachers to teach in non-traditional ways. However, the difficulty is much greater than meeting the teaching styles of a few people. It stems from a general distrust of a school system that has historically abused Native American children, and is still incapable of meeting their needs in many cases (Cummins 1988). In addition, the general structures of the languages themselves do not lend themselves well to the Western model, because of their great linguistic complexity and their distinctiveness from Western languages.

According to Garcia and Ahler (1988:14), “Teaching [Indian] children as though they were the same robs children of their unique individuality... a child’s culture and environmental background are what makes a child unique.” Western education has traditionally ignored the rich backgrounds of its Native American pupils, preferring instead to inculcate them with Western values and ideals. Many Native American children were forced to go to boarding schools, where they were separated from their parents and communities, and severely (and often humiliatingly) punished for speaking their languages (Reyhner and Eder 1988). One Warm Springs elder related some of her experiences in boarding school, where she had to “march everywhere”. Her granddaughter interjected, saying that the boarding schools took away everything from them, their clothes, their foods, their language, and their celebrations.

Because mass assimilation efforts by the United States government failed, many Native American students continue to hold different cultural practices than their non-Native American counterparts. These cultural differences are often very covert, such as different styles of communication and interaction. Based on a study she did on the Warm Springs Reservation from Fall 1968 to Spring 1973, Susan Philips (1983) describes many of these communicative differences that often lead to teacher misinterpretations of their Native American students' behavior. A teacher may attribute what a Warm Springs student considers normal or polite to the student's inattention or non-understanding of the material.

In addition, curricula that ignore or minimize Native American history, culture, and contributions further alienate students who feel a great disparity between themselves, their family, and their community, and what is considered "good" or "normal" at school. A Klamath educator reported, "Our kids aren't learning about themselves in classes. They get part of their history from their families, but they don't get the bigger picture that a class could provide, so they understand some things about themselves, but not enough. Kids aren't taught Klamath history when they're taught 'American' history." An affiliate of the Warm Springs language program voiced similar concerns about his own education as a child. He said he learned history from the white perspective, with the overtone, "the only good Indian is a dead Indian." This robs children of their self-esteem, he explained, and shuts them out from their history. For example, there was never any mention in school of the Warm Springs Trail of Tears, or of white soldiers massacring the tribes' women, children, and elderly.

An open embrace of Native language courses may reverse this pattern of distrust, because Native American students will see that their heritage is considered important and worth learning. Fordham (1998:45) notes, "The incorporation of an Indigenous language as an integral part of the formal curriculum can demonstrate that education no longer requires abandoning one's ancestral tongue or cultural identity." Though the Klamath language program is only in its third year, Doug Smith has high hopes that it will lead to fewer drop-outs and suicides as the children reach high-school age. He contends that in order for these children to avoid tragic self-destructive behavior, they must have pride for who they are and a strong sense of self-identity. He believes that Native language programs develop this pride, where traditional Western curricula have failed, and finds this aspect essential to their growth. Rhoan agrees: "[Mainstream American educators] have been trying to teach our children their way for how long now? And it's not working."

Many of the teachers reported good classroom behavior from the children they were teaching, even the "trouble" students. Warm Springs teachers report that children listen to the teachers and ask when they're coming back. Their regular teachers are often amazed at how well they behave. But as one Native language teacher told me, "The kids carry teachings of respect for us, and are hungry for our

knowledge.” Another Klamath language teacher explained, “The children just have burgeoning curiosity when they start to learn about their heritage. The child becomes a whole person. Trouble kids stop acting out when they regain who they are.”

But teaching Native American languages requires flexibility on the part of schools. According to Brenda Frank, this is the Klamath program’s greatest obstacle: gaining credibility according to Western standards while maintaining traditional methods of teaching. One Native language teacher asserted that she shouldn’t be expected to teach as though she had a Master’s Degree in education; her students are learning, she said, and this isn’t about meeting standards as with other languages. This is about the *survival* of a people. A Klamath teacher said, “Western education puts us at odds with our elders... The kids get so many mixed signals.” She added that if she has the approval of her elders, why should she need the further approval of the state? Radine Johnson asserted that it’s wrong for the state to insist on conformity. Instead, they should recognize and respect the teachers’ knowledge, and the fact that the languages ought to be taught in the ways the elders taught them.

