Indigenous language revitalization in Montana: Perspectives from four nations

Mary Groom-Hall

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INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION IN MONTANA

PERSPECTIVES FROM FOUR NATIONS

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Education
The University of Montana
2003

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Indigenous Language Revitalization in Montana: Perspectives from Four Nations

Director: David R. Erickson

This qualitative case study examines the experiences of 19 Native American people who are involved with indigenous language revitalization in the state of Montana. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teachers of the languages and professionals who were responsible for initiating and directing language preservation programs. Data was collected from one-on-one interviews, from participant-observation at various cultural sites, and from conversations held with community members adjacent to study sites. Four of Montana’s six reservations were visited; teachers and professionals from six language groups participated in the study. Questions focused on individual stories and the meanings inherent in the language. Participants discussed the ways in which cultural and moral teachings were imparted to them as children through their Native languages; some later language learners spoke of regaining their identities as American Indian people through adult acquisition of their languages. The significance of their involvement with language revitalization through teaching, program development, or both, was expressed by many participants. The importance of language was found to permeate all aspects of personal, spiritual, community, and cultural life for the participants. Data revealed three emergent categories of language and its meaning to the participants: language and a) its meaning to the self, b) its meaning to the culture and community, and c) its specific meanings among teachers and language preservationists. These three themes emerged from first, participants’ responses about their own language-learning experiences and how language had affected their personal identities. Second, the role of language that participants observed or hoped for in their communities amplified the culture and community aspects of the data, and finally, since most participants interviewed were involved in the language education process in some way, specific concerns of educators emerged as the third important theme. Given the need for public education to respond more fully to laws requiring integration of Native American curriculum into the education system, sensitivity to and support for indigenous language teaching is an implication of the study. Recommendations for further study include the role of indigenous languages in empowerment and resilience, gendered communication and generational differences, and indigenous rhetorical structure.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Viola Spotted Bird, who, because of her love for her Dakota language and her belief in its importance to her people, spent part of one of her last days on earth with me. Her dedication to the cause of language preservation and her immeasurable generosity toward me will stay in my heart always.
Acknowledgments

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Finally, for safekeeping, for listening, for caring, for tolerance, I would like to thank my family and my friends Mark and J.T. They sustained me.
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Chapter One

Beginning and Background

Role of the Researcher

I was blessed to be born in a place where I did not belong. My Scots-Irish father managed a Hereford ranch in the middle of the Flathead Indian Reservation. The modern boundaries of the 1,250,000-acre Flathead Nation were established in the 1855 Treaty of Hell Gate, ratified in 1859. In 1887, the Dawes Allotment Act gave the U.S. President the authority to allot 160 acres to American Indian family heads, effectively changing reservation land ownership from tribal communal ownership to that of individual families. In 1910, the Flathead was opened to white settlement, and the ranch of my childhood was established on the south shore of Flathead Lake, neighboring the property of the Ducharmes, a long-time Flathead-Native family with whose children I played.

I was raised in a mixed-race family. My adopted baby brother is Cree and my half-sisters are the result of my Irish mother’s union with a French-Canadian-Blood man. I went to school with American Indian children—Salish, Kootenai, Blackfeet and Nez Perce—and heard the occasional “grandma words” that were spoken surreptitiously among my friends’ family members, simple phrases uttered to children, “come here,” “stop that,” “wash up.” I took those snatches of almost-forgotten Salish for granted in the same way I did my maternal grandpa’s Gaelic, heard but not valued for the treasures they were, and I was not to realize the impact of language loss on culture until my studies in
linguistics some twenty years later. It was with sorrow that I realized despite my life-long
love and respect for Native peoples, their languages had floated somewhere outside my
hearing, and that I had disrespected their culture by not noting the importance of
language to their identity as sovereign peoples. My childhood with them had been a
privilege, and it struck me that now I had some small role to play in the millennial efforts
to revitalize Native languages in Montana. Mark Fettes (1997) perhaps said it best:
“Language renewal is about finding ways to restore the balance between primary and
secondary discourse, and with it the balance between people and nature that indigenous
communities had once perfected. By the same token, language renewal is not something
that should concern indigenous people alone…” (p. 303).

The Place of a Non-Native Researcher in Native Communities

Piquemal (2001) states

the problem I address arises from researchers who work in Native communities
and have been widely criticized for their disregard of local ethics, adhering only
to the conventions of scientific research. This critique comes from two general
perspectives. First and foremost is the opinion of many Native American people
that researchers have misappropriated knowledge. The second critique is located
within academia: a common expression in postmodern theory is that modernist
researchers, by not questioning their own ethics and methodologies, have
unwittingly constructed the Other. While the importance of free and informed
consent is accepted in most circles, what often goes unquestioned is that free and
informed consent may have different meanings and implications in cross-cultural
situations, particularly when doing research with Native American communities.
It is the researcher’s ethics, and not those of the researched, that often seem to
govern the relationship. Researchers in cross-cultural situations often assume that
the individual in question understands the project fully and is able to give full
permission in a communicative code that happens to belong to the researcher. (p. 65)

Given the strictures of the above imposition that can be unwittingly broken by a non-Native researcher, this research project was initially discussed with tribal gatekeepers who were not only educational liaisons for their Nations, but also were individuals who had been educated off-reservation in mainstream institutions of higher education. They were therefore able to walk as go-betweens for the researcher and the Native people who would be interviewed by the researcher—the liaisons were, in effect, bicultural.

Piquemal (2001) takes particular issue with ethnographic participant/observer research, and it is reassuring that this research project involves both non-sacred and non-private information, and could be conducted through an interview process. Piquemal states:

Structured interviews such as questionnaires are usually structured around a main focus question; in this case, free and informed consent, as we have seen, implies that the researcher is allowed to use the information given by the participant. Open communication between participant and researcher requires a certain degree of trust that can be betrayed if the researcher does not conscientiously respect ethical considerations. The interview itself imposes a distance, physical and oftentimes emotional, between the researcher and the participant. Though in a good interview these are not distractions, the researcher’s tape recorder and notebook subtly direct the conversation, indicating, if only unconsciously, that the two or more people involved in the interview process are not “intimate acquaintances.” Thus, ethical guidelines are seemingly easier to follow and respect. (p. 68)
A further stance important to take in doing research with Native peoples is that of being a co-researcher rather than an outside researcher who comes in to obtain information from subjects. Not only should participants be offered the courtesy of reading the transcripts of their interviews, but in particular, if those participants happen to be individuals who are interested in the results of the research for their own language revitalization programs, they should be treated with the respect accorded to colleagues. As Piquemal (2001) puts it, “there is consent beyond the initial consent, and that it is by negotiating, renegotiating, and confirming consent that one can ensure that consent is truly and fully informed. In discussing these ethical recommendations, our recurrent theme was that collaboration should be ongoing and that research participants should be viewed as active co-researchers. Collaboration, as the spirit of research, will ensure that research is motivated by beneficence rather than by scientific curiosity only” (p. 75).

It is important for an outside researcher to be careful of placing his or her own definitions of what it means to be Indian on those Native peoples with whom he or she is studying. Given that reservation communities may be fragile in some respects, it is imperative that outsiders impose no “Indianness” on the Indians with whom they collaborate.

What was ‘Indian’? Either we’re seen as savages that should be gotten rid of, or put up on some throne until we are fighting one another for the candies the white government hands out—fighting for the spotlight that reads ‘Indian.’ Indian became another image and another thing for people to run after for a sense of importance. Because we had already lost a strong sense of ourselves, ‘Indian’ could be defined by the white world. Competition for who is the ‘most’ Indian seemed to be the name of the game, and the white world seemed to be the judge.
of the race. There became a kind of desperation to have attention from the white world and many things changed because of that. (Swentzell, 1997, p. 220)

As a member of the oppressor culture, an outside researcher cannot go into an oppressed environment with idealistic hopes to make changes to help the oppressed. “The oppressors…cannot find in [their] power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both” (Freire, 1970, p. 44). In other words, the solutions to problems faced by the oppressed must come from themselves, not from some outside, paternalistic source. Realistically, however, the researcher must be aware that his or her very presence injects a variable into the situation he or she is investigating. “One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual’s choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness” (pp. 46-47). Having recognized that going onto a reservation to perform research is not an objective act, but a stance taken in itself, the researcher must examine the ethics of the intrusion he or she is undertaking. If one is not engaging with the Native peoples in order to obtain data and then leave them behind, one must decide the stance she is taking—one of objectification, or one of solidarity.

Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary….true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these ‘beings for another.’ The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice…when he stops making pious,
sentimental and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love... To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce. (Freire, 1970, pp. 49-50)

History of Indigenous Language Suppression

It is estimated that in 1492 there were 300 or more indigenous languages spoken in North America and that 190-210 of these more than 300 languages are still spoken or remembered by American Indians. Dr. Michael Krauss, President of the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americans and Director of the Alaska Native Languages Center testified before a U.S. Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs in 1992 that of the 155 of those still-sentient languages in the United States, only about 20 are still spoken by people of all ages (Reyhner & Tennant, 1995).

The Naturalization Act of 1790 denied U.S. citizenship to immigrants from Africa and Asia, and to Native Americans (Spring, 1997). American Indians were thought to be primitives at best, savages at worst, who required civilizing in order to become assimilated by mainstream culture. The Civilization Act of 1819 was intended to bring that civilization to Native peoples in many cases in the form of missionaries who would undertake to educate them. Missionaries actually brought literacy for many tribal languages, developing English-based transcriptions of indigenous languages in order to translate religious tracts (Spring, 1997). The teaching of English was considered to be an important means of cultural transmission. Moravian educator John Gambold wrote, “It is indispensably necessary for their [Cherokee] preservation that they should learn our Language and adopt our Laws and Holy Religion.” (Spring, 1997, p. 34)
The Report of the Indian Peace Commission in 1868 (Reyhner, 1993) maintained that

now, by educating the children of these tribes in the English languages these differences would have disappeared, and civilization would have followed at once....Through sameness of language is produced sameness of sentiment, and thought; customs and habits are molded and assimilated in the same way, and thus in process of time the differences producing trouble would have been gradually obliterated...In the difference of language to-day lies two-thirds of our trouble....Schools should be established, which children should be required to attend; their barbarous dialect should be blotted out and the English language substituted. (pp. 16-17)

The Indian boarding school movement furthered the cause of eradicating both language and culture. The first boarding school to be established away from any reservation was the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, founded in 1879. Based on the ostensible success of the students who attended, proponents of eradicating Native languages, such as J.D.C. Atkins, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1885 to 1888, were emboldened to declare, as Atkins did:

Every nation is jealous of its own language, and no nation ought to be more so than ours, which approaches nearer than any other nationality to the perfect protection of its people. True Americans all feel that the Constitution, laws, and institutions of the United States, in their adaptation to the wants and requirements of man, are superior to those of any other country; and they should understand that by the spread of the English language will these laws and institutions be more firmly established and widely disseminated. Nothing so surely and perfectly stamps upon an individual a national characteristic as language...[As the Indians] are in an English-speaking country, they must be taught the language which they
must use in transacting business with the people of this country. No unity or community of feeling can be established among different peoples unless they are brought to speak the same language, and thus become imbued with like ideas of duty....The instruction of the Indians in the vernacular is not only of no use to them, but is detrimental to the cause of their education and civilization, and no school will be permitted on the reservation in which the English language is not exclusively taught. (Reyhner, 1993, quoting from Aktins’ 1887 report, pp. xxi-xxiii)

Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle Indian School, was also a proponent of assimilation, with his chief principle being “kill the Indian and save the man” (Marr, 2000, p. 1). When students arrived at Carlisle, as at most other boarding schools, their hair was cut, their traditional clothing was removed, and they were garbed in proper Victorian style of dress. It was thought that removing children from their tribal influences could mold them into the mainstream cultural patterns. Carlisle was off-reservation, but the federal government went on to establish two other types of assimilation schools that were meant to save costs: the reservation boarding school and day schools. Contact between students and families was minimized as students remained at the schools for eight or nine months a year (Marr, 2000). At any of these schools, speaking any language other than English was strictly prohibited, as was any attempt to adhere to any Native spiritual practice. Commissioner of Indian Affairs E.A. Hayt aptly stated the Indian school policy:

I [have] expressed very decidedly the idea the Indians should be taught in the English language only...There is not an Indian pupil whose tuition is paid by the United States Government who is permitted to study any other language than our own vernacular – the language of the great, most powerful, and enterprising
nationalities under the sun. The English language as taught in America is good enough for all her people of all races. (Jaimes, 1992, p. 380)

It might be asked if the boarding school experience accounts for the entirety of Native language loss in North America. According to Crawford (1996), there are other factors to be considered. The boarding school era may still be at fault, since the...experience has had a delayed effect, inducing shame among many Indians about their culture of at least convincing them that their languages are a source of educational difficulties. So, on becoming parents themselves, they have raised their children only or mostly in English, believing this would help them in school. In my observation, such practices are not uncommon among Indian parents even today. (p. 41)

Crawford (1996) has a second hypothesis, however, that ultimately, speakers themselves are responsible, through their attitudes and choices, for what happens to their native language. Families choose to speak the language on certain important occasions or to insist on its use in certain important domains, or they don't. Tribal leaders choose to promote the tribal language and accommodate its speakers in government functions, social services, and community schools, or they don't. (p. 3)

Modern communities can be disrupted from without, however, in several ways that Fishman (1991) refers to as dislocations.

- Demographic factors. In- and out-migration disperses a community – for example, when people have to leave a reservation to attend school or look for jobs.

Mobility often leads to intermarriage with other language communities, which in
turn means that English will likely become the common language of the household.

- Economic forces. Opportunities for employment and commerce tend to be open only to those fully proficient in the dominant language. This is increasingly true when a wage economy starts to replace an agricultural economy and when isolated markets become integrated into a consumer society.

- Mass media. Television and videocassette recorders have had a noticeable cultural impact among Native Americans. In more remote areas this has happened only in the last decade. With increased electrification and satellite dishes popping up everywhere, Indian children are watching TV, listening to heavy metal, and playing video games -- none of which makes any use of their native language. Perhaps more important, electronic media have displaced traditional pastimes, such as the winter stories through which elders passed down tribal history and culture, with passive forms of entertainment.

