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Integrating Language and Culture Revitalization into Public School Life

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1. Introduction

The workshop from which this paper is derived summarized the circumstances and the stages of development of an innovative Native American education program I helped to establish, and provided participants with an overview of basic principles for use in creating similar programs in their own local situations. In the following pages I will explain in greater detail the reasons for the choices we made in designing the program, and suggest some ways to avoid setbacks that can undermine efforts to make the revitalization of First Nations languages and cultures a fundamental part of Indian students' learning in public school settings. I maintain that the integration of indigenous language and culture into mainstream classroom instruction is a natural and necessary component of an overall strategy for saving endangered ways of life which are essential for our shared future.

Much of the work that led to the ideas I will present here was conducted in a place that I will not name. There are two reasons for this choice. The first reason is that the actual location is not essential to the value of the insights I hope to share. My role was not that of a researcher, but rather that of a curriculum specialist, program designer, and professional developer. The second reason is that I feel obligated to honor the trust placed in me by the Chiefs' Council of the Native American nation involved, by respecting their privacy. Like many First Nations, their history is marked by instances of academics taking advantage of their generosity by learning from them and then publishing work based on their association without adequate regard to how it might affect the lives of the people concerned. While I do not in all cases repudiate such work and have learned a great deal from some of it, I will not emulate it needlessly.

I make mention of the relevant circumstances solely in order to place the achievements of the Nation and the school district, which serve as my primary inspiration, in a context sufficient to enable readers to appreciate their significance. The two entities exist side by side in a rural area of a northeastern state. Though the district was the first in its state to accept Native American students into its schools, some eighty years prior to the collaboration I will describe, their relations from that point up to the start of our work together had been strained.

Tensions and resentments resulting from real and perceived discrimination on the district's part had resulted in such bitterness in the native community that when we began it was not uncommon to hear native students in the district's elementary school describe teachers as "racists" in a "white man's school."

Such situations are not unusual in school districts throughout the United States that serve significant numbers of Native American students. Teachers and administrators in these districts often regard these students as academically disadvantaged due to cultural differences and poverty. Their response is to place native students in lower "ability level" tracks or reading groups, and to provide them with various forms of remedial assistance. Many end up being retained to repeat grades when this help proves ineffective. Others, in numbers disproportionate to their percentage of the general population, are eventually referred for special education evaluation and placed in programs for students with disabilities. Large numbers later in their school careers develop attendance problems and discipline problems. Far too many ultimately drop out of school. Those who remain often perform at levels considerably below their potential.

This had long been the case at the district in question. For over a decade I had attempted to persuade this district to implement an academic enrichment program for its Native American students to change this pattern of failure. District leaders had resisted, believing that their remedial approach was the best answer to the situation. They also probably were suspicious of my motives. I contended that one of the major contributing factors in native students' school failure was their sense of alienation resulting from the fact that the district employed no native teachers, and that the curriculum included no meaningful attention to the Nation's history or culture. Administrators and others took the position that no qualified native teachers were available, and held that the state curricula, an assembly program from time to time, and certain artifacts on view in a hallway display case were sufficient in their acknowledgement of their Indian students' background.

During this same period, the Nation was facing a deepening crisis related to the gradual loss of its heritage language and traditional culture. With each succeeding generation, fewer children learned ways of life that had been sustained by their ancestors for generations despite the influences of missionaries, land grabs, and boarding schools. Several dedicated elders and aspiring young native teachers had established a small tribal school aimed at intervening in this pattern by teaching the language to small groups of young children in a culturally appropriate instructional environment. Their long-term efforts were hampered by the fact that parents who were motivated to send their children to the program for a traditional education during pre-school and kindergarten became less willing to do so beyond first and second grade, fearing possible negative effects on their children's prospects for long-term economic security. They would withdraw their children from the tribal school and send them to the district elementary school instead, whatever concerns they might have about how they would be treated there, believing that their futures depended upon receiving a conventional American education. This limited the program's language stabilization potential.

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Both educational endeavors, operating in their separate spheres, were failing. The district, whatever its intentions, was not providing an equitable educational opportunity for its Native American students. The Nation, striving to rescue its language from oblivion, was hobbled by the reality of its children needing to make their lives in not just one world, but two. District administrators were growing concerned, as state and federal learning standards were being imposed, that native students' academic underperformance would have a negative impact on the district's standing. Nation educators dreamed of establishing a school of their own to teach their children from pre-school through high school, and thus provide them with continual language and culture training without depriving them of the advantages of mainstream education. However, an array of obstacles made this vision one that would take many years to realize.