In part, this is because the languages themselves are linguistically very complex. Rhoads explained that the uniqueness of her language (Sahaptin) calls for unique teaching styles, apart from European languages. All of the Warm Springs teachers in this study agreed that Western teaching methods don’t always work for teaching their languages. Radine Johnson said, “Our language doesn’t work on an agenda. It’s learned by hearing and repeating it, and that’s what we do. It will never work in lesson plans, because there’s always so much to learn, even about a single word.” (A single Wasco verb, for example, can have 40,000 separate conjugations.) Another teacher echoed her sentiment, explaining that the knowledge of their elders can’t be put into standards and benchmarks: “Standards and benchmarks just don’t fit who we are as people.”

In addition, the Native language teachers feel frustrated at what they are not allowed to teach in public schools. Many of their traditional songs and stories have religious overtones, and they feel that they are neglecting a very important part of their language and culture by leaving that out. They compare this to teachings of Western culture that are embraced in the school. “They’re learning [in the schools] that Santa Claus is more important than God”, said one Warm Springs teacher. According to a Klamath teacher, they have to edit some of the cultural materials to match Western standards, so as not to offend anyone. However, she says that they address these issues by teaching them in extracurricular culture camps, where they can teach the children anything they deem appropriate for them to learn, including aspects of the language and culture that should not be shared with non-tribal members.

### 3.4 Relations with Local School Districts

Each school district has a unique character, and as such, each tribe has had different encounters with their local school district and administration. In Klamath County, language revitalization efforts have been welcomed. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, which are just beginning their Kindergarten language program this year, have not yet entered the school district, though they've had good relations with them in the past. Warm Springs, however, has had considerable trouble communicating their needs with their local school district, and with convincing school officials of how important the continuation of their languages is.

Classroom teachers also play an important role in language programs, as a state-licensed teacher is required to be present during the language lessons. In Warm Springs, many Native language teachers reported positive interactions with the mainstream teachers, some of whom actively encourage their students to practice the language, or are even trying to learn it themselves. Rhoan said that there was a lot of resistance at first, as teachers feared they would be supplanted by the new Native Language teachers, but the new head of the Teacher's Association greatly facilitated their introduction by explaining their role under Senate Bill 690 (which allows speakers of Native American languages to attain a special license without obtaining a teaching degree) to the teachers.

However, Warm Springs language teachers are regularly excluded from teacher's meetings, in-service days, and teacher trainings which would, they say, improve their relationships within the schools. Their status has remained essentially unofficial, as they have never been formally introduced. Rhoan told me, "The basic attitude is that we don't know or understand enough to teach these languages. We're not included in meetings or in decisions. We're told where to go and what they need, and that's it." She has encountered administrators throughout the district who have treated her condescendingly, as though she lacked knowledge or understanding.

In 1998, Warm Springs Elementary introduced a language plan without the input of the language teachers or members of the Language program. It was not a viable plan, and as one teacher put it, "the 509-J people have a lot of plans, but without our input they won't work, and we'll just look incompetent." Language teachers also point out that they're not given enough time in the schools to achieve the standards the school district expects. And this has been severely curtailed by No Child Left Behind mandates, which don't leave enough time for "extras".

Though the Klamath school district, under the direction of Doug Smith, has been very open to the language programs, and has allotted time and money to Native language classes, language program staff still face difficulties with mainstream teachers. As one Klamath language teacher reported, "[Mainstream] teachers come to the school district without any idea of how to reach our kids.

They should have cultural training so they know how to teach our kids.” Grand Ronde has maintained a good relationship with their school district, giving money at times to support various programs within the schools. However, the district remains strapped for money, and budget cuts hurt language programs. For example, the school district has rescinded a promise of classroom space for the Chinook-wawa kindergarten program this year, leaving the language program with the problem of finding space and transportation for their students.