- Social identifiers. We speak like those we aspire to emulate. Native Americans who desire to succeed in professional careers or who feel an attraction to popular (i.e., Western) culture or non-native religions often come to identify with the language of those pursuits—English—and to ascribe low status to native languages. Such tendencies are especially strong among the young, who increasingly identify with non-Indian role models.

Changing values in a community can hasten language shift, as well. Attitudes about language itself are not the only contributor to language loss; systems of belief also
contribute to the process. Crawford (1996) discusses the following values as encroachments of Western ways of thinking into Native language communities.

- Individualism—putting self-interest ahead of community interest. Ambitious individuals tend to ask: How is honoring the old ways going to help me get ahead? Other people can do what they want, but my family is going to stress English, the language of success in the dominant society.

- Pragmatism—worrying about what works, not about defending principles that may seem old-fashioned or outmoded. Pragmatists reason that, as indigenous languages decline in power and number of speakers, they are no longer useful. With English taking their place in more and more domains, they no longer seem worth maintaining.

- Materialism—allowing spiritual, moral, and ethical values to be overshadowed by consumerism. The attitude is that indigenous languages won’t put bread on the table, so why worry about preserving them? Teaching them to children is a waste of time, and time is money.

Context: The Status of Modern Indigenous Languages across the United States

According to Krauss (1996),

Native North American languages are about three percent of the world’s languages at present. There are approximately six thousand languages still spoken by mankind....I estimate that between twenty and fifty percent of the 6,000 are no longer spoken by children or will no longer be spoken by children by the end of this century....The only way to calculate the enormity of the endangerment is to calculate how many of the world’s languages can be considered ‘safe,’ i.e., will
continue to be learned by children in the traditional way for the foreseeable future. ... Between the twenty to fifty percent of the world’s languages already no longer spoken by children and the five to ten percent of the world’s languages considered ‘safe’ are forty to seventy-five percent of the world’s languages that can be considered (merely) endangered. These languages are still spoken by children alright, but mass communication and social change threaten them severely. Their fate depends upon what people do, not just on what governments do. (p. 2)

The Status of Indigenous Languages in Montana

Information taken from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (formerly National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education), updated by Estes (2002) includes the following data for speakers of the Montana Indian languages: Assiniboine, 150 speakers on the Fort Belknap and Fort Peck Reservations; Blackfoot, 1,062 speakers on the Blackfeet Reservation; Cheyenne, 1,721 speakers on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation; Western Cree, 1,070 speakers on the Chippewa-Cree Reservation at Rocky Boy; 4,280 Crow speakers on the Crow Reservation; 10 Gros Ventre speakers on the Fort Belknap Reservation; 200 Kalispel-Pend’Oreille (interior Salish) speakers on the Flathead Reservation; the count of 102 Kootenai speakers includes people both on the Flathead Reservation and in Idaho; and indeterminate numbers of Dakota, Lakota and Ojibwe speakers on the Fort Peck Reservation. Dakota speakers number 20,355, and are found in Nebraska, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana. The National Clearinghouse does not delineate speaker numbers for each state. Likewise, Lakota speakers number 6,000 across the above-named states.
Indian Education Laws

In response to perceived needs of Indian education, the Education Amendments of 1972 to Public Law (PL) 92-318 inaugurated the Education Division in the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the National Institute of Education. The law also established a bureau-level Office of Indian Education. PL 92-318 initiated a comprehensive approach to meeting the unique needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students. Two years later, PL 93-638, The Indian Self-Determination Act and Indian Education Assistance Act, authorized the federal government to provide grants and enter into contracts with tribes to provide tribal governments with the autonomy to run all social programs designed to benefit the tribal people, including schools. The act encouraged tribally-controlled education programs meant to meet the academic and culturally related academic needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students, and was intended to replace B.I.A. boarding schools. In April of 2002, only four B.I.A. boarding schools remained in the United States, and attendance at those schools was voluntary (Christian Science Monitor, 2002).

Native American languages have been protected by law since 1990. While the entire text of Public Law 101-477 is given in Appendix A, the sections pertinent to this study, delineated in Cantoni (1996) are as follows (pp. 53-56):

SEC. 102. The Congress finds that—
(2) special status is accorded Native Americans in the United States, a status that recognizes distinct cultural and political rights, including the right to continue separate identities;
(3) the traditional languages of Native Americans are an integral part of their cultures and identities and form the basic medium for the transmission, and thus survival, of Native American cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values;

(9) languages are the means of communication for the full range of human experiences and are critical to the survival of cultural and political integrity of any people (Section 102, p. 1)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the efficacy of indigenous language revitalization efforts in the state of Montana. The investigation centers around the meaning inherent in language teaching for the study participants. That there is value in preserving indigenous languages is not universally self-evident in Native communities. As discussed in Crawford (1996), the beliefs that success comes through use of the dominant language, that the old languages have little purpose in the modern world (and are spoken by so few that the effort to save them is wasted), and that the old values expressed in the indigenous languages have become outmoded have contributed to the rapid demise of North American native languages. Estes (2002) estimates about 150 of an original 300 North American indigenous languages are now extinct. Many of the remaining languages are considered moribund. Some projections suggest that by the year 2050, only twenty Native languages will remain (Crawford, 1999).

The English-Only movement also contributes to a devaluation of indigenous language revitalization. The movement to make English the official language of the U.S. began in 1981 with Hayakawa’s introduction of proposed U.S. constitutional amendment
(S.J. Res. 72) in Congress. The bill never passed, but the movement picked up steam while Reagan was president (Ricento, 1996), most likely in reaction to the Vietnam era and the ethnic pride movements of the sixties and seventies. Reagan’s presidency heralded a return to good old-fashioned American values and a devaluation of cultural pluralism. According to Ricento, the indirect goal of English-Only policies is to restrict the domains in which non-English languages can be used, such as government services, voting, and education. In order to be a fully-participating citizen, one must use the dominant language.

One of the arguments for English-Only specifies that use of more than one language in the U.S. leads to balkanization. Proponents for English-Only maintain that if a cultural group is allowed to maintain and use its heritage language not only in the home, but in the schools and in further institutional extensions, the country will become politically fragmented. Reference is made to Hispanic-Americans in foreshadowing a bilingual policy like Canada’s. According to Chavez (1991), “The real fear of Americans is that Hispanics will one day be a group large and powerful enough to insist that the U.S. adopt a bilingual policy. That fear is not so far-fetched, as Canada’s example demonstrates. French-Canadians make up only about one-quarter of the Canadian population, but they have succeeded in forcing the entire country to recognize and use French as an official language. Will something similar happen with Spanish when nearly one-third of the U.S. population is Hispanic? The mere possibility drives some Americans to make sure that day does not come” (p. 88-89). Bilingualism is seen to be a
threat to national unity; opponents such as Schlesinger (1992) refer to bilingualism as the
cult of ethnicity.

This insistence on English-Only has been, in effect, an insistence not only upon
language use, but on cultural practice. Reyhner (1996b) states, “If a citizen in this country
cannot choose, or more accurately, retain the culture of their choice, then their liberty and
citizenship rights are severely limited. Intimately tied to culture are both language and
religion. Through language we pass on our culture to our children. Many argue that
language and culture cannot be disconnected” (p. 5).

In Montana, House Bill 528 (MCA 20-1-501) was passed in 1999, and affirmed
that public schools, in order to inculcate positive understanding of and appreciation for
American Indian cultures, should undertake to integrate Native American cultural
information into the curriculum. If language and culture indeed cannot be disconnected,
and the value of Native culture is recognized through public law, it is useful to study the
status of indigenous language preservation efforts in the state.

Research Questions

In addressing the issue of research questions and how they are best framed,
Creswell (1998) asserts that qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and
non-directional. He recommends that a researcher reduce his or her study to a single,
overarching question and several sub-questions. At the outset of the study, the
overarching question was as follows:

What are the experiences of those attempting to revitalize their native languages
in twenty-first century Montana?
The sub-questions were as follows:

1. What specific meaning has the language and its revitalization attempts brought to the life of the individuals questioned?

2. What was the language-learning environment like for teachers, and how have their learning experiences impacted their teaching styles?

3. What are the greatest hopes and greatest concerns of those who hope to save their languages?

4. What connectivity is there between community, culture, and language revitalization programs?

The specific interview questions are shown in Appendix B, and were designed to give the participants a way to discuss the specifics of their work at a good comfort level for the initial part of the interview. The questions as the interview progressed became increasingly open to the participants’ individual interpretations and perception of what the interviewer should learn. The latter questions were framed to lend themselves to discovery of individuals’ experiences.

The open-ended and flexible nature of the questions was deemed to be appropriate in dealing with Native participants. In a study conducted in 1991 with Ojibwe First Nations communities in southeastern Manitoba, it was found that as the research process developed, some of the researchers’ preset rules were broken by some participants—specifically, elders who believed that the preset rules themselves broke cultural protocol. Rather than abandon the study, the researchers found that allowing for a more holistic story-telling genre to evolve among the elders ultimately provided a richer data source...
than might have been gained through strict adherence to the interrogation structure.

Further, by bending to cultural appropriateness, the researchers demonstrated their respect for the culture and their sensitivity to its norms as outsiders coming into a community to learn from it (Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001).

Definitions of Terms

- Assimilation—the practice of absorbing people into a larger group (Oxford Modern English Dictionary, 1996).
- Bilingualism—the ability to speak more than one language; the situation in a community where members acquire more than one language natively (Finegan & Besner, 1989).
- Communicative competency—the ability to produce and interpret utterances appropriate to their context of use (Finegan & Besner, 1989).
- English-Only—The current movement to declare English the official language of the United States, which began in 1981 when the late Senator S. I. Hayakawa of California introduced a constitutional amendment (S.J. Res. 72) into the US Congress (Ricento, 1996).
- Indian English—English spoken by American Indians that exhibits many varieties depending upon the influences from the speaker’s ancestral (or native) language tradition(s) or from other language sources, and differs accordingly from non-Indian notions of standard grammar and appropriate speech (Leap, 1993).
• Intergenerational language use—ordinary, commonplace speaking for communicative purposes that occurs between old and young in a natural environment (Fishman, 1991).

• Language endangerment—when a language is spoken only by older members of a culture, and is not used intergenerationally (Fishman, 1991).

• Language extinction—when a language is no longer used because there are no living speakers (Fishman, 1991).

• Language morbidity—when a language is on the verge of extinction due to very few elderly speakers remaining (Fishman, 1991).

• Language nests—in Maori, *kohanga reos*, childcare institutions where preschoolers are placed with target-language-speaking elders who provide some care, but mostly are there with the children for the purpose of providing a natural learning environment (Fishman, 1991).

• Literacy: autonomous model—a literacy model that considers literacy to be a neutral technology, a technology that can easily be detached from a social context (Bielenberg, 1999).

• Literacy: ideological model—a literacy model that concentrates on the social practices of reading and writing, recognizing that these practices are culturally embedded (Bielenberg, 1999).

• Maintenance (of a language)—when a language is spoken by enough people, in a naturalistic environment for it to continue in its current state of health (Fishman, 1991).
• Natural approach—an approach to language teaching whereby learners should be flooded with comprehensible input by the teacher, with the knowledge that not all of the input will be utilized by the learner. Rather, certain input will trigger rule development in a language via Chomsky's hypothetical Language Acquisition Device; i.e., that there is significant innate input contributed by the learner to the learning process (Krashen, 1983).

• Primary discourse—face-to-face conversational interaction among members of a speech community (Reyhner, 1999).

• Revitalization (of a language)—when a language goes from a near-morbid state to a state where it is used intergenerationally to the extent that its demise is no longer imminent (Fishman, 1991).

• Secondary discourse—abstract interaction needed when interlocutors who are strangers and who do not have a set of closely shared experiences and understandings from which to interpret what is being said (Reyhner, 1999).

• Total Physical Response (TPR) method—a method of language teaching whereby students respond physically to commands given by their instructor (Asher, 1977).

Delimitations of the Study

The researcher chose to interview participants who were involved with language revitalization, and thus, might be expected to have positive attitudes toward the processes and outcomes of language use, language teaching, and language programs. Some people who engaged in informal conversations with the researcher did not exhibit positive
attitudes in all cases, but those conversations, while relevant to and included in a discussion of the results, were not structured as formal interviews.

Limitations of the Study

Not all tribal gatekeepers were amenable to allowing outside research to occur on their reservations. In some situations, gatekeepers were agreeable to the research, passed the decision on to those who would actually be interviewed, and those individuals did not respond positively. On the reservations where research did occur, gatekeepers were not only attentive listeners to the research proposed, but were also collegial, collaborative, and offered constructive suggestions for conducting the research, as well as providing introductions to those being interviewed.

Being unable to interact with members of the various tribal cultures who might act as go-betweens and guides disenables an outsider to perform research, and predicting where the impenetrability might occur is difficult. Each individual contact with each tribe was a discrete experience in cross-cultural understanding, communication, and flexibility.

Significance of the Study

The maintenance of the unique cultures of Montana’s Indian nations is at stake in the language revitalization movement. The importance of language to culture is succinctly summarized by Crawford (1994). He reiterates the scientific, political and humanistic considerations entailed in language revitalizationists’ work. First, linguists have warned that the death of any natural language represents an incalculable loss to their science; second, those making the intellectual-Darwinian argument assert that the loss of linguistic diversity represents a loss of intellectual diversity. The cultural pluralist...
approach, exemplified by Hale (1992) stresses the general loss of diversity in all things. Crawford himself is most supportive of the revitalist argument that the nation’s broader interest in social justice mandates preservation of language because of the human costs involved in language loss.

Along with the accompanying loss of culture, language loss can destroy a sense of self-worth, limiting human potential and complicating efforts to solve other problems such as poverty, family breakdown, school failure, and substance abuse. After all, language death does not happen in privileged communities. It happens to the dispossessed and the disempowered, peoples who most need their cultural resources to survive. In this context, indigenous language renewal takes on an added significance. It becomes something of value not merely to academic researchers, but to native speakers themselves. (Crawford, 1994, p. 9)

No matter which stance the academic researcher takes for language revitalization, that stance cannot be taken without a thorough appreciation of American Indian language history. One must understand the causes of language loss, the forces that continue to batter language stability, the prevailing schools of thought about how best to undertake language preservation, and the methodologies used by practitioners. If one empathizes with the experiences of twenty-first-century American Indian teachers attempting to retain their native languages, one must look through the refracted lenses of history, memory, culture, and politics. The literature is rich with all these themes.
Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

The literature discussed in this chapter comprises six facets relevant to this study, including the stages of language survival, the question of literacy as part of language preservation, language teaching methodologies, the role of technology in revitalizing indigenous languages, the role of Native languages in preserving culture, and shared components of successful language programs.