Then the district hired a new superintendent. He initiated a new relationship with the Nation, and formed a task force of district and Nation personnel to redesign Indian education. I served as their advisor. In the first year, the district hired a full-time Native American teacher who had two primary responsibilities. The first was to provide lessons in the Nation's culture and history to all elementary classes. These regularly-scheduled lessons, conducted initially by the teacher visiting other teachers' classrooms and then later with whole classes coming to her own well-equipped classroom, were drawn from a curriculum written by a team of teachers from the elementary school and the tribal early childhood program. These lessons were designed to integrate the state standards with a local native world-view that made Indian students' knowledge an asset in all students' learning.

For example, when learning about local history and places of interest in their area, elementary students learned not only about the development of their town but also about the formation of the nearby reservation and the process of its gradual reduction in size over time, and how these patterns are related. When studying family structures and the roles of community leaders, they learned not only about the nuclear family but also about clans, and not only about the mayor and the town council but also about chiefs, clan mothers, and faithkeepers. Native history and ways of life would no longer be confined to a single unit, but integrated into the entire mainstream curriculum through a parallel native curriculum designed and delivered for the mutual enhancement of both bodies of knowledge.

The second part of this teacher's job was to provide intensive culture and language instruction exclusively to native students as part of their school-day schedule. These sessions grouped students by grade and were timed to ensure that they were not absent during the presentation of new content-area material in their regular classrooms. Some time in each session was devoted to discussion of how things were going in school, and conversation about any significant events taking place on the reservation or in students' families. The teacher might discuss principles drawn from the Nation's cultural and spiritual teachings about such topics as the importance of learning, being a friend, and making good personal choices. The bulk of the time was then devoted to lessons in cultural content objectives

and heritage language development.

In the second year, students attending the Nation's early childhood program began spending their mornings in district elementary classrooms for their core content-area lessons, and then returning to the reservation to spend the rest of the day learning language and culture. District teachers had professional development support to help them integrate these students into their classes, and tribal teachers became regular visitors to the elementary school to observe, serve as substitute teachers, and take part in workshops on methods and materials. Native students had better attitudes toward school, and were getting better grades. They also knew more about their traditional culture than before, and were speaking their heritage language more often and more fluently. This year, the district hired another Native teacher to teach the language to students in the middle grades.

I do not mean to suggest that this progress was made easily, or without some setbacks and frustrations for all concerned. The program continues to undergo refinement and expansion, and this process is not without its obstacles and concerns. But given the history of relations between the district and the Nation, and taking into account the rapid pace at which such substantive and lasting positive changes were accomplished, their shared success can only be described as remarkable. Credit for this achievement goes exclusively to the leaders and the educators directly involved in the work. My contribution was solely to affirm their good judgment, and facilitate in their setting of priorities along the way. This has given me a unique perspective from which to draw implications that may be of use to others who are contending with similar apparently conflicting objectives as they strive to stabilize and revitalize indigenous languages.

What follows will be my attempt to present some of the reasons for potential benefits of, and guidelines in, the creation of programs like the one I have briefly described. In bringing these introductory remarks to a close, it is important to stress that while a key element leading to change in our model district and Nation was the arrival of a new superintendent with new ideas, this alone would not have been enough to bring about the transformation that occurred. This individual was and remains extraordinary, but had he not adopted and operated from certain fundamental principles in implementing his reforms, he could not have succeeded. Such individuals are rare in any profession, but he would be the first to acknowledge that the principles matter most and that these are available to anyone, anywhere. First, indigenous language and culture survival and mainstream academic excellence can be mutually reinforcing. Second, native cultural heritages are powerful resources for meaningful, motivating learning for all students. And third, in negotiating the complexities of the first and second principles, Native American cultural and spiritual values must be the primary consideration.

2. Separation and Integration

Most First Nations children in the United States attend public schools where they are a minority of the student population. Given the extreme and increasing degree of segregation in American schools at the start of the 21st century, this may seem a

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questionable statement unless it is remembered that nationwide more of these children live off rather than on reservations, and that there are at least as many who can claim native heritage as a significant part of their identity as there are those who are enrolled members of federally recognized tribes. It is not my intention here to make assertions about how a Native American child should or should not be formally identified as such. I wish only to point out that in terms of the circumstances of their education experience, the majority of students who can be considered potentially at risk as a result of learning environments that are insufficiently responsive to their native background do not have access to native-run programs that might help to reduce the negative effects of alienation.