### **3.5 Funding Obstacles**

While other obstacles loom largely over Native Language programs, funding also remains a problem. Grants are difficult to obtain and administer, and are not permanent sources of money for language programs. The programs themselves incur many extra costs not often associated with language learning; unlike foreign minority language teachers in the United States, who can often obtain language materials from the country of origin, Native language program staff must develop all of their own materials and curricula, often working in close conjunction with elders who are the last fluent speakers. Administration for Native Americans (ANA) grants from the federal government’s Department of Health and Human Services allocate money specifically for Native American language programs, but these grants total only \$2 million total each year (ANA 2003), far too little to fund language programs for the United States’ hundreds of Native American tribes.

Myra Johnson listed the extra costs associated with funding a language revitalization program, including: elder consultation, consultations with linguists, the development of entirely new language materials (including the development of fonts and other software for computers), recording the language, transportation for teachers to the various schools they teach at and to trainings, mentorship and training for curriculum development (which is necessary for gaining access to public schools), development of language standards, and the education of the greater society of the importance of the continuation of their languages (including hiring researchers to assess the scholastic success of their students). And as she pointed out, they must do everything from scratch; no one can simply go out and buy a book about their languages.

Among basic language program running costs, current needs at Warm Springs include specialized training for working with handicapped children and children who have fetal alcohol syndrome. Rhoan pointed out that hiring a linguist would help ease the transition into the high schools, where standards are stricter. And the teachers need their own classroom space, so they can store and display language materials, instead of hauling everything they need to every class.

Though private and federal grants have been very helpful to all of the language programs in funding various portions of their efforts, they are not without their own difficulties. Warm Springs must hire an outside grant-writer, because

many of the grants are far too complicated and technical for language program staff to take the time to write. A Klamath teacher pointed out that grants are often so competitive that grant-writers must make astronomical promises that are difficult to administer and achieve. “They limit your accessibility to the kids because you have so much to do. But it’s really essential to spend time with them. My boss is saying, ‘stick to the grant’, but my heart is saying, ‘help everybody’.”

Tony Johnson points out that Senate Bill 690 was a tremendous step in Native language education, but without money attached to it, still represents a struggle for Native American tribes. And as he very succinctly explained, “It wasn’t our effort to get rid of our languages, so it shouldn’t have to be completely our effort to bring them back”. He then went on to say, “I was always told by my elders that it takes at least as long to fix a problem as it took to make it. I think that goes for resources as well”. The federal government, which poured tremendous amounts of money into eradicating Native languages, has a responsibility to assist their return.

### **3.6 The Role of Elected Officials**

Myra Johnson pointed out that though many state and local elected officials have been receptive to the needs of the tribes, their terms are often short, and when they leave, the tribe must start over again explaining all of their needs to a new person. This emphasizes the need for government officials to pass on information learned from the tribes to successors, so that tribal language programs don’t have to spend time explaining their position anew every time.

In addition, United States government officials should remember that they are dealing with sovereign nations, who understand their own needs better than anyone else. Passing legislation or making plans without consulting true representatives from the tribe may do more harm than good. And many Native language teachers emphasized the importance of visiting the reservation and sitting in on language classes. As Brenda Frank pointed out, “state officials should visit reservations and schools to see how it really is and how we’re teaching, and to see the pride that’s there in the classroom. It’s a whole different way of teaching.”

“The kids are learning our language, and it’s an awesome feeling to know that our language won’t die,” said Radine Johnson.

## **4. Recommendations**

Because many of the obstacles that stand in the way of Native language revitalization are external, language policy and education officials can make a positive difference in the struggle to bring them back. The following recommendations are not comprehensive, nor are they appropriate to every Native group; many factors depend on individual histories and situations. But they may

be used as a starting point for effecting changes that ease the burden of bringing entire languages back from the brink of extinction.