Language Survival Stages

Fishman (1991) discusses eight stages of language survival. In his terms, the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) uses a higher rating to indicate lower intergenerational continuity and maintenance prospects of a language network or community. Higher (more disrupted) scores imply all or nearly all of the lesser degrees of disruption as well.

Stage 8 on the GIDS involves what Fishman terms vestigial users: socially isolated older people from whose mouths and memories the language needs to be re-assembled in order to be taught to demographically-unconcentrated adults. Such users often have no one with whom to communicate and may have become quite deficient for ordinary purposes of everyday discourse. “Stage 8 contexts yield individuals who are well recognized as informants by folklorists and by linguists who are concerned with
saving even the last few remnants of language-in-culture already in the most advanced stages of attrition” (Fishman, 1991, p. 88).

GIDS Scale 7 specifies that most users of the language in question are a socially integrated and ethnolinguistically active population, but they are well beyond childbearing age. Thus, no babies and children are being brought up in a natural language-acquisition environment by the minority-language-speaking individuals. In terms of folk culture, this stage yields neither a vibrant nor a moribund folk culture—folk culture is neither clearly authentic nor is it artificial. The major differences between Stages 7 and 8 reversing-language-shift (RLS) remediation efforts, according to Fishman, is that Stage 7 elderly speakers are still societally integrated among their own families, unlike Stage 8 speakers who are often lone survivors living in isolation, perhaps in rest homes.

Stage 6 on the GIDS attains intergenerational oralcy, and there is also demographic concentration and institutional reinforcement. Fishman (1991) states that the “lion’s share of the world’s intergenerationally continuous languages are at this very stage and they continue to survive, and, in most cases, even to thrive, without going on to subsequent (higher) stages” (p. 92). In this stage, multi-generational families speak the language among themselves for ordinary discourse on a daily basis. Children growing up in this environment hear the language being used around them, and they acquire it in a natural fashion. Further, the children are growing up in a community which uses the language, so not only do they hear it in the home, but outside in schools, places of business and other institutions, primarily in spoken form.
Stage 5 on the GIDS includes literacy in the language at home, school, and community, but without taking on extra-communal reinforcement of such literacy. According to Fishman (1991), Stage 5 is preoccupied with the protection of the oral realization of the language by providing it with a somewhat broadened functional periphery through focusing on literacy primarily under intragroup sponsorship. He believes “there are various reasons for advocating a modicum of literacy...for languages that basically function in their spoken forms. The most vital of these...is that literacy facilitates interindividual, internetwork and intercommunal communication and goal attainment” (p. 96).

GIDS Stage 4 involves the language being in lower primary (i.e., local and less specialized) primary or secondary education that meets the requirements of compulsory education laws. In a community where the school is at least partially funded through speakers of the language in question, and a majority of its students are members of the language-speaking group, the medium of education, while still primarily the dominant language, also includes units or partial-schedules involving the minority language. Fishman (1991) discusses the risks involved for (RLS) supporters of the minority language in this scenario. While the schools are still primarily language teaching within the body of majority-language-dominated curricula, programs can be revoked at any point in time due to funding that is still in part dependent on outside sources. In lower stages of GIDS, schools exist in the community that are entirely funded by the minority-language speakers and thus can be assured of conducting their entire curricula in the minority language.
In Stage 3 on the GIDS, the language is used in the lower work sphere (outside of that particular language’s neighborhood and community) that involves interaction between minority-language speakers and majority-language speakers. Fishman (1991) states that even at Stages 6, 5, and 4, the lower work sphere is also germane within the minority-language neighborhood. In Stage 3, the contribution of the minority-language workers can be made in two ways. In Fishman’s terms, X signifies the minority language, while Y signifies the dominant language. He goes on to discuss the two forms the minority language may be used in the lower work sphere: Either Xish (minority-language speakers) -controlled and -staffed enterprises and services seek to meet the needs of the Yish market, or Yish controlled enterprises and services seek to meet the needs of the Xish market. Fishman points out the different challenges of the two contexts as follows.

When minority-language speakers (Xmen) are serving dominant-language speakers (Ymen) from the point of departure of an Xish enterprise, the reversing-language-shift emphasis must be on differentiating inter-Xmen interaction from Xman to Yman interaction. Despite the fact that the minority speakers need to communicate with their dominant-language speaking customers in the dominant language, they are free to speak among one another in their own language and to keep their business records in the minority language. When dominant-language-controlled enterprises are serving minority-language speakers, ostensibly they could provide that service entirely through the medium of the dominant language, with the minority speakers being expected to be functional in the dominant language. Fishman (1991) asserts, however, that those in favor of reversing language shift can insist that service to Xmen be provided through the
medium of Xish. Records would be kept in those businesses in the dominant language, but the enterprises could function such that Xmen could use their language among themselves and among dominant-language speakers who were bilingual. Service should be in the language preferred by those served is a general principle of reversing-language-shift proponents.

In Stage 2 on the GIDS, the minority language is used in lower governmental services and mass media, but not in the higher spheres of either. At this stage, the minority speakers possess enough political clout that they are able to request services and media broadcasts to meet the needs of their significant minority-speaking population. Neither services nor media will be provided exclusively in the minority language, but options become available to the consumer.

Finally, in Stage 1, there is some use of the minority language in higher level educational, occupational, governmental, and media efforts. The minority-language speakers do not have political independence, however. For Fishman (1991), Stage 1 represents “the arrival of the pursuit of cultural autonomy for those who have pursued the vision of Xmen-via-Xish” (minority-language speakers who realize their cultural identity through the medium of their own language). This stage is not without its frustrations, however, particularly in the political arena.

Bilingual Programs

The Bilingual Education Act was passed in 1968. Tye (2000) asserts that bilingual education was oversold at that time as a panacea to deep-rooted social and economic problems causing the low achievement of many minority students. Crawford (2000)
states one weakness of bilingual education is the failure to build widespread strong grassroots support for it even among groups it serves. Through the initiative process, bilingual education proponents, a minority, are being subjected to a kind of majority tyranny through the democratic process. American Indians, less than one percent of the nation’s population, are defenseless against the majority (Guinier, 1994).

Despite opposition, proponents testify to the efficacy of bilingual education and bilingualism. Cantoni (1997) states, “Mastery of more than one linguistic code results in a special kind of cognitive flexibility, such as the awareness that the same thought can be expressed in more than one way and some words and expressions have no exact equivalent in another language. These abilities relate to an early realization that a symbol is not the same as the item it refers to” (p. 1). She goes on to say that despite the fact there is no coverage in current standardized tests to link higher test scores causally with the cognitive abilities of bilinguals, bilinguals’ experiences with two languages seem to result in mental flexibility, greater skills at forming concepts, and a more diversified set of mental abilities. Willig (1985) found that students who participated in bilingual programs consistently got higher English language test scores in reading, language skills, mathematics, and total achievement.

American Indian educators advocate for bilingual education as a means to maintain heritage languages while promoting Native students’ access to the opportunities of the dominant culture through English. “We must also learn the English language because it provides access to the dominant culture. If we do not have access we will not be able to determine our own educational, economic, political, and social agendas. For
this reason, I see our native languages nurturing our spirits and hearts and the English language as sustenance for our bodies” (Littlebear, 1999, paragraph 28).

*Tuba City Two-Way Program*

Bilingual programs have been helpful in sustaining indigenous languages. Reyhner (1993) reports on Tuba City, Arizona’s Two-Way bilingual program, which was started for first grade students in 1992-1993. The program includes a half day immersed in Navajo language and a half day immersed in English. As students progress to higher grades, less of the day is spent in Navajo. The program emphasizes language development with whole language activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing in both languages. The Two-Way program costs about the same as a monolingual curriculum, with in-service teacher training in various aspects of bilingual education as the only extra cost. The curriculum planners believe that bilingual education builds bridges between homes and school because positive attitudes are maintained toward the family. The program allows students to learn academic concepts and reading in Navajo and then apply their knowledge as they learn English. Planners believe the bridge between home and school, minority and dominant language allows students ultimately to learn English better.

*Rock Point Model*

At Rock Point Community School, also in Arizona, reading and writing are taught first in Navajo (Reyhner, 1990). In kindergarten, two-thirds of the instruction is in Navajo, and the other third of the time is spent on teaching the children oral English. In grades 1 through 3, instruction is half in one language and half in the other. By the time
students reach the upper grades, instruction in the Navajo language has been reduced to one-fourth of the time. Since content areas are taught to the younger children in Navajo, those children have not had to achieve proficiency in English prior to learning content, so are not behind in content compared to students who are educated monolingually. When students reach high school, they spend half a year in Navajo studies and a quarter in Navajo writing.

Yup’ik Models

In Alaska, Yup’ik is taught in over twenty village schools, with models ranging from Yup’ik-as-a-Second-Language to a bilingual-bicultural mode with Yup’ik being used anywhere from one period a day to half-a-day for instruction both in content and language practices. Evaluations of the program in 1990 indicated that while there had been some weakening in the program since the 1970s when bilingual education was first introduced by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, they had made great progress toward achieving equality and excellence in Yup’ik and English education (Reyhner & Tennant, 1995).

The Literacy Question

A discussion of literacy in indigenous languages should begin with a distinction between what Street (1984) delineates as autonomous and ideological models of literacy. In this discussion, it should also be clear that literacy technologies refer to reading and writing in the language, as well as the attitudes, concepts, and practices surrounding the use of the technologies (Bielenberg, 1999). An autonomous model is one that considers literacy to be a neutral technology, a technology that can easily be detached from social
context. Followers of this model argue that literacy can be isolated as an independent variable, thereby allowing the predicted cognitive effects of literacy to be examined. The autonomous model attempts to distinguish literacy from schooling, and sets up a dichotomy between written and oral modes of communication.

_Ideological Model_

The ideological model (Street, 1984) concentrates on the social practices of reading and writing. It recognizes that these practices are culturally imbedded, that literacy is a socially constructed practice and thus has different meanings for different groups. This model envisions an overlap of the oral and literate modes. Bielenberg (1999) argues that literacy decisions in the context of language revitalization must be looked at from the perspective of an ideological model of literacy. In his discussion regarding opposition to the development of literacy, those who argue against inclusion of a codified version of their language point out things such as literacy having been associated with missionaries, anthropologists, and disseminators of unpopular BIA policies. These associations lead the traditionalist to conclude that literacy is alien. In many communities the continuance of traditional religious practices depends on limiting information access to outsiders. Since it is believed that if language is written, anyone will be able to learn it and thereby have access to private or sacred knowledge, literacy is seen as potentially exploitative (Bielenberg, 1999).

A second argument against literacy that Bielenberg (1999) reports is that of potential impacts of indigenous literacy on language community. In reporting a personal communication with the anonymous leader of a language revitalization program,
Bielenberg relates the story of previously oral stories told by elders at specific times of year being written down. First, the authorship or ownership of the stories that were formerly community property is seen as belonging to the person who writes down the narrative. Secondly, when those stories become available in the vernacular the listeners become readers, and no longer interact with each other through group listening to the stories, but go to the written text as individuals and engage in the stories privately.

Bielenberg (1999) reports that indigenous language communities often believe that different groups and clans are trusted with certain knowledge that only they are to know. In this way, an interdependence is maintained. There is a fear that if indigenous literacy is taught there will be a movement to write down much of this information, thereby making it available to all on an individual basis, against traditional practices. Bielenberg reports on the comments of another anonymous language preservationist about how indigenous literacy changes a people. His anecdote concerns a people that had once been known for honesty and trustworthiness. When the language was oral the people trusted one another and the word was sacred. As literacy became more prevalent, the people seemed to detach themselves from what was written, they became more likely to go against what they had written, creating an atmosphere of distrust and dishonesty. Bielenberg asserts that in this context, the greater the dependency on the written, the less personal trust there appears to be in fellow human beings. Those who write seem to be able to detach themselves from what is written, as if they are no longer responsible for what has been “said.” Meanwhile, people begin to distrust the spoken word, fearing that it has less value and can easily be altered.
A final concern of those opposing indigenous literacy concerns pedagogical issues (Bielenberg, 1999). The oral and written are considered by some to be two different modes, which are meant for different purposes. The language must be learned in the context in which it will be used, which for these indigenous language communities is the oral.

**Literacy Models**

On the other hand, literacy technology can be seen as the only possibility for those working with moribund languages (Kushner, 1999). Anonby (1999) maintains that “developing the ability to read and write a language helps the language to become permanent. Languages with literary traditions generally survive longer than languages without literary traditions or languages with only oral traditions” (p.36). Doyle (1998) distinguishes between endangered languages, meaning those whose youngest speakers are middle-aged and children are no longer learning it, and moribund languages, or those that are spoken only by the elderly.

**Multimedia Arikara Program**

Kushner (1999) describes a multimedia language preservation Arikara language program being used on the Fort Bethold Reservation at White Shield, a K-12 school in Roseglen, North Dakota. She describes the impossibility of using an immersion model, a mentoring model, or any of the currently-popular in-classroom methods of teaching children, such as TPR. The Arikara model is a language course designed for a complex language with no teachers, few materials, and even fewer speakers. The language has been meticulously documented by a linguist and the lessons are informed by the literature
on second language acquisition and computer-assisted language learning. The lessons are adapted from and accompany a written text. An orthography has been developed to convey unique Arikara sounds that cannot be represented by symbols used to convey English sounds. Students both read and transcribe sounds, and build upon basic word-by-word knowledge to the point that they transcribe novel sentences not seen before. Kushner asserts that the computer model is interactive and user friendly or intuitive. “Computerized language lessons are a creative, workable alternative to immersion with great potential for both preservation and teaching... the significance of using multimedia in language teaching could be prodigious... only written and well-documented languages—such as Hebrew and Cornish—have been resurrected from near extinction. The meticulous documentation of the structure of all indigenous languages is likewise crucial to their preservation” (Kushner, 1999, p. 70).