Even in places where native-run programs designed to intervene in language death and culture erosion do exist, they can generally only reach limited numbers of young learners in those communities. For a variety of economic, political, religious, and other reasons many native students who might otherwise be seen as natural participants in language revitalization efforts end up not taking part. Most of these programs are aimed at the early childhood level or are designed for adults. Such programs as do exist for learners between early childhood and adult are almost exclusively after-school, weekend, or summer programs, and thus involve either considerable additional commitments of time and effort outside of school, extended interruptions in language learning, or both. These combined effects further limit the number of students likely to participate, and also undermine the maintenance over time of optimum language-learning conditions needed to produce as many fluent speakers as possible.

I do not mean to imply that native-run early childhood language programs as presently constituted are doomed to fail. On the contrary, they are indispensable, and many have achieved impressive and increasing success. (The same is true of adult programs, although for a variety of reasons to a lesser degree.) I do contend, however, that such early childhood programs by themselves will probably not be enough to produce the numbers of fluent speakers needed to save many of the indigenous languages now facing extinction. One fundamental reason for this is that too few students are likely to attend them long enough to achieve or maintain the necessary levels of fluency required to create adequate numbers of speakers. The vast majority of these students speak English as a first language. The desire to immerse them in their second, indigenous heritage language early in their lives is in keeping with the research in second language acquisition that indicates that young children can in the right circumstances learn second languages quickly and easily. The prevailing pattern of subsequently suspending the learning of these endangered languages when children leave these programs to attend mainstream schools where the languages are not taught confirms another, less widely acknowledged lesson of the research, namely that young children can also forget languages at least as quickly as they learn them.

Faced with the stark choice of either keeping their children in programs designed to teach them their heritage language and culture or pulling them out to send them to mainstream public schools where they will learn the subject matter

that leads to a high school diploma, the vast majority of Native American parents will choose the latter. Even those who are prepared to delay this choice by keeping their children in tribal programs through the kindergarten and first grade years will almost without exception sacrifice tradition for a greater chance at economic security in their future lives. This is a contemporary version of the same force that undermined the transmission of indigenous languages in previous generations. These parents, unlike many of their predecessors, are highly motivated to have their children learn the languages that they themselves in many cases do not speak. But this motivation, out of parental concern, typically cannot help but yield to economic imperatives operant in the larger society.

Numerous Native American nations have sought to respond to this difficult choice by establishing their own schools to provide the same content-area education students receive in mainstream public schools, hoping in this way to persuade native parents to keep their children in settings where they will be able to continue learning their heritage language and culture throughout their school careers, in addition to learning math, science, English, and social studies. Some of these nations have succeeded in this endeavor, and others will succeed in the years to come. But for most First Nations, creating their own schools is at present too great a burden to bear for a host of financial and logistical reasons, and the time it will take to achieve the goal may be longer than the time their languages have left.

Saving a dying language is one of the most complex and consuming endeavors that a community can undertake. More than simply a full-time job, it demands every resource of funding, energy, will, and genius that those committed to it can summon. Training teachers, devising materials, creating curricula, conducting community events, doing publicity, recruiting students and staff, learning ethnographic and linguistic techniques, nurturing mentor relationships with elders, and continually assessing progress and programs are only some of the essential activities (apart from actual teaching and learning) that must be attended to. To simultaneously take up the task of creating a school capable of serving all grades with all subject areas is to guarantee that to some extent language revitalization work will be diminished in its focus and effectiveness.

The reason why many Native American educators have chosen to pursue this daunting double task is no mystery. They often have their own painful memories of struggling to keep their spirits alive in schools where their identities as First Nations people were ignored or insulted. They may since have seen their own or others' children going through similar hardships in the more recent past. They have concluded that the best way to ensure that native students get a traditional education is to take control of their entire education. They are by no means the only minority American educators who, over fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, have despaired that mainstream American schools will never take integration seriously enough to achieve it in a thorough and meaningful way. I share their concerns, and will never hesitate to assist them in their efforts in any way that I can. But from my experience as a language and culture minority education advocate who has worked in hundreds of schools over the past two decades, I

now perceive a change that has created an opportunity we cannot afford to ignore if we are serious about doing everything possible to save Indian languages from extinction.