- Respect the sovereignty of each tribe. Each tribe is a unique entity, with distinct history, traditions, and culture. Many retain unique treaties with the federal government, promising certain amenities for the use of their land. Tribal representatives, therefore, should be respected as such, and chosen by the tribe by their own methods. In addition, a representative from one tribe does not necessarily represent “Native American” interests, so should not be treated as a representative of all tribes.
- Respect the importance of Native languages to the identity and culture of the language community. Making their language a low priority marginalizes Native students by reinforcing the dominant ideology that their heritage and culture are unimportant.
- Remember that Native languages are not “minority languages”. They belong to local cultures, with histories that pre-date the advent of the United States. They can’t be learned anywhere else in the world.
- Both traditional teaching methods and the linguistic complexity of many Native languages make it difficult and often impracticable for Native language programs to conform exactly to Western guidelines and standards. Recognize that Native language programs require flexibility. Be willing to accept different (though not inferior) standards for language acquisition.
- Include Native language teachers and program directors in decisions affecting language programs and their students. Their expertise is invaluable, and ignoring their input greatly increases the chances that the program won’t work.
- Remember that Native communities didn’t do the work to destroy their languages. This was the conscientious effort of the United States government, which poured many resources into the forced assimilation and cultural genocide of Native peoples. These communities deserve similar efforts and resources to revitalize their languages, at least to a sustainable level. Because Native language programs are starting from the ground up, their resource needs are greater than those of other, more prominent languages.
- Pass on pertinent information to future officials and educators; Native language advocates must continually restate their position to each new official, a disheartening process.

- Most importantly, remember that those who know their needs best are the language teachers and program administrators themselves. They define most precisely the problems that face them, and have the best understanding of what solutions will be the most beneficial. Respecting their knowledge and dedication is paramount to achieving the level of communication necessary to restore Oregon's Native languages.

## **5. Conclusion**

The United States government has long held a policy of “civilizing the savages”, which continues to haunt Native American school children today. Years of abuse (physical, emotional, and psychological) by the Western education system have generated an atmosphere of distrust in schools. Indeed, Native children continue to face marginalization of their language, culture, and traditions in public schools, further augmenting the problem. This marginalization contributes to feelings of loss of identity that lead to high drop-out rates and self-destructive behavior (Cummins 1988).

One way to combat this distrust is the open incorporation of Native languages and cultural programs in public schools. However, this will take a dedicated effort on the part of state and school officials to work in equal partnership with Native communities, and provide the funding, training (for both Native and non-Native teachers), and classroom time and space for these activities to take place. Equal partnership means working together with Native representatives to determine the needs and resources of the community, rather than making assumptions and plans based on the input of hand-chosen Native personnel.

Native language and culture programs also require flexibility on the part of school districts. Many of these languages are very linguistically complex and difficult to learn, and do not lend themselves easily to other language teaching standards and methods. They have the added difficulty of being very close to extinction, requiring the tremendous effort of community elders, teachers, and linguists to work together to preserve them in their entirety. These languages were never traditionally taught in a classroom, and though it's true that in order to gain credibility in modern institutions, they will have to conform somewhat to Western standards, they can't fit these standards perfectly without losing their integrity.

Funding should be forthcoming to the degree that it was originally used to eradicate Native languages. Providing Native language education in public schools will be beneficial to school districts in terms of better student performance. As students gain an important sense of identity and self-worth, they will excel in other subjects as well. Language programs require funding to allow them to reach a viable level within the community, whence they can proceed with less assistance. Funding might go directly to language programs, for the hiring and training of

teachers and the development of materials. It might also be used to start charter schools, where Native American students can learn more of their history and culture, with language immersion possibilities.

Most importantly, state and school officials should recognize and respect tribal officials as equal partners in the effort to educate children. Encounters with condescending and rude officials make tribal members reluctant to express their opinions. Officials should not minimize the contributions that the community makes in educating their children. And they should pass on what they learn from their Native American counterparts to their successors, so that future officials will not have to learn everything from scratch.

Ultimately, it will be the dedication and relentless work of the many tribal language program staff, teachers, elders, and their pupils that overcome these obstacles and reinstate fluency in their communities. Working uphill the whole way it seems, they have already achieved a tremendous amount of success, and so continue to build solutions to a problem they did not create but are determined to solve.

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