Cree Language Instruction Project

The use of writing in teaching indigenous languages is part of the structure of many different language programs. The Cree Language Instruction Project in northern Quebec (Burnaby, MacKenzie, & Salt, 1999) advocates initial student literacy in Cree. Linguistic and cultural work was done so that materials could be prepared in a standardized and accepted orthography and so that teachers could be trained in that writing system. Heredia and Frances (1997) point out that it is important to understand that some tribes had writing systems before Europeans introduced alphabetic writing in the sixteenth century. Tribes already had various pictographic, iconic, and mnemonic
systems related to their interest in storytelling as well as to the preservation of their languages over thousands of years.

**Advantages of Written Activities**

The Language Proficiency Method (discussed in detail in a following section) is based upon the belief that writing is useful within a program of language instruction (Bennett, Mattz, Jackson, & Campbell, 1999). Issues related to writing in this method include the idea of writing as a learning tool; learning to speak and learning to write; the issue of transference of thought processes into the second language; the relationship between learning styles and learning strategies; and strategies proven effective with Native American students. The success of writing activities introduced in Native American language classrooms depends upon students finding themselves in instructional situations that they recognize (Johnson, 1995). Gerbault (1997) provides a list of advantages for written activities: having a record with which to check one's memory, the opportunity for private self-study, being able to analyze language and construct original sentences, developing organizational skills in written language, and the transfer of knowledge to and from spoken language.

**Constructivist Models**

Au (1993) advocates a constructivist model of instruction. Among constructivist models, emergent literacy incorporates the literacy experiences that children bring with them to school from their homes, and Au advocates that native language literacy should be developed before second language literacy. Au defines instruction as “helping the student to become interested and involved in a meaningful activity, then providing the
student with the support needed to complete the activity successfully” (p. 40). In constructivist models of instruction, (cf. Vygotsky, 1986) learners actively construct their own understandings, teaching proceeds from the whole to the part, literacy is embedded in social contexts, and students are encouraged to explore the functions of literacy, among other facets of the model.

Beyond language instruction models that support literacy, however, child-centered support for literacy is seen in language preservationists.

Children who come from homes, whether they are ethnic minority children or not, where they are not read to extensively need early direct instruction in what reading is all about, including phonics; but they also need to be immersed in a friendly literacy environment as soon as possible in school that emphasizes how reading can satisfy their curiosity about things they are interested in....The best books from all cultures including picture books help teach children what it means to be a human being in the same manner of traditional stories from oral cultures. Whether these stories are read or heard, they help enculturate children to become productive members of their communities. Children who are denied these oral and written stories are in danger of missing a moral compass that will keep them on course. Educators need to work with parents and communities on a literature-based reading program to provide students with narrative guideposts, both oral and written, that will provide direction for today’s youth. (Reyhner & Cockrum, 2001, p. 182)

Heredia and Francis (1997) note “that the indigenous cultures of the Americas were not complete strangers to complex systems of graphic representation when the Europeans introduced alphabetic writing in the 16th century” (p. 46). Lankford (1987) comments on early practices such as wampum belts used by speakers at formal councils.
to remind themselves of the historical or mythical episodes they were to tell, or the painted hides used by the Plains Indians for the same purpose or for the purpose of record-keeping, called winter counts. Heredia and Francis (1997) discuss the use of coyote stories being transcribed to written stories as vehicles to convey subtlety, complexity, and moral lessons that are in conformity with various Native communities, with such potential oral-to-written texts as Colville-Okanogan story of *Coyote and the Buffalo* to the White Mountain Apache narrative of *Coyote Gets Rich off the White Man*.

**Red Rock Community Program**

In discussing the language program at Red Rock Community School in northeastern Arizona, McCarty and Dick (1996) explain how Navajo literacy is used to “inform, instruct, record traditional knowledge, transmit non-Navajo knowledge, and mediate children’s and adults’ personal communications and intrapersonal reflections” (p. 4). To make sense of literacy functions, McLaughlin (1989) argues that literacy should be seen in a social context that is framed within the parameters of the institutions and ideologies of a particular social milieu. In short, claim McCarty and Dick (1996), “we need to understand indigenous literacy as social and political action” (p. 4).

More than simply directional for youth, however, literacy can be seen in terms of “social context, fundamentally constitutive of, and constrained by, institutions and ideologies that frame what goes on” (McLaughlin, 1989, p. 287). McCarty and Dick (1996) conclude that

Navajo literacy is first, an affirmation and expression of indigenous identity and a validation of community-held knowledge…an assertion of local educational control. All of this has the self-reinforcing effects of increasing Navajo teachers’
confidence in foregrounding the language in the classroom, and of increasing community members’ awareness of the preciousness of their language. (p. 4)

Language Teaching Methodologies

In discussing second language acquisition, the Saskatchewan Education website delineates discourse, linguistics, and sociolinguistics as the facets involved in attaining fluency in a language. Discourse proficiency is knowing appropriate use of the language, linguistic competence is knowing the possible and impossible sentence structures of a language, and socio-linguistic proficiency is knowing and acknowledging the inherent cultural aspects of language usage. How those facets of fluency are taught is varied.

Reyhner and Tennant (1995) wrote:

For a language to be taught effectively in the school, more than a methodology is needed. The way the language will be taught must be mapped out concretely in a curriculum or course of study. This curriculum...must be supported by appropriate materials. What specific curriculum and materials evolve for a particular program depends on a number of factors that must be reviewed, discussed and decided upon by the local community working with principals, teachers, and bilingual aids. From this careful planning, an ideal language-teaching model can emerge. (p. 286)

Part of the careful planning has to include sensitivity to culture. Schaffer (1988) discusses traditional ways American Indian students learn, including silent observation and supervised participation. Gattegno (1972) advocated the teaching of language using a method what came to be known as the Silent Way. Jim Green, a linguist who works with the Lakota language in South Dakota, adopted this approach. The teacher does a
minimum of talking, always speaks in the native language, and encourages learners to do the talking and the learning (Rubin, 1999).

Mellow's Two-Dimensional Model of Language Teaching

In addition to the issues of cultural sensitivity, an examination of Western influences on indigenous language teaching should occur (Mellow, 2000). Mellow proposes a two-dimensional model of approaches to language teaching that correspond to two theoretical commitments within any approach to language teaching. The first dimension indicates the assumption that an approach makes about the nature of language, indicated as a dichotomy between form and function. Because functional approaches focus on the meanings that are communicated, language is usually considered in relation to the contexts of use, in which meaning is situated. Formal approaches include Grammar-Translation, Audiolingual (hearing and repeating the teacher in repetitive drills), Skills-based and Phonics (Mellow, 2000). Mellow's second dimension indicates the assumption that an approach (to language teaching) makes about the nature of language learning, indicated as a dichotomy between construction and emergence. Some approaches conceive of language learning as a process of active construction by the learner—language learning is thought to result from the cognitive processing involved in the comprehension of extensive input and the production of extensive output. The emphasis is on practice and automatization (Mellow, 2000). The emergence approach is in sharp contrast to the assumption of construction. With this approach, language learning is thought to result from innate cognitive abilities that rely on a subset of the input that a learner receives, and that the learning is catalyzed by this limited input because learners
are biologically predisposed to acquire language. This approach follows the work of Chomsky (1968, 1986), whose work referred to these innate abilities as the Language Acquisition Device, and from the 1980’s on, the hypothesized abilities have been described as Universal Grammar by Chomsky and his colleagues.

Mellow (2000) offers a four-quadrant graphic of a two-dimensional model of approaches to language teaching (Figure 1). The four quadrants delineate the following framework of approaches to language teaching: (i) formal-construction, (ii) functional-construction, (iii) formal-emergence, and (iv) functional-emergence. Mellow places several language teaching approaches into each of the four quadrants, based on the degree to which each adopts specific assumptions regarding language and language learning.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1.** Four quadrants within a two-dimensional model of approaches to language teaching.

Within the quadrants, teachers of indigenous languages have employed a variety of methods, often eclectic, often experiential. Experiential learning focuses on doing, rather than on passive listening and reading. Rubin (1999) describes a program with the
Sm’algyx language that revolves around units focused on traditional seasonal activities. Hands-on activities include berry picking, fishing, food preparation, smoking fish, hunting, drum making, dancing, carving, weaving, and feasting. “These experiences provide opportunities for language use and place demands on students that are holistic and natural: to have respect for those with traditional knowledge and skills, to pay attention, to practice manual skills, and to remember important details” (Rubin, 1999, p. 22).

**Total Physical Response**

Based on the experiential mode, many teachers and initiators of revitalization programs have embraced a model called Total Physical Response (TPR). Asher (1977), who popularized the TPR model, recommended a silent period in which students could learn to recognize a large number of words without being expected to say them. About 150 words should be presented during the first four or five weeks, such as floor, window, door, mouth, and desk. The teacher then demonstrates actions associated with these words, such as walk, sit, open, and close. As students respond to simple commands, qualifiers such as fast or slow, and various colors or descriptors are added. Commands are first issued to the entire group, and then to individuals after everyone has developed a comfort level among the group (Asher, 1977). Since the students are not required to speak, they are not stressed by trying to produce unfamiliar sounds and making mistakes, called the affective filter (Krashen, 1981). TPR uses the scaffolding strategy discussed by Vygotsky (1986) where students learn by watching other students, guessing within context, and watching demonstrations of meaning and action. Krashen (1981) built his
theory of natural acquisition around the notion of comprehensible input, where new items are introduced within the framework of items already taught in previous lessons or coming from the students' prior knowledge.

While TPR has been shown to be “very effective for the initial stages of second language instruction… it has limited usefulness for more advanced learning” (Cantoni, 1999, p. 55). TPR “emphasizes commands, leaving out the forms used in narratives, descriptions or conversations… TPR promotes only the learners’ receptive language skills and ignores the productive ones, which are essential to real communication” (Cantoni, 1999, p. 53). Heredia and Francis (1997) state, “Legends, myths, folk tales, and stories have long been an important aspect of the history and culture of indigenous people” (p. 46). Being able to progress from obeying simple commands in the target language to telling stories in narrative form is true to American Indian cultural patterns.

TPR-Storytelling (Ray & Seely, 1997) utilizes vocabulary taught at the earlier stage of command-oriented TPR. Learners watch, act out, retell and revise their stories, and as they progress to literacy, they write their stories, read others’ stories, and rewrite their own. Some conversational skills can develop along with TPR storytelling; for example, if a student were telling a story about a dog coming through the door, the teacher can model short-answer or open-ended kinds of questions based on animals’ comparative size or the color of objects (Marsh, 1996). TPR-Storytelling is a transition between wholly-oral and written proficiency methods of language teaching.
The Language Proficiency Method (Bennett, Mattz, Jackson, & Campbell, 1999) is “based upon the belief that writing is useful within a program of language instruction. Writing offers a sequence for presenting new language material, moving from easier to harder forms, and can also be the basis of communication” (p. 85). There are six levels of instruction, with the introductory level being a listening environment only, and the final level being the state where content-based instruction can be done through the medium of the acquired language. From Level 2 through Level 5, students interact with the teacher in the language instruction process, and each level builds on the earlier one. A new level is introduced when students master the current level in which they are placed. Writing can be introduced at any level the teacher feels appropriate. The levels of instruction are as follows:

1. Setting the Scene: capturing attention
2. Comprehensible Input: filling the bucket
3. Guided Practice: fill in the blank
4. Independent Practice: generating language
5. Challenge: performing
6. Expansion: applying other areas of instruction.

At the first level, the student listens. At the second level, the student demonstrates understanding non-verbally. At the third level, the student responds with one or two word responses. The student formulates complete sentences in level 4. By level 5, students generate their own conversations (Bennett, 1997). The levels build from where the
teacher talks to the students to where the students talk to each other. Each level consists of lessons that include culturally relevant activities (Bennett, Mattz, Jackson, & Campbell, 1999).

The Role of Technology in Teaching Indigenous Languages

The loss of non-English languages in the United States...appears to be an inexorable process...members of minority language groups have been, or are becoming, increasingly aware that an important linguistic and cultural tradition is disappearing, and some have chosen to take measures to try to stem the incipient loss of their heritage language. These efforts take place at many levels, but undoubtedly the recent explosion in technology presents opportunities to aid in efforts at learning or re-acquiring a heritage language...Not long ago, a people’s record of their traditions, culture, and their very way of viewing the world died with the oldest member of the community unless that record was memorized by subsequent generations. (Villa, 2002, p. 92)

Arikara Multimedia Language Lessons

Kushner (1999) states that “a new model for teaching dead, endangered, or moribund indigenous languages needs to be devised” (p. 66), and she discusses the Arikara Multimedia Language lessons as a response to the issue of how a language course can be developed for a complex language with few remaining native speakers, no current teachers, and few materials to use in the development of curriculum. Kushner describes the Arikara computer model that was developed. The lessons were adapted from and accompany a written text. The computer program was designed to be user friendly and academically sound, and the lessons are not just replicas of printed texts. She concludes, “computerized language lessons are a creative, workable alternative...with
great potential for both preservation and teaching” (p. 70). In terms of preservation, Kushner comments that “the meticulous documentation of all indigenous languages is...crucial to their preservation” (p. 70).

**Peach Springs Hualapai Program**

In discussing the Peach Springs Hualapai language program, Stiles (1997) comments:

In 1976 45 percent of the school age students spoke English as their dominant language. Since that time, the development of federally subsidized HUD housing has weakened traditional family cultural transmission by separating the extended families into individual households. Television and media availability has further eroded the use of the language....to fight fire with fire, the [language] program turned to technology, computers, and video to capture the attention of children in the native language. (p. 149)

McHenry (2002) indicates that “being able to see the Native language on a computer screen may be just the 21st century touch that makes learning the ‘old’ languages interesting and maybe even fun for contemporary learners” (p. 107). Brandt (1988) commented that being able to print out a language in its own orthography (spelling and character style) on a laser printer serves to demonstrate to Native language community people that their language is not an obsolete or embarrassing remnant of the past, and that it should not hold them back to speak it. McHenry (2002) contends that the validation of seeing words printed or published online cannot be underestimated.
Arguments Against Computer Technology

While saying that “the appearance and rapid growth of computer technology opens new doors to heritage language maintenance and teaching,” Villa (2002, p. 95) also states that “computers cannot become a surrogate for one generation of minority language speakers passing that tongue to subsequent generations. The teaching of a language, its intergenerational communication, depends on individuals dedicated to both transmitting and learning the heritage tongue” (p. 96). Rubin (1999) comments that computer-assisted language instruction is “probably more effective if the computer is used as a reference or supplementary source of linguistic information” (p. 21). Valiquette (1998) further argues against computers: “Computers are the most questionable of language teaching tools. They are not cost-effective; they bypass intergenerational teaching; they often involve handing over control to technical experts” (p. 11).