Whatever ill effects have resulted from misguided priorities in standards-based school reform initiatives, the emphasis on improving all students' academic performance has had one significant benefit. For essentially the first time, public schools are under real pressure to live up to their responsibilities to provide minority students with the support they need to succeed. It has already become evident to all but the most "back to basics"-oriented educators that purely remedial interventions are not effective in meeting this goal. Many district and building administrators who not long ago would have refused to consider programs like the one described in the introduction are now prepared to listen. One reason is that high-stakes tests all students must pass to graduate are requiring a more thorough understanding of subjects such as history and language arts than was previously the case. The increased potential of instructional enrichment resources drawn from local indigenous cultures offers us a chance to connect "modern" and "traditional" approaches to the education of all our students, and especially Native American students, in mutually reinforcing ways.

3. Benefits of Integration

Existing definitions of "modern" and "traditional" ways of learning are proving increasingly inadequate as educators strive to re-invent schools that will be capable of preparing students to meet higher standards and the challenges of living in the imperiled global biosphere of the 21st century. Mechanistic and hierarchical approaches to grouping students and addressing content-area knowledge, typical of "modern" education, are being revealed as a primary source of learners' alienation from one another and from what they are supposed to learn, contributing to an undemocratic, ecologically unsustainable view of the world. The cultural wisdom of indigenous peoples, which has too long been characterized as "traditional" and thus irrelevant to or non-existent in the "modern" world, is rooted in the principle of interdependence among learners and in the areas of knowledge they attain. When infused with "traditional" values and methods, "modern" teaching becomes more meaningful to the learner, and more responsible for the life of her community on both a local and a global level.

The most powerful outcome that results from integrating local Native American culture and history in substantive and ongoing ways into mainstream content-area curricula and lessons can be seen in the attitudes and performance of Indian students in the classroom and in school life. Where once such knowledge may have been at best peripheral and at worst ignored or distorted, it becomes invested with genuine status in the institution which determines children's success or failure, and the contributions children can make from their own life experiences to activities and discussions with classmates are linked in valuable ways to the lessons everyone is expected to understand. Non-Indian students' early intrinsic interest in First Nations' ways of life is confirmed as important in a range of

contexts by the de-facto arbiters of what matters in children's worlds: their teachers. Native classmates become privileged knowers where knowing counts.

This reinforcement and affirmation of their heritage in school has been seen to have two profound effects on Native American students. First, by positioning them as experts in areas of minority knowledge seen as valuable by the majority society as embodied in the classroom and school, they can develop awareness and skills needed to live in these two sometimes-conflicting worlds. Second, and perhaps even more importantly for our purposes, this experience motivates native students who might otherwise be largely indifferent to their cultural and linguistic heritage to learn more about them, and to make them a more fundamental component of their sense of their own individual identities. An echo effect is seen among non-native students, who become more likely to respect and seek to better understand local native cultures. This has a beneficial influence on peer relationships among members of both groups in and out of school, and may be expected over time to promote better community relations among adults.

When non-native as well as native students at all levels are provided with culture-rich lessons and activities, drawn from local Native American ways of life and conceptually and specifically linked to content-area material across curriculum boundaries, conducted by native and non-native teachers working together with each making reference to the other's ideas and objectives, the pedagogical effect is to reveal multiple inter-relationships among content disciplines and to restore some sense of wholeness to students' courses of study. It also embeds abstract history, literature, and science content in a local context that connects past, present and future aspects of the places where learners are living their lives, providing teachers with a rich source of ideas and experiences from which to draw material that makes lessons more meaningful and memorable.

As potentially valuable as the integration of native perspectives into classroom learning is for non-native and native students to learn together. The benefits of the approach I am advocating are especially powerful for Native American students. This is because the program design described in the introduction requires the hiring of a native teacher in order to be fully credible and effective as a vehicle for the transmission of local indigenous culture and language. When native children have even one native teacher in a predominantly non-native school setting, it becomes possible for them to perceive their place in the school in a new light. It is their place, too. Someone who understands their situation is present to provide encouragement and advice, and to serve as a role model for living in two worlds. Not incidentally, non-native students are afforded the useful experience of interacting with a native adult as a person of knowledge and authority, which also influences native students' perceptions of what is possible for them personally.