Kellogg Foundation-New Mexico State Navajo Project

In responding to the issue of control by technical experts, Villa (2002) describes a project carried out at New Mexico State University under the auspices of the Kellogg Foundation. A member of the Navajo nation assisted with the computer technology for the project, working with hardware, software, and data sorting. The project demonstrated that a minority speaker who had acquired and used the technical skills needed to collect language data would result in an individual who has an in-group member’s access to the contexts in which the minority language is used in authentic contexts. For those who wish to preserve their heritage language, who would like to develop materials for teaching that language, do not necessarily have to be dependent on some governmental or academic institution to keep their language and history.
Technological developments have moved along so fast that it is now possible for minority language speakers to record their language and history, and create materials for its teaching as they deem appropriate. (Villa, 2002, p. 95)

McHenry (2002) states, “a particular relevant context for language use in recent years involves computer technology. Native communities are slowly but surely becoming wired, and the significance of having a Web presence is not being ignored....A primary way of asserting utility and value and an orientation toward the future in today’s world is the skillful use of technology” (p. 106). When Native-based educational practices encounter Western technology, the production and sharing of wisdom beneficial to Natives and non-Natives alike becomes possible (Simonelli, 1993).

**Choctaw Nation Web-Based Language Instruction**

In-house computer software is not the only kind of technology being used to preserve indigenous languages. The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma “have tightly embraced the possibilities of modern technology with respect to language preservation and pedagogy” by developing an Internet course to teach the language (Haag & Coston, 2002, p. 78). They point out that “there are some decidedly Choctaw features to this modernity, however, that are quite unlike those of the dominant culture,” (p. 78) and they mention that the course is provided free to the Choctaw people, that competition is avoided, and that the Choctaw seem to manage the dissonance between their cultural imperative to meet people face-to-face in order to conduct any kind of transaction with the need to learn the language at any cost. Haag and Coston (2002) conclude, “the Choctaw are very open with their language, as can be seen from the fact that everyone is welcome to learn it. This is not an attitude that can be taken for granted among Native
Americans in general. In the pragmatic words of the Choctaw Nation Director of Education, ‘In a hundred years, all the native languages will be gone, and the only one anyone will remember will be Choctaw because of what we are doing today’” (p. 78).

Radio and Television as Means to Disseminate Language

The Navajo Nation has used radio to disseminate language since 1972 (Peterson, 1997). Fishman (1991) noted the influence of mass media as a factor in language choice. After the first radio station, KTDB, went on the air in 1972, radio was expanded in 1986 with KTNN, a station that reaches the entire Navajo Nation (Peterson, 1997). The station has a country-western format and the “broadcast Navajo” used tries to appeal to older speakers, with few contemporary expressions used and little slang; thus, the appeal to younger listeners is not as great as it might be, and the station is attempting to add to their format to garner a younger audience.

Anderton (1997) describes a weekly 30-minute public access television show about Oklahoma Indian languages sponsored by the Intertribal Wordpath Society, a nonprofit educational corporation formed to promote the teaching, status, awareness and use of Oklahoma’s heritage languages. The goals of the show are to raise the consciousness and appreciation of the general public for Indian languages; to share information by announcing classes, conferences, and grants and by demonstrating methodologies and technologies; to create language materials for classrooms and archives; and to honor language preservationists including teachers and students.
Telephone as a Teaching Medium

The Deg Hit’an people who live near the confluence of the Yukon and Innoko Rivers in west-central Alaska have fewer than twenty elder speakers remaining, and their solution to the issues of few speakers and great distances between speakers and potential learners was to use the telephone (Taff, 1997). The two ways that class members utilized the telephone was for all members in each community to go to a central location and call the toll-free number using audioconference convening equipment, or participants would use multiple handsets on one line in a household. The first semester included one speaker and learners in four sites, and learners convened twice a week for an hour and a half each session. The group set individual language learning goals, and students selected the goal of learning to perceive and produce the sounds of the language in the context of common expressions and being able to use some expressions in their daily routine. By the end of the second semester, learners had gained confidence in their improved pronunciation, and were able to extend greetings to one another, and inquire and tell one another about how they were feeling. Taff comments, “We recommend this distance delivery method as part of a larger language learning program or as a way of getting such a program started. Distance delivery language learning could be an effective method for follow-up after an intensive face-to-face class when participants disperse” (p. 42).

In discussing how the University of Hawaii has utilized various technologies to strengthen their language programs, Ka’awa and Hawkins (1997) list the potential benefits of technology. They believe various technologies can:

1. Document and promote culture and native speech
2. Help to revitalize language
3. Promote the status of the language as a viable medium of communication
4. Expand and strengthen ... language communities by creating an audience and purpose for writing in [the native language]
5. Make [the language] resources available beyond educational institutions
6. Expedite production and distribution of relevant, quality...language materials and resources
7. Provide opportunities to create multimedia projects
8. Excite learners to become motivated, engaged in the learning process and producers in the target language. Aspects of multi-modal capability include integrated text, sound, and graphics that are suitable for a range of learner types.
9. Increase student-student communication and collaboration
10. Enhance and expand instructional strategies
11. Build upon/enhance existing and effective pedagogy
12. Promote literacy skills
13. Promote computer literacy. Computers add to the study of [language], and computer skills that are learned transfer to other courses and aspects of students’ lives (pp. 151-152).

The Role of Native Language in Preserving Culture

Native Americans, by struggling to keep their linguistic heritage alive, are preserving cultural treasures that otherwise would be lost (Crawford, 1999). Many Indians and some non-Indians see the perpetuation of native languages as vital to their
cultural integrity. The reason for this is that in addition to speech, each language carries with it an unspoken network of cultural values (Reyhner & Tennant, 1995). Although these values generally operate on a subliminal level, they are, nonetheless, a major force in the shaping of each person’s self-awareness, identity, and interpersonal relationships (Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Tse (2001) affirms that conserving heritage languages helps with identity conflicts. When young people attain proficiency in their ancestral language, including the ability to read, they are able to resolve their own ethnic ambivalence through identifying with their parent community. Alienation is replaced with pride and self-confidence.

Reyhner and Tennant (1995) state that

across two cultures the preferred etiquette for behaving or communicating in a particular situation may be starkly different. Using the same language across the two cultures often poses a challenge to both sense and sensitivity. Giving young Natives the opportunity to keep or learn their tribal language offers them a strong antidote to the culture clash many of them are experiencing but cannot verbalize. If along with the language, they learn to recognize the hidden network of cultural values that permeates the language, they will add to the knowledge and skills required to ‘walk in two worlds.’ They will learn to recognize and cope with cross-cultural values that are often at odds with each other, and they will begin to adopt more comfortably the cultural value that is appropriate for a particular cultural situation. (p. 279)

Cleary and Peacock (1998) discuss suboppression, which they describe as the continuing tragedy of internalized oppression. Suboppression adversely affects the students who struggle with identity issues, self confidence, and self destruction. Students, who in their traditional teachings should be lucky enough to have cultural teachings still
intact, struggle to find balance and harmony. They discuss the belief that if a language dies, the culture also dies because the language contains and perpetuates the depth, subtleties, and nuances of culture. Fishman (1996a) in speaking of language death, expresses the loss as the

most important relationship between language and culture that gets to the heart of what is lost when you lose a language is that most of the culture is in the language and is expressed in the language. Take it away from the culture, and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers. The culture could not be expressed and handed on in any other way....When you are talking about the language, most of what you are talking about is the culture. That is, you are losing all those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, the human reality that you are talking about. (p. 1)

Language loss creates barriers within families that produce tension, conflict and sometimes violence. Communication is crucial to family relationships. In the case of immigrants, (or heritage-language-speaking elders), the elder generation relies on the first language, not English, to pass on values, advice, and traditions. Many youths tend to rely primarily on English, losing their skills in the elders’ only medium of fluent expression (Crawford, 1999). Fishman (1996a) discusses the reasons people give for liking and valuing their own languages.

They tell you about kinship. They tell you that their mother spoke the language to them, their father spoke the language, their brothers, the sisters, the uncles, the aunts, the whole community. All the ones who loved them spoke the language to them when they were children. Just before their mother died she spoke the language to them. All the endearments, all the nurturing, that is kinship is tied into...
a living organism of a community by people who know each other, and they know they belong together. Maintaining skills in the heritage language opens worlds of experience that would otherwise be inaccessible—not only literature, art, and music, but also the daily life of ethnic communities. In the case of Native peoples, it can even determine whether those worlds survive. (p. 2)

Fishman (1996a) discusses the deep symbolic relationship between language and culture. The language stands for the whole culture; it represents it in the minds of the speakers and the minds of outsiders—the language being the mind of the people. Psychologists have found that bilingualism is correlated with greater mental flexibility, perhaps because command of two symbolic systems provides more than one way to approach a problem (Crawford, 1999). “People from oral traditions contextualize their articulation of thought: they depend on shared knowledge of the people who will be listening to them and do not necessarily articulate what others already know. People from literate traditions tend to decontextualize thought, to add the context that a distant audience will need to make sense of speech or writing” (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p. 188). Losing heritage languages to English only represents a loss of diversity of thought. The loss of diversity may also deprive of us as a people of different ways of looking at the world. There is mounting evidence that learning a language produces physiological changes in the brain. Mark Pagel, an evolutionary biologist who has studied language diversity asserts that “your brain and mine are different from the French-speaking person’s,” (Knight, 2000, p. 16) and this could alter the way we think. “The patterns and connections we make among various concepts may be structured by the linguistic habits of our community” (Knight, 2000, p. 16).

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Some scholars compare linguistic loss to a loss of biological differentiation and ecological diversity, and argue that just as animal and plant species are threatened, so too is the cultural and intellectual sphere that produces perception. Each language contains a world view that uniquely captures ideas and potentially shapes experience. When such cognitive variation is lost, so are the thoughts that nourish it (Hale, 1992). Schrock (1986) states

> evolutionary biologists recognize the great advantage held by species that maintain the greatest possible diversity. Disasters occur when only one strain of wheat or corn, a “monoculture,” is planted everywhere. With no variation, there is no potential to meet changing conditions. In the development of new science concepts, a “monolanguage” holds the same dangers as a monoculture. Because languages partition reality differently, they offer different models of how the world works. There is absolutely no reason why the metaphors provided in English are superior to those of other languages. (p. 15)

For American Indians, language is the basis of sovereignty. We are always talking about sovereignty, and rightfully so, because when we were dealing with the U.S. government during the treaty era, our people were treated as nations equal in stature. It was a government-to-government relationship. We have all the attributes that constitute sovereign nations: a governance structure, law and order, jurisprudence, literature, a land base, spiritual and sacred practices, and that one attribute that holds all of these other attributes together—our languages. So once our languages disappear, each one of these attributes begins to fall apart, until they are all gone. (Littlebear 2000, p. 9)

Maintaining a culture through its heritage language is seen by Crawford (2000) as an issue of social justice. He maintains that we should care about preventing the
extinction of languages because of the human costs to those most directly affected. “The destruction of a language is the destruction of a rooted identity” (Fishman, 1991, p. 4) for both groups and individuals. Along with the accompanying loss of culture, language loss can destroy a sense of self-worth, limiting human potential and complicating efforts to solve other problems, such as poverty, family breakdown, school failure, and substance abuse (Crawford, 2000).

Common Components in Successful Programs

Peacock and Day (1999) discuss five characteristics of successful revitalization programs. The tribes they specify as having attained varying degrees of success, and possessing these characteristics to some degree are the Cree of Quebec, the Hualapai of Arizona, the Native Hawaiians, the Arapaho of Wyoming, the Pasqua of Arizona, the Inuttitut of Arctic Quebec and the Mississippi band of Choctaw. The characteristics they share include:

1) Acknowledging that the language is important enough to save in perpetuity. Peacock and Day state, “it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the first of these five characteristics. While many tribes say they support preserving or reacquiring their dying languages, far fewer have taken steps to begin the process. It is time to ‘walk the talk’” (p. 2). Greymorning (1999) explains that one of the biggest challenges he faced in developing Arapaho instruction was persuading school administrators, teachers, and even some tribal leaders on the importance of students learning Arapaho. Political, community, and school leaders from all six of the tribes strongly acknowledged the need to preserve their languages for the benefit of the
tribal members. For example, the Mississippi band of Choctaw use English in tribal
government, businesses and the public schools, but they use Choctaw in their social,
ceremonial and family lives (Crawford, 1996).

2) Immersion experiences. Immersion allows people to be immersed, to be totally within
the language and to be totally away from English (Stiles, 1997). The Navaho,
Arapaho, Native Hawaiians, and New Zealand Maori are examples of tribes that use
immersion experiences extensively to teach the language (Anonby, 1999,
Greymorning, 1999). Many of the Native American programs are based on the model
provided by the New Zealand kohanga reos (language nests) and the Hawaiian Aha
Punana Leo (Greymorning, 1999).

3) Literacy programs. Being able to develop the skills of reading and writing from the
ground up helps the language to become permanent. Languages with literary
traditions generally survive longer than languages with only oral traditions (Anonby,
1999). Anonby further states that literacy combats an indigenous language’s
borrowing from the dominant language: “Unchecked, borrowing will eventually kill
the minority language” (Anonby, 1999, p. 36). Anonby discusses a number of
languages including Huave in Mexico and Dogrib in Canada that have developed
dictionaries, grammars, and primers in their languages, and “seeing that it could be
written down and had grammar, just like language, brought a sense of pride to the
people” (p. 36).

4) Community input and assistance. As discussed by Crawford (1996), successful
language maintenance efforts depend on strong community support. Parents need to
support their children learning the language. Language and cultural preservation efforts must be woven together. The leadership for the programs must come from within the community, not from outsiders. Anonby (1999) characterizes this support and leadership as solidarity, and claims “a language effort will usually fail if the focus is on language alone. It is much more likely to succeed if it is part of a greater societal movement...if language promotion is part of a nationalist movement or is perceived as an expression of solidarity or ethnicity, it has greater potential for success” (p. 35).

The goal of community involvement is re-vernacularization; it requires not only inter-generational language transmission, but also, societal change (Fishman 1996b). Fishman (1996b) states, “If you are going to change the language, you have to change the society...Informal society must change its way of living during the long stretch from one generation to the next...Informal role relationships already established in a new language must come to be implemented in the old language, in order for the old language to be transmitted from parents to children. Parents are already talking the new language; they have to change themselves, and they need a society that is changing, too, for them to transmit it to a newborn as a mother tongue” (p. 4).