Native students are further benefited by the presence of a native teacher in their school because such a professional can also provide their non-native teachers with a colleague who can offer them guidance in how to respond to Indian students' cultural orientations to learning, can assist them in interacting positively with parents and other family and community members, and can serve as a re-

source person in recommending local resources to enhance lessons, field trips, special events, community service opportunities, committee work participation, and so on. Apart from the project of creating an instructional enrichment program, it is often difficult for administrators to justify the hiring of a native person specifically because she is a native. In the context of such an integration-oriented initiative, however, the reasons become compelling enough to persuade local and state education officials to consider specially targeted measures (such as obtaining emergency certification status, or support for course-work toward a teaching degree) which may be necessary to establish and operate the program in its first few years. Choosing a teacher the Nation can accept is the crucial first step.

4. Guidelines for Program Development

Nothing will be more apparent by now than the fact that good leadership plays an essential role in initiating any program of the kind we have examined in the preceding pages. While relatively limited in terms of its overall size, expense, or direct impact on the general instructional program of the school or district, such a program will for many mainstream educators represent a profound shift of priorities and approach in meeting the needs of Native American students. Some, without considering the potential benefits for non-native students, may view this form of enrichment-oriented intervention as catering to a minority on whose behalf a great deal of effort and expense is already being exerted. Others, without taking into account the prohibitive expense and ineffectiveness of remedial approaches, may object that the idea is too extravagant an indulgence at a time of tight budgets and do-or-die standardized test scores.

In order to themselves be persuaded and then to persuade others, school district and building leaders will in most cases need to be convinced that the proposed program is not designed or intended exclusively to benefit Indian students. While this fact does not entirely eliminate the risks for these leaders in advocating change in Native American education in their institutions, it creates parallel risks for the First Nations leaders who must be engaged as program advocates in their own political and community contexts. Some will assert that their first duty is to protect and advance the interests of native children without subsuming these in the achievement of any imagined benefits for already-privileged non-natives. Others will maintain that native cultural teachings should not be entrusted to the use of institutional settings that have a poor record of respecting them in the past.

The objectives raised on both sides cannot be ignored. The only way for leaders to address them on or off the reservation, in council sessions, or in school board meetings, is by taking shared risks. The initial risks need to be taken by the people in whom the relevant power is most concentrated, and with whom the primary responsibility for education resides: the school district's top-level administration. Native leaders who are obliged to entrust their community's children to public school districts have long been forced to be close observers of the workings and decisions of school boards, superintendents, and principals. Even where

relations are not good, communications are typically ongoing and occur on an influential level. A good-faith gesture by a district, especially where such gestures have been few, can have a galvanizing effect on Nation perceptions of the possibilities for progress. Stakes have grown high enough on both sides to make such gestures and responses more viable than they have ever been before.

The shared nature of the risks involved is nowhere better demonstrated than in the consistent reiteration by district and Nation leaders that the benefits of integrating indigenous culture and language into public school life must benefit both native and non-native students, and that incorporating the work of a native teacher into the work of all teachers benefits the entire faculty. Every aspect of program design and implementation must express and reinforce this objective. Many majority educators will characterize this as privileging one minority group over others. Some native educators and advocates will claim that it dilutes a necessarily exclusive focus on the needs of native students. But a shared insistence on the part of non-native and native leaders in their respective spheres of influence that their aspirations for any child will be best served by improving the education of all children creates a third, intermediary space within which those on both sides of the divide can gather their support. This has the effect of relegating oppositional voices from the center to the margins, and gives a plurality of teachers and parents a chance to further their own interests by advocating for the interests of others.

Lasting change can result from the kind of consensus that such a political and pedagogical position permits. When programs are instituted primarily by one or another set of interests in the context of progressive or conservative district leadership, they are vulnerable to elimination when the political pendulum swings back again in the opposite direction. Representing a range of interests makes this effect far less likely. In order to build a foundation of trust where constituencies often may have been at odds, it is advisable once again to observe the principle of affording primacy to the more vulnerable of the two sets of interests. Many proponents of Native American language revitalization are uneasy at the prospect of their heritage cultures and languages becoming subjects of study in public schools. The spiritual content of these inheritances is not to be discounted by non-native educators who embrace the goal of keeping them alive for future generations. We must always be guided by our native partners in what to do in order to avoid doing further damage to that which we wish to help save.