5) Language programs in the schools. Because schools played such a powerful role in the decline of Native languages, it is reasonable to expect they can play a powerful role in restoring languages. (Peacock & Day, 1999). Tribes that begin language instruction at an early age will be more successful than tribes that concentrate on teaching older students (Greymorning, 1997, 1999). Successful programs have trained and motivated Native language teachers in the schools (Greymorning, 1997).
Programs such as the American Indian Language Development Institute work with Native schools to “incorporate linguistic and cultural knowledge into curriculum in ways that democratize schooling for indigenous students and support the retention of their languages and cultures” (McCarty, Watahomigie, Yamamoto, & Zepeda, 1997, p. 85). The Institute trains American Indian teachers in a “learning-teaching environment in which participants can affirm their identities and their power to act as change agents within their home communities” (McCarty, Watahomigie, Yamamoto, & Zepeda, 1997, p. 87).

Anonby (1999) discusses two further aspects of successful language programs. The first is media. He states that “a language effort that ignores the importance of the media encounters difficulties” (p. 38). He cites the cases of Swahili, Amharic, Catalan, Hebrew, Yiddish, Sango, Tok Pisin, Irish, Basque, Freisian, Navajo, Me’phaa, and Maori as language revitalization programs that utilize various media to strengthen their efforts.

The second characteristic discussed by Anonby (1999) is that of establishing a large population of speakers. He states that even “a few dedicated people can make a big difference in reversing language shift to English in small communities” (p. 38). The Karuk in Alaska (Reyhner, 1996a) have started with a community of just a few elder speakers, and have recorded those elders as a start toward their primary goal of developing a body of new fluent speakers over time.

Understanding the complexity of language preservation or revitalization movements allows the academic researcher to approach communities involved in language preservation efforts with an open mind. Knowing that there is more than one
school of thought on how best to save one’s native language provides a framework for understanding the nuances between different indigenous communities’ approaches to their own languages. The methodology developed, therefore, should reflect sensitivity to philosophical differences between the participating communities.
Chapter Three
Methodology

The initial purpose of the study was to investigate the efficacy of Native-language revitalization programs in the state of Montana according to the assessments of those involved in the programs. Indeed, that purpose remained throughout the collection and analysis of the data, but the context for that purpose deepened. The central research questioned what the experience is for those attempting to revitalize their native languages in the twenty-first century. Therefore, while the researcher entered the door through an assessment frame, the actual interest was not in the teaching or program evaluations of those people queried, but in the people themselves. Thus, the sub-questions evolved to how meaning is shaped by language in individuals’ lives; to explore what the language-learning experience had been for present-day Native language teachers; to learn from the hopes and fears of those teachers; and to find what connectivity those Native teachers saw between their efforts and the life of their communities and cultures.

Design

Stake (1994) discusses the nature of both intrinsic and instrumental case study. He defines intrinsic cases as those undertaken because the researcher is intrinsically interested in the subject of the case. This is certainly true of this research involving American Indians; in fact, that the research was proposed on the basis of the researcher’s desire to work closely with Native people, the type of case study done here was a
collective study of an instrumental case. Stake describes instrumental cases as those in which “a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory. The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else” (p. 237).

The study incorporated recommendations made by Smith (2001). First, in terms of theory development, Smith states:

Research is linked in all disciplines to theory. Research adds to, is generated from, creates or broadens our theoretical understandings. Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory. Any consideration of the ways our origins have been examined, our histories recounted, our arts analyzed, our cultures dissected, measured, torn apart and distorted back to us will suggest that theories have not looked sympathetically or ethically at us. Writing research is often considered marginally more important than writing theory, providing it results in tangible benefits for farmers, economists, industries and sick people. For indigenous peoples, most of the theorizing has been driven by anthropological approaches. These approaches have shown enormous concern for our origins as peoples and for aspects of our linguistic and material cultures. (pp. 37-38)

Smith, however, does not entirely condemn theory born of research when she continues: Theory at its most simple level is important for indigenous peoples. At the very least it helps make sense of reality. It enables us to make assumptions and predictions about the world in which we live. It contains within it a method or methods for selecting and arranging, for prioritizing and legitimating what we see and do. Theory enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties. Perhaps more significantly, it gives us space to plan, to strategize, to take greater control over our resistances. The language of a theory can also be used as a way of organizing and determining action. It helps us to interpret what is being told to us, and to predict the consequences of what is being promised. Theory can also
protect us because it contains within it a way of putting reality into perspective. If it is a good theory it also allows for new ideas and ways of looking at things to be incorporated constantly without the need to search constantly for new theories. (p. 38)

Research as an unavoidable intervention in indigenous communities is discussed by Smith (2001):

Research in itself is a powerful intervention, even if carried out at a distance, which has traditionally benefited the researcher, and the knowledge base of the dominant group in society. When undertaking research, either across cultures or within a minority culture, it is critical that researchers recognize the power dynamic which is embedded in the relationship with their subjects. Researchers are in receipt of privileged information. They may interpret it within an overt theoretical framework, but also in terms of a covert ideological framework. They have the power to distort, to make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgments, and often downright misunderstandings. They have the potential to extend knowledge or to perpetuate ignorance. (p. 176)

In particular reference to Maori, but generalizable to research with other indigenous communities, Smith (2001) has this to say:

Culturally sensitive approaches to research cover a wide range of attempts to take heed of the problems and issues which concern the people involved in the research. For Maori, this has involved efforts by researchers to inform the ‘researched’ about themselves in a way which respects people. The challenge...to the research community...has led to several different approaches and strategies for carrying out further research...they sought other ways [than exploitative western methodologies] of thinking about their projects and proceeded with far more caution when entering the domain of Maori concerns. (p. 176-177)
Smith (2001) suggests several strategies that characterize culturally sensitive research:

1. the strategy of avoidance whereby the researcher avoids dealing with the issues of the Maori;
2. the strategy of ‘personal development’ whereby the researchers prepare themselves by learning Maori language… and becoming more knowledgeable about Maori concerns;
3. the strategy of consultation with Maori where efforts are made to seek support and consent;
4. the strategy of ‘making space’ where research organizations have recognized and attempted to bring more Maori researchers and ‘voices’ into their own organizations. (p. 177)

Smith (1992) also discussing Maori, suggests four models that non-native researchers can use to perform culturally sensitive research. The first model, the tiaki or mentoring model is one in which authoritative Maori people guide and sponsor the research. The whangai or adoption model differs from the tiaki model in that the researchers are incorporated into the daily life of Maori people, initiating a lifelong relationship that extends beyond the bounds of research. The third model is a power-sharing model. In this model researchers attempt to get the researched communities to support the development of the research. In the fourth model that Smith refers to as the empowering outcomes model, researchers address questions that the Maori are interested in and that have beneficial outcomes for the indigenous communities. The basis for the stance taken in this research is drawn from select points made by Smith (2001) and Smith (1992).
Reliability

In a qualitative case study conducted through participant interviews, the single researcher becomes, in effect, the instrument. By tape-recording whenever participants consent, by taking meticulous interview notes and field notes, and by sending transcripts of interviews to all participants for a member check, the research followed reliability protocols (Creswell, 1998). Beyond using member checks to verify accuracy and intent of interview transcriptions, field notes and journals kept during the research process are important measures of impressions gained at the time of research. Interview data should be set within the context in which they were gathered, and field notes set the context for each set of semi-structured interviews gathered on the various reservations (Creswell, 1998).

Because all individuals have their own stories to tell, each story differs in the details, and those differences are of great interest in a qualitative study. But in order to ensure that one individual’s story does not overshadow the entire narrative of a case, the same questions must be asked again and again throughout the field of participants. Thus, while individual threads were followed throughout this study, the essential weave is that of recurring themes. Not only were the same themes echoed repeatedly, but also the transcripts of participants’ remarks were sent back to them for verification. The only changes made on transcripts were that some individuals changed the vernacular transcription (gonna) to standard English (going to). In one case an individual perhaps thought better of his use of the word “half-breed” and substituted it with “progressive.” Because this topic had recurred in another interview, the spirit of his initial comments
was kept intact while great care was taken not to embarrass him or reveal who he was. Individuals who responded to the member checks often commented that their remarks had been faithfully reproduced. Interviews on three of the reservations were taped (with the exception of one participant who had never given an interview before, and preferred not to be taped), and field notes were taken on all reservations.

**Interview Protocols**

As part of a warm-up introductory phase for each interview, people were asked demographic questions: their age range, if their Native language was their first language, and some other generic questions (see Appendix C) that might lend themselves to informal conversation to make the interview setting comfortable. These answers were not taped, but were recorded on forms.

The questions having to do with methodology, with successes and challenges, with attitude toward the language’s future, and with the opportunity to inform the researcher of anything the participant thought she should know, were tape recorded. On occasion, at the participant’s request, the tape recorder was turned off as the participant made a statement off the record, or simply to share an emotional moment with the researcher. The taped portion of the interviews began with neutral questions about methodology and the individual’s greatest successes in teaching the language. The third question concerning the participant’s greatest challenges, was interpreted both as a third neutral question concerning methodology, and as a politically-charged question providing an opportunity to discuss issues far outside the purview of the classroom. The next question, having to do with the participants’ optimism or pessimism about the future of
the language on his or her reservation opened the door to a variety of philosophical and
lengthy responses. The question concerning what the experience of being an indigenous
language teacher had been like for the individual participant was meant to elicit personal
stories developing a narrative of meaning. The final open-ended question for teachers
only asked the participants to mention any issues that the interviewer had forgotten to
cover, or that the participants felt should be added to her knowledge.

The interview protocol for professionals who had developed or were in the
processing of developing language revitalization programs was framed to allow for as
much procedural or philosophical response as participants desired. Participants were first
queried about whether or not they thought it was important for their languages to be
revitalized, and then they were asked to talk about what the experience of developing a
program had been like. They were asked in particular to talk about some development
issues in indigenous language programs that a non-Native would perhaps not be aware of,
and in what ways Native people could help. The final question was carefully phrased,
asking what non-Natives could do to help, besides just staying out of the way so that
Native activists could develop their own programs. The final phrase of the question was
meant both to convey a sensitivity to the over-social-worked-by-the-mainstream
environment extant on many reservations and to share some humor with the participants.
It was believed that in developing this question, through the researcher’s many years of
experience with Montana’s Native peoples, that self-deprecating humor would be an asset
in communicating and empathizing with American Indian participants.
Selection of Participants

In a way not surprising for one familiar with American Indian cultures and their diversity, the selection was done differently on each reservation. The four reservations, selected on the basis of hospitality (Stake, 1994), were the Flathead Nation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes; the Blackfeet Nation; the Fort Peck Reservation of the Assiniboine and Dakota Sioux tribes; and the Northern Cheyenne Nation. Nineteen participants were interviewed, ranging in age from mid-twenties to those over sixty. Gender was nearly evenly divided among the participants; a table delineating participant demographics follows in Chapter 4.

Prior to visiting the reservations, tribal gatekeepers were contacted in person and in writing, with explanations of the research, its purpose and procedures, and an assurance of confidentiality accompanying the correspondence. Tribal gatekeepers are those either designated by the Montana-Wyoming Tribal Association, or are those to whom the researcher was referred by the tribal chief or president. Their roles vary in structure according to the cultural ways of their tribes, but in general, they must speak with potential researchers before anyone else on the reservation is contacted by the researcher. In the case of one reservation the gatekeeper simply gave permission to contact key language professionals there. In the other three cases, one-on-one time was spent with gatekeepers in extensive conversations about tribal culture, protocols, and preferred approaches to tribal language teachers. Following those screening conversations, the gatekeepers gave permission for the interviews to be conducted. In one case, a letter of introduction to be presented to participants was provided by the
gatekeeper. In another, the gatekeeper contacted participants and set an interview schedule prior to the researcher's arrival on the reservation. In a third case, the gatekeeper accompanied the researcher to the field where participant-observation was to take place, and provided introductions according to the protocol of that culture.

**Interview Time Frame**

Interviews were conducted between April and August 2002. Most interviews were conducted on-site on reservations. For one interview, no travel was required because the participant was scheduled to be on campus for another purpose and agreed to meet with the researcher in her office. Another interview with a tribal liaison, the first of several with him, was conducted on campus as well. Some conversations occurred at a language revitalization conference. Individual interviews lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 4 hours, depending upon the inclination of the participant and the environment in which the interview was being conducted. Also, many conversations were held in social or casual settings outside the purview of the interview framework, and while the fruit of those conversations was not recorded verbatim, an extensive field diary was kept to preserve the thematic essence of those outside conversations.

Participants' identities are not revealed in this report. Complete confidentiality was maintained in the field observation notes, interview notes, and tape recordings. Tape recording was done with individuals' permission, on three of the reservations; on the fourth, only interview notes were taken due to the physical limitations of the site and the specified preference of many participants. This was in keeping with the informed consent documents, which provided separate permissions for participation and for being tape-
recorded. Reference to individuals was through a code that designated their reservation, their language, and their chronological order in the interview process. Field observation notes, interview notes and tape cassettes were kept in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s residence. Subject identification keys, linking names of subjects with their identification code, were kept secure in a location that is locked and separate from the collected data. Furthermore, after a suitable time and after publication of the research findings in various formats and venues, all notes and documents, including tape cassettes and other data collected from field observations and interviews will be destroyed.

On three of the reservations, straightforward interviews were conducted as the primary means by which indigenous teachers shared their perceptions of language teaching and its meaning to their lives with the researcher. On the fourth reservation, participant-observation was deemed to be the appropriate protocol according to the cultural standards of that people, and so the researcher spent time at a field site observing language teachers working in an immersion environment that also included cultural immersion. Interviews were also conducted at the field site when teachers had free time.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with consenting language teachers. Open-ended questions allowed each participant to convey the meaning and significance of his or her experience according to the dictates of his or her culture or individual life experience.

The interview protocol was developed using Creswell (1998) with input from tribal gatekeepers regarding beginning comments and certain open-ended questions that would lend themselves well to the particular cultures involved. Participants were
informed that they could stop the interviews at any time, request that the tape recorder be
turned off at any point, and that they would have the opportunity to review member-
check transcripts of the interview transcripts following the interviews.

The separate reflective journal that was kept not only recorded the thematic gist of
non-interview conversations, but also recorded the researcher’s meta-linguistic or
culturally-framed observations. While not directly a part of the research, such data-
keeping reflected the need to provide a context for interpreting and understanding the
various data provided by participants’ interviews.

Data Analysis Time Frame

Data analysis continued from September 2002 through January 2003, with
considerable reference to the literature of qualitative research. A thorough extrapolation
of all emergent themes, including those anticipated and those evolving unexpectedly
(Stake, 1994), was followed by consolidation that lead to categories for the findings.

Summary

The study investigated the background, circumstances, and personal histories of
participants as they became language teachers and developed or adopted certain
methodologies, and the research questions sought to unearth the meaning of indigenous
language for tribal teachers of those languages. Of particular interest was the meaning to
be found in the act of teaching, in the role of teacher, and in the mission of
preservationists borne by participants.
Chapter Four

Findings

In traveling to Montana Indian reservations to speak with people from six
different language groups, the research was driven by intrinsic interest in American
Indian people and in language. While as shall be seen, initial categories of inquiry framed
the research questions, particular curiosities were temporarily subordinated in order that
the participants in the case study could reveal their own stories (Stake, 1994). Although at
least four distinct cultures were encountered, and an appreciation for differences between
tribes was heightened, it will be seen that 50 common themes emerged in the process of
the research.

The Settings

Most of the research was done on remote Indian reservations—the Fort Peck, the
Blackfeet, the Northern Cheyenne, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of
the Flathead, although the Salish-Kootenai reservation is close to a semi-urban area. The
remaining three Montana reservations, all of who have significant language-revitalization
programs, did not grant permission for research. The interview setting was different in
many situations: located in schools or tribal colleges, or in the field as part of a
participant-observation process mandated by the ongoing cultural practices of the
particular tribe. Some interviews were conducted in the context of a shared meal; some
were conducted while sitting under trees to escape the summer sun. Some were
uninterrupted; others generated tape recordings rife with background sound—laughing interruptions from community members, shouts from children, even firecrackers popping on the nearby street. Some interviews were solemn, even punctuated by tears; others were woven with jokes and laughter. In all cases the sense of hospitality and a desire on the part of participants to tell their own stories was present (Stake 1994).

Linguistic Background of the Tribal Languages in the Study

The linguistic histories of each of the tribes with whom the research was done demonstrate both the relatedness and the absolutely discrete differences between American Indian languages.

The Blackfoot language is also called Pikanii, and it is spoken on the Blackfoot, Piegan and Blood Reserves in Canada, as well as on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. Dialects of the language are the Piegan and Blood. Blackfoot is a member of the Algic language group, of which several other Algonquian languages are members, including the closely-related Gros Ventre and Arapaho languages of Montana-Wyoming, and of most interest in this study, Cheyenne.

One of the interesting facts about Cheyenne, for a linguist, is that the language utilizes pitch accent. Pitch is related to tone, seen in languages like Chinese and some African languages, and the fact that pitch is a constituent of the heritage language may account for the distinctive intonation of the Red or Indian English spoken by Cheyenne people who have grown up with Cheyenne as a first language, or in a home with Cheyenne-first speakers.
Another language family represented in this study is the Siouan. If one follows the lineage of the languages used at Fort Peck, Dakota and Assiniboine are languages in the Dakota branch of the Mississippi Valley node of the Central range of Siouan Proper. While Dakota and Assiniboine or Nakona are closely related languages, they are distinct. There are some words, such as those that translate “thank you” that sound very similar to the untrained ear: *pinamaya* in Nakona and *pidamaya* in Dakota. Because this was a sociolinguistic study of language teachers/speakers, no comparative linguistic data was collected for the purposes of descriptive linguistics.

The Salish spoken by the people interviewed in the study was that of those people who call themselves the Bitterroot Salish. There are four dialects spoken on the Flathead Reservation: the Bitterroot, Pend d’Oreille, Kalispel, and Spokane. Salish is a large language family, with coastal Salish and interior Salish being represented in the western United States. Kalispel and Pend d’Oreille are examples of interior Salish.

Kootenai is considered by some to be related to the Salish language family, but many linguists also classify it as a language isolate, with no living languages related to it. Work on the Kootenai (also referred to as Kutenai, Kutenay, Kootenay) language family continues. There are speakers in Idaho and Canada as well as in western Montana. Apparently the association between the Kootenai and Salish tribes existed prior to First Contact, so the relationship between the groups is not simply a construct of the federal government.
Initial Categories of Interest Prior to Fieldwork

Prior to doing fieldwork, initial categories of interest concerned when and how Native language teachers learned their language; how those teachers taught the language to their students; and what had been most successful in their teaching experience. Those broad categories of interest fed into the research questions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Initial Categories Used to Construct the Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIAL CATEGORIES</th>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When and how did they learn their language?</td>
<td>Overarching question: What is the experience of those attempting to revitalize their native languages in twenty-first century Montana?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are some of the ways they teach their language to students?</td>
<td>Sub-questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What has been most successful in their teaching experience?</td>
<td>• What specific meaning has the language and its revitalization attempts brought to the life of the individual(s) questioned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What was the language-learning environment for the teachers, and how has their learning experience impacted their teaching styles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the greatest hopes and the gravest concerns of those who hope to save their languages?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What connectivity is there between community/culture and language revitalization programs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Participants

Interviews were conducted with 19 adult participants drawn from four Montana Indian reservations over a four-month period. Participants were all teachers of their
native languages or a native language they had learned, or were founders of language preservation programs. Demographic information concerning these interviewees is supplied in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Information for Participants Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38-48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48-58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ada</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28-38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59 or older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38-48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes from Interview Data

Following the collection of the data, interviews were analyzed for various themes, and an initial list of themes emerged (see Table 3). No attempt was made at this stage to
sort those themes into categories. Further detailed analysis abstracted another 19 themes; see Table 4.

**Table 3. Initial Themes**

| 3. Awakening, embraced language as part of |
| 5. Catholic church oppressed language |
| 8. Connection to ancestors |
| 9. Criticism of learners by elders |
| 10. Cultural conduit |
| 11. Culture-specific themes taught |
| 12. English language/boarding schools as oppressor |
| 13. I did it my way |
| 14. Identity |
| 15. Immersion, usefulness of |
| 18. Isolation of language teachers |
| 21. Literacy, importance of |
| 23. Monetary resources a problem in teaching |
| 24. Non-natives speaking the language, approval of |
| 25. Opportunity to learn when teaching |
| 27. Optimism, function of in teaching language |
| 31. Pride in being a teacher |
| 4. Proficiency in Native language also helps English and thinking (later changed to bilingualism a positive) |
| 32. Progressive-traditional divergence |
| 36. Spiritual conduit |
| 37. Status lowered (speaking the language) |
| 38. Status raised (speaking the language) |
| 39. Story-telling or just talking as a way to teach |
| 41. TPR (total physical response) |
| 42. Tribal politics |
| 43. Tribal resource, language as a |
| 44. Urgency of saving language in this generation |
Table 4. Additional Themes.

1. Adaptability of native language to modern usage
2. Admiration for elders who kept language alive
4. Bilingualism a positive skill
6. Children need to hear native speakers
7. Community involvement critical
16. Inspired by children learning to speak language/desire to pass language on to children
17. Inspired by wish to speak with elder (relatives)
19. Joy at having students speak the language to them (teachers) in public
20. Leadership, need for in language programs
22. Misconceptions of those outside language-teaching community
26. Optimism about future of language survival
28. Peer group pressure problematic in teaching teenaged students
28. Personal responsibility, sense of in saving language
30. Pessimism about future of language survival
33. School as catalyst (for language in entire community)
34. Shared goals/passions between preservationists of all languages
35. Sign/symbol/artistic conduits of culture
40. Technology
45. Voluntary language learning versus compulsory
47. Teachers need to be trained as teachers
48. Rival issues take community’s attention away from language
49. Sound of language prioritized over writing
50. Natives not interested in learning
51. Internalized racism

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One of the 51 themes was abandoned as vacuous because the initial interview comment was reanalyzed, and it was determined that the comment could be better placed under the rubric of a more appropriate theme. The remaining 50 themes were then subdivided into three major categories: Language and the Self; Language in the Community and Culture; and Language Issues through the Eyes of Language Revitalization Activitists. Appendix D illustrates the semi-structured interview questions arrayed with these emergent categories, and Appendix E indicates which themes were consolidated into each of the emergent categories. The determination of which themes to place in which categories was the researcher's decision, based upon those aspects of the multiple realities extant in the interviews that the researcher thought most enlightening to the study at hand (Stake, 1994).

Following the placement of the 14-19 themes into each of the three emergent categories, the themes themselves were further consolidated into the consolidated theme lists given in Table 5. This further consolidation was done for the purposes of orderly discussion. While these themes will later be discussed in linear fashion to provide clarity, this chapter will also demonstrate the circular and interdependent nature of the major themes that emerged in the study.

The 360-Degree View of the Categories

The snapshot of the consolidated emergent themes given above is meant only to be illustrative of the deep content involved in each of the three major categories found in the study.
Table 5. Categories and Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th>EMERGENT THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Beliefs about Language and the Self | Ancestors and Elders: “The language is a connection to our ancestors.”  
Identity and Spirit: “They say the drum is the heartbeat of our people; language, I guess, is the spirit of our people.”  
Pride, Optimism and Joy: “We pray for our language, and I feel that nothing’s gonna get in our way.”  
It’s Up to Us! “We’re the ones, and no one else can do it for us.”  
The Down Side: “The school didn’t want me to speak the language; I was punished for tryin’ to speak it.” |
| 2. Beliefs about Language and its Relationship to the Culture and Community | Our Bad History: “The old boarding schools— they killed it.”  
The Negative Aspects of Today: “My feeling is a lot of them have negative views toward our language.”  
The Positive Aspects of Today: “We’re embraced very well by this community.” |
| 3. Beliefs about Language Learning, Teaching, and the Specific Concerns of Language Preservationists and Teachers | Ways to Teach: “The most important method will be havin’ a fluent speaker in there with the kids.”  
What We Know about the Students: “They are so energetic; they just can’t wait for me to start teachin’ it.”  
What We Know about Each Other—Our Fellow Teachers: “We say it as one voice... for our language, we have to be together.” |

Beliefs about Language and the Self

This emergent category, while ultimately being of most interest to the researcher, was the most unexpected to emerge. The researcher, having extensive experience and a life shared with American Indian people, was familiar with the intimacy that is often demonstrated in relationships with Indian people. However, in her role as a researcher...
and as an outsider coming onto reservations, the openness and self-direction in talking about their personal feelings and experiences was an unplanned gift. This category yields not only the most interest for the researcher, but the richest and most varied data.

"The language is a connection to our ancestors." (David)

The themes from which this consolidated theme is drawn are: admiration for elders who kept language alive; connection to ancestors; and inspired by wish to speak with elder (relatives).

In American Indian cultures, wisdom passed down from ancestors to elders to the young generation is vitally important. A personal responsibility is felt toward those ancestors. Respect for those older than one is a closely-held value in Indian culture, and was evident in participant-observation situations where the researcher observed young Native children being attentive and acquiescent to their often-elderly teachers. David, in talking about why he felt it was important to save the language, responded, “It’s through our language that we have the world view that our ancestors saw things....All the work they’ve done to ensure that everything was good for the people, it’s still held in our language.” There is a gratitude for what has been done for the younger generation: “I’m grateful for all the teachers that came before us,” Sarah said. The sense of interconnectedness between succeeding generations is strong, and the dependence on one’s forbearers for strength and wisdom is apparent. David recounted how he wanted to be able to understand what his grandparents, who didn’t speak English, were saying, and how he also wanted to be able to express himself to them, because he believed the interchange was important between himself as a child and his grandparents. Again, when
asked if he was optimistic or pessimistic about the future of his language, he responded, “It’s gonna be really strong; the people are gonna be healthy. We continue on with what our ancestors have passed down to us; we continue to...dance...as long as these things continue, our people are gonna continue to live as our ancestors did, bein’ strong people, knowing who they are and where they come from...some of our elders have told us...those things are still out there; we can still go receive them again as our ancestors did.” Moses, speaking of the respect in which the ancestral language is held, commented, “Maybe tribal languages are the precious heirlooms of tribal people...the language keeps the secrets of the tribe.” Functioning as modern citizens in a modern world, participants nevertheless consistently demonstrated a respect for and a reliance on their elders, both dead and still living. Even though people know that the language spoken by modern American Indians has changed somewhat, as languages do, it is still the same language spoken by those honored forbearers. Abraham said, “When I became a teacher, and went back to....finding out how the words are used, it just ....sort of humbled me. You learn to respect the ways how the elders spoke.” Teachers are realistic about the changes that come in language: “As far as bringing the language back, as it once was, I’m not sure we’ll be able to do that,” Sarah stated, and they realize that not all of the ancestors’ language can be saved: “Back in our grandparents’ grandparents’ generation, they used words that we’ll maybe never understand,” Sarah said. Language is the connector to the elders’ voices, and however it may change in modern usage, it is still seen as a vital bridge between then and now.
“They say the drum is the heartbeat of our people; language, I guess, is the spirit of our people.” (Isaac)

The themes from which this consolidated theme is drawn are awakening, embraced language as part of; identity; and spiritual conduit.

Language, identity, and spirituality were revealed to be closely related in this study. People spoke of finding themselves, of what had been provided for them by the Creator, and of what language meant for their identities. Sarah spoke of the early stages of learning her ancestors’ native language: “When I started learning the language, I felt that I needed to know more, to know who I was.” Isaac recounted, “Just kind of an awakening happened to me....Language was kind of the answer to it, to everything.”

Becoming involved with their native language often reorganized people’s priorities: “A lot of other things that I had thought important for life have become not important.....my priorities changed,” said Isaac. “Somewhere in our personal pasts,” recounts David, “we had the need to connect....the most key thing to connect is language...to our Creator, to the spirits, to each other, to our ancestors, to our kids.” Moses, illustrating just how important he thinks his language is to overall well-being, said “What if I had a dream? What if I had a revelation? What if I, after months of soul-searching, decided ‘You know, speaking my language simply makes me feel better; makes me feel healthier, I feel stronger, I feel more connected to the spiritual side of my life.’”