Toward this end, it makes sense in program development and initial implementation to begin with cultural content, and defer the often more sensitive element of language until the program has begun to demonstrate its responsibility and effectiveness. While it is seldom easy to definitively demarcate the sacred from the secular in either the cultural or linguistic domains of native tradition, it is generally not difficult for native educators to identify elements of their way of life and worldview that they would like their non-native neighbors to understand better, and that they would value having become a part of native students' lives in school. Elements that are manifestly sacred in nature will always be reserved for native teachers to transmit in their own ways and on their own terms. These

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boundaries must be made clear and respected by non-native educators as the program proceeds. A native faculty presence helps to ensure this without quelling a spirit of proper inquiry or instilling unwarranted inhibitions or resentments.

Having stressed the inclusiveness of benefits for all students as the program's most fundamental principle, it becomes possible to pursue and protect essential provisions for native students as an integral component of that overarching goal. The two-tiered nature of the program, with native students receiving content-area enrichment lessons from a native teacher together with their non-native peers but also receiving more intensive and personalized small-group tutoring in native culture and language as part of the school day, is essential to the program design. Neither of these two components can be fully effective without the other. To do only the former would reduce native teachings to the status of an adjunct role in pursuit of other instructional objectives. To do only the latter (even if it were possible in the context of the general program without first benefiting the general program) would have a segregating effect on native students' school experience, in part because it would be viewed by most non-native teachers as an irrelevant entitlement detracting from the achievement of the academic goals native students must share with their non-native classmates.

Once having established generally accepted grounds for the creation of this specialized space for native students' learning of native teachings from a native educator, it must be scrupulously and steadfastly guarded from incursions by the general program. It must never be allowed to lapse into another form of remedial program, providing homework help or reinforcement of basic academic skills in the service of other classes. This protection is accomplished in two ways. First, however much planning is devoted to the enrichment curriculum provided to all students, twice as much must be devoted to that provided exclusively to native students. The extent of the units, lessons, and materials developed by the native teacher in consultation with other native educators must be continually made known to district and building administrators and other teachers to ensure their understanding that the work being done is substantive and intensive. Second, native students' progress must be evaluated in an ongoing qualitative and comprehensive manner to document that specific objectives are being met.

These guidelines for implementation would be incomplete without making mention of one potential pitfall that must be taken into account in order to avoid what could become a serious obstacle for an otherwise successful program in its early stages of development. Many Native American communities are faced with complicated and sometimes heartbreaking differences surrounding the question of which children are to be accepted as members of the Nation and which cannot be. This question may emerge, for example, in whether or not a child has a designated clan, or an Indian name. It may become a problem for the program in determining which individual students may be permitted to take part in the small-group sessions reserved for native students. To refuse such permission to a child who may be half Indian, and who is thus subject to all of the difficulties any native child faces, would be to add to those difficulties by denying her what could prove to be

an important part of an answer in her search for meaning in her life. This is not a choice any teacher would ever want to have to make.

It is not my place to say how such a choice should be made in all instances. I will only suggest that it be considered carefully, on a case-by-case basis, through balanced consideration of the Nation's judgment, the district's regulations, the child's parents' wishes, the best interests of the program and the other students included in it, and, most of all, the child's own needs. Once the child is included in the sessions, if she ultimately is, it is for the teacher in her best wisdom to determine how to respond to the complex realities of her circumstances. I will add that in the case of the program I have described, and others that I have been privileged to work with, when students in this situation have been included rather than excluded they have often made some of the greatest gains of any students involved. Moreover, other students whose native identity is uncontested have also learned what seem to me to be valuable lessons from them as a result.

One final recommendation concerns the issue of what levels should be included in the initial phase of program implementation. Even in the unlikely event that a district is prepared to attempt to institute a program from kindergarten through twelfth grade in its first year, I would in almost all cases advise against this. Wherever there are significant enough numbers of Native American students in a district to warrant the consideration of such a program, there is also invariably a long history of tension and distrust due to educational inequity (even if the non-native education establishment remains oblivious to it). The effects of this inequity may or may not be subtle, but they always begin in less obvious ways during the elementary grades. They then become steadily more evident as students move up into the secondary grades, where they become less readily amenable to remedy and where attempts that fail make further attempts difficult or impossible.

It is best to begin in the elementary grades, where curricula are more open to flexible and inventive enrichment possibilities, and where students are still relatively unselfconscious and open-minded in the process of their identity formation and their sense of one another. Consider starting with kindergarten and grades one and two for the first year, with firm plans to move up to third, fourth, and fifth grades in the following year or two. This works better for several reasons. First, it builds confidence among all concerned by laying a foundation of success, and allowing additional planning time. Second, it enables practitioners to learn from their inevitable mistakes and missed opportunities so these can be avoided as the native enrichment instruction moves up to be integrated with increasingly complex content-area material in later years. Third, the students move up along with the program, and are thus better prepared to benefit from it.

This is not to suggest that a decade must elapse before high school students may be directly affected by the positive influences that such a program might have in their lives. What happens in one part of a school district has a profound impact on all the other parts, even if that impact is at times indirect and subtle. Secondary students have younger siblings who are elementary students, and they will be cognizant of what their brothers and sisters are learning, and of the im-

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pression this has on their parents, who may well themselves be involved in the program as advisors, guest presenters, and planning team members. A range of program dimensions more directly significant to native teenagers themselves also becomes possible, however, from the first year onward. As native teachers join the district's faculty, they can become available to serve as consultants and mentors to secondary school students, and to offer occasional guest presentations in various courses and special programs. They can also reach out to native students in the upper grades to visit elementary classrooms and native small-group sessions to share their experiences, tell stories, dance, sing, make art, play games, teach skills, and otherwise serve as cultural ambassadors and role-models for younger non-native and native students. The value of such experiences for middle and high school students can be immense. Apart from constituting a meaningful form of community service, it may even inspire some to consider careers as teachers.

5. Conclusion

Readers of this contribution to a compendium of proceedings from the Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference (SILC) may justifiably ask whether my subject is sufficiently concerned with the urgent challenge of intervening in language death to warrant its being included here. I am half inclined to respond simply by quoting John Lennon's line in "Revolution 1" that says "We're doing what we can..." and leave it at that, but I think there may be a bit more worth saying. Obviously, the approach I have outlined will not in and of itself save anything (with the possible exception of a considerable amount of money presently being expended in misguided and ineffective attempts at the academic remediation of far too many Native American students). Public school-based programs are not and never can be a substitute for language-saving work done in native communities, by native people, in their own programs.

I hope it is by now evident, however, that programs such as the one I have described, built and run by native and non-native people together, can be a worthwhile supplement to other kinds of programs that are aimed specifically and solely at teaching and learning endangered languages. In the district I have referred to, high school courses in the Nation's language were long offered, but very few of the native students there ever took them. The social, psychological and emotional barriers to reclaiming this part of their heritage, even if they once got some of it when they were little, had by then grown too great. Many of the most successful students who did take those courses were non-natives. Now there are good prospects that those courses will begin to be filled with native students who have had a chance to learn the language continuously throughout their school lives. This will improve the prospects for the language's survival.

Public school administrators and teachers who read this textual version of my workshop given at the 11th annual SILC may also be skeptical about the possibilities for creating a program that integrates Native American culture and language into content-area learning in a comprehensive way, regardless of how much they

might consider the idea appealing. School districts in America are presently under tremendous stress due to the pressures of “No Child Left Behind” and the stringent standardized testing regimens being imposed to enforce it. I can only turn to John again: “You tell me it’s the institution...” This cycle of school reform has provoked a widespread “back to basics” reaction that is tragically self-defeating, and largely self-inflicted. We need to use this moment of crisis as an opportunity to implement long-overdue changes in how we educate language and culture minority students, and all students. In other words, “You better free your mind instead ...” We may not get a chance like this again.

In order to revitalize First Nations languages, it is necessary to transform the lives of First Nations children. For the vast majority of these children, in addition to addressing still unresolved issues of dire poverty, this will mean transforming the public school classrooms where they must learn to read, write, think, and live together with others in the pluralistic society we need to start building if America is to survive much longer as a democratic republic. That vision cannot be realized without present and future generations of Native America fully involved in the process. Their involvement requires the restoration of their heritage languages and cultures as fundamental elements of their overall education. To assume that such a monumental task can be achieved by working only on the margins of children’s educations without transforming their core, or that it is solely the responsibility of First Nations people themselves to make the necessary changes, is almost certainly to ensure losses from which none of us will fully recover.

REPORT 14

**SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA AND
OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES**

Language is Life

***PROCEEDINGS OF THE 11TH ANNUAL
STABILIZING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES CONFERENCE***

June 10-13, 2004

University of California at Berkeley

Wesley Y. Leonard and Stelómethet Ethel B. Gardner, Editors

Andrew Garrett and Leanne Hinton, Series Editors

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