“We still go back to our ways and practice our spirituality....it’s our way of worshipping and giving thanks,” reported Naomi in describing her and her family’s involvement with the Sun Dance. On the reservations visited, many participants made
reference to the importance of the native language in spiritual practices and ceremonies.

“People need to understand that the language is the life force of [our] culture. It’s the conveyer of our belief system...the language has many connotations that are religious, sacred, holy—the people will lose the power embedded in the language if the language is lost,” Paul said. He continues, “Many [of our language’s] expressions can’t be translated to English. That’s what we’d lose—that richer connotation of spirituality—our ceremonies, our cultural practices.”

In further exploring the notion of who they are as American Indians, Moses stated, “The idea of keeping a language intact is crucial to Native Americans....because it’s a vestige of their uniqueness.” “We’re all just searching back for identity again,” echoed Abraham, as did Sarah: “It’s very important to our identity as a tribe.” The meaning found in working with their native language is expressed by Sarah, “This is my life, to teach it. It’s not just a job...it’s so much about who I am that I don’t know anything besides doing this....it’s personal.” Because language is closely linked to spiritual practices and spirituality is linked to a healthy identity for American Indians, the merging of these themes is pertinent in this cultural context.

“We pray for our language, and I feel that nothin’s gonna get in our way.” (David)

The themes from which this consolidated theme is drawn are bilingualism as a positive skill; joy at having students speak to them in public using the language; optimism about the future of the language; the function of optimism in language teaching; and pride in being a teacher.
While this study focused on those who had started or who had or currently taught in language revitalization programs, and would therefore likely favor a bias toward the theme of pride, optimism and joy, not every conversation held reflected these themes.

Although their attitudes were often tempered by touches of pessimism or what they called realism, participants exhibited a high degree of optimism in general. “My life is optimistic!” exclaimed Joseph. “I’m optimistic all the time, with everything that I do,” asserted David, and Naomi said, “I’ve always been an optimist—I never give up.”

Feeling positive about the future of their particular languages seemed to be a common theme among participants: “As far as the language is concerned, the clearer it becomes to me, the more optimism I have for it,” Sarah said. “We got the help of our Creator, we ask to help us keep our language alive. As long as our hearts are true to that, I don’t think that it’ll ever die,” Isaac said. “I’m extremely optimistic about our language efforts, and I have no doubt that we will succeed in everything that we do,” David stated. And Ruth declared, “This language will survive!”

The process of becoming a teacher often triggered a recognition of their own value as bilingual speakers, and the rewards of teaching were apparent in the comments of the participants. “It [the initial teaching experience] was fun! I was doing something that nobody else had done here….It’s done a lot for me in that I am recognized as a teacher,” Leah said. “Teaching is kinda like coming home,” said Nathan. “Any day coming into our school is rewarding,” Moses reported. The fulfillment found in teaching often led to a reappraisal of the value of what it means to be a person with two languages. “If you speak both languages, it helps you to be a better thinker,” Ada said. “I believe the
diversity [in] language is good. You learn something from all languages,” asserted Joseph.

The responses of their students (and often the parents or grandparents) brought a great sense of joy to many of the teachers. “A high point is when I’m readin’ a story [from our culture], and all of a sudden it’s the end, and I tell them, ‘Something’s wrong here. This isn’t the end. There’s another half here. It’s not over yet. Now I’m gonna tell you the rest of it.’ And they had their mouths wide open and they were listening, and it was so funny; they were laughing, and then after I was finished, they complimented me and said, ‘Gosh, you know a lotta stuff!’ Now that’s been the highlight of my life, when they say things like that!” Matthew recounted. He goes on to say, “It makes me feel good that I can teach the language, teach the ways, customs, teach them ceremonies, teach them [our cultural] ways. When I teach them all this it makes me feel better. And I feel good because I’m doing something for the kids.” The sense of healing was often expressed in the interviews.

Not only was there healing, but a great sense of love—love for their students, their cultural ways, the sound of their own language being spoken in public. “I look at them kids, and .... every time I see those kids like this, showing them, me knowing that they already know, knew it before I came, and we’re helping each other, helping each other with language,” said Matthew. “If a kid wants a hug, I’m gonna give ‘em a hug” Nathan declared. The teachers’ pride in the students was obvious, and one of the most satisfying experiences for them was for their students to greet them publicly using the native language. “When they come up and talk to me out somewhere....at graduation,
some of them talk in the language, give a speech in the language,” Rebecca began her comments about students. Joseph’s story included, “I went to a ball game in [a nearby town], and she [a former student] was selling tickets there at the door, and I walked by and she said in [my native language] ‘It’s good to see you.’ And I said ‘What? Who is this?’ And she was standing there, and she said ‘How are you? I want to shake your hand!’ I almost cried right there.” “When I go to the pow wows, I see them or when I go to the store, I hear someone say ‘Grandpa!’ Somebody’s over there, somebody comes over and grabs me by the leg. I appreciate that,” Matthew declared.

The power of language to heal, to make whole, and to connect was vital for the teachers interviewed. “It’s about making a language alive in the people again….it’s not just the language, it’s the people, it’s a resurgence!” Sarah declared.

“We’re the ones, and no one else can do it for us.” (Sarah)

This consolidated theme is drawn from the three-pronged themes of inspiration by children learning to speak or watching one’s own children learn to speak; from a feeling of personal responsibility; and from a sense of urgent need to save the language in this generation.

“I was kind of inspired by, or my motivation was from, my kids,” David recounted. Not only did people watch their children learn, but for those who did not have children yet, the desire to convey the language to them, the desire to teach them the language was palpable. “I’m gonna teach it to my kids, and I’m gonna teach it to my grandkids,” asserted Sarah. Confidence that one’s children would carry on the language was heard: “My children will always maintain that,” John said. Not only did people know
that their children were learning and would carry on the language, but they also were
confident about the future of their grandchildren. “We have the Medicine Lodge
ceremony; we pray, ask for rain for our country. They have this rattle. The one with the
rattle, he leads the first song. My grandson, the little three-year-old, shook the rattle,
shook it right along, then got pretty wild, almost hit this guy next to him on the head!”
Joseph exclaimed. Joseph also said, “My three-year-old grandson talks to me [in the
language]. And sings, like I do.” Other grandparents mentioned using some of the new
teaching methodology they’d learned, such as Total Physical Response, to teach their
grandchildren at home.

The sense of urgency about language loss and the need to take responsibility for
saving it were often seen paired in their interviews. Peter said, “I always fear we’re gonna
lose it. And I want to do something to change that....we [have] to do something that has
an impact on changing the way that our language has been lost....we are losing our
language; actually, all the Indian languages are being lost....I’d like to somehow be a
pivot in changing it back the other way.” “It’s a threatened language. If we don’t do it,
nobody else will....you can’t go anywhere else to learn the language....now we get to be
the ones to be strong to keep it going,” said Sarah. “For us, it’s survival. We have no
place to go,” echoed Isaac. David followed, “It’s our duty to pass that on to the next
generations to come....it’s our job to do that, we have to do it. It’s not even a choice for
me; it’s something I have to do.” “The urgency causes the people working with the
language to be united and have a positive attitude toward the language,” Mark said. He
went on to stress the need for a sense of urgency in young people. “You might tell them,
‘Hear that thunder? A tornado is coming.’ But until that tornado hits, they aren’t going to be scared and run for cover. Same way with the language. Until they see the storm, they’re not going to get that urgency to save the language.”

“The school didn’t want me to speak the language; I was punished for tryin’ to speak it.”

(Matthew)

Two emergent themes were combined in this consolidated theme, and the focus here is on the personal negativity embedded in experience and in outlook toward the future. It should be stressed that no one interview held only pessimism, but rather, that pessimism emerged as a kind of realism or resignation threaded in with the hopes and dreams of language preservationists. Outside the interview setting, however, the researcher encountered more than one person with a negative outlook. Perhaps one anecdote will suffice to exemplify the tone of such conversations. One evening the researcher and her friend were invited to the home of a chief of one of the bands on a remote reservation. During the drive there, a summer rainstorm blew up from the south, and sheets of water poured across the red clay road. Drenched, the two women were welcomed into the living room of the chief’s daughter and were offered the only two chairs in the house. The chief’s house was next door to that of his daughter. She was raising several teenagers alone, and she and her father looked out for one another. While the researcher and her friend petted some kittens belonging to the chief’s grandson, a plentiful meal was cooked by the women in the household. A plate was taken next door to the chief and an elderly friend of his who was visiting for the evening. The researcher went with her friend to the chief’s house, and when she was asked, ‘What brings you to
our reservation,’ a conversation about language ensued. On this reservation there are two
different dialects, and the dialect of this chief’s band is considered ‘the old language.’
While the eaves dripped and the thunder retreated, the two gentlemen spoke about their
comfort in being able to speak the old language together, and bemoaned the fact that not
many people still spoke it. The researcher commented that many language
preservationists were working on the reservation to save both dialects of the language,
and the chief’s friend replied, in effect, “It’s no good. There’s no use in bringing it back.
It doesn’t serve any purpose in this world today.” Not being inclined to argue with her
elder, the researcher hesitated to remind him of his own comments about the comfort and
ease brought to him by speaking his own language, and the conversation continued in
another vein. This dualistic view of one’s native language was expressed by more than
just this one gentleman.

The fact that speaking the native language as a child had been a problem for some
of the teachers emerged. Not all of the older teachers were victims of the boarding school
system, however, (see “The Old Boarding Schools—They Killed It” below) and the
greatest healing in teaching the language seemed to occur for those who had been
punished for using it as children. Pessimism about the future would often creep
momentarily into many conversations: “That’s kind of the way language is, kind of melts
away, not important to the people, something to look back on” Abraham said. “I think
only the basics will be remembered. In this day and age, we’ll never be fluent again,”
said Matthew. ”I think we’ll lose our language,” echoed Ada. “There’s a lot of pessimism
on my part. I’m also a realist. If interest in the language doesn’t spread....it’s going to
die,” Paul stated. Most participants laid language loss at the feet of many factors that have been discussed in other sections of this report; however, the factor worth mentioning in this section dealing with individual concerns is that of internalized racism. Nathan commented on his growing-up-years: “It was at that time when Indians didn’t want to be Indian.” Paul, however, in exemplifying the poignant mixture of attitudes toward the future, also commented in his interview, “My vision is that [my language] will be spoken 1,000 years from now.” If one were to try to gauge the relative weight of the negative comments against the positive in this study, positive attitudes and optimistic comments would far outweigh those that were negative.

Beliefs about Language and Its Relationship to the Culture and Community

American Indian cultures are high-context, and among other things, that means that Native cultures are more concerned with the welfare of the group than that of the individual. It might therefore seem an oddity to try to extrapolate beliefs about the self from beliefs about the community. Native communities are not isolated from mainstream culture, however, and the mainstream value of individuality has an impact on Native views of the self as a member of the community. Therefore, a study of this nature must by necessity deal with self-concept as well as communal perceptions.

Even though American Indians as individuals have individual and private histories of their own language acquisition, loss, guilt, stigma and joy, Natives, even across the differences that one finds between tribes, have shared histories and attitudes. Therefore, this category is comprised of three consolidated emergent themes—that of
history, and those of present-day positive factors and negative factors in the culture and community.

“The old boarding schools--they killed it.” (Abraham)

Boarding schools were sponsored both by the Catholic Church and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. At times participants would clarify which type of boarding school to which they were referring; at other times they would not. “[They] forced us not to speak. The Catholics, they should kind of take some of their money out and try to get us back in it [back into speaking the language], slap it back into us, [since] they slapped it out of us,” chuckled Abraham. When speaking of the Jesuit mission on his reservation, Moses noted, “They didn’t say ‘let’s educate them,’ they said ‘let’s change them.’ Not ‘Let’s educate them and leave them alone, let them talk their own language; no, we’ll change them, we’ll turn them into something else.’” John pointed out that being taught to speak English by the missions was an attempt to civilize American Indians: “It’s just that because of non-Indian people, ideas of savages, non-civilized people because they don’t speak English, they forced education to make them speak English—that central type of idea saying I don’t exist because I don’t speak English.” When asked if she had gone to boarding school, Rebecca responded, “I went through that. We were always punished for talkin’ Indian to each other. I didn’t want my kids to go through that. I didn’t teach them the language because I didn’t want them to go through it. But my granddaughters are learning it! I’m teaching it to them!”

It is common among Native people of her generation to hear that they did not teach the language to their children for the same reason she gives. Some of the
participants indicated they realized that the factors and the blame involved in indigenous language suppression were complicated. “I think that when our culture and our language was suppressed, it was a combination of the government, churches, and formal education... Somewhere the churches have to start looking back at us, and instead of saying, ‘That’s heathenism; that’s the devil worship,’ they’ve got to stop that, they have to say ‘It’s all right to learn your language!’” Joseph said.

The sense of something valuable lost was apparent in many of the participants, particularly since a great deal of that loss was not a natural progression, but was forced. The power lying in the lost fragments of language is recognized by many of the people who spoke. Matthew, in describing a young student’s response to the question of where he lived, answered in the native language, across the river. “And that word, across the river, I haven’t heard that word since my grandparents left this world, and I got goose bumps.”

Several of the participants commented that it is time for people to let history stay in the past, to stop re-grinding the grist of the boarding school experience, and to move on to revitalize what is left. “It’s a poor excuse to blame our current situation on the boarding school syndrome,” Mark stated.

Because community is formed both by shared history and present contiguity, the burdens of history often are carried by the members of a community.

“My feeling is a lot of them have negative views toward our language.” (Isaac)

This consolidated category is comprised of the categories criticism of learners by elders; misconceptions of those outside the language-teaching community; the
progressive-traditional divergence; status lowered by speaking the language; tribal politics; rival issues take community’s attention away from language; and Natives not interested in learning the language. The complexities and interrelatedness of these factors is apparent in the comments of the participants.

It was noted by the researcher that both the participants and the others not formally interviewed (but who eagerly engaged in conversation on the study topic) were not hesitant to criticize one another. In helping to explain what some call the crabs-in-a-bucket syndrome, Mark explained, “It’s also important for you to understand that [our culture’s] desire to keep people in their place, or the crabs in a bucket idea, is a remnant of our past egalitarian social structure. No one was better than anyone else.”

When asked about his particular challenges as a teacher, Abraham responded, “The elders are always so critical. Students that are trying, they’re trying to learn, they get criticized about how to pronounce, how to say words, ‘who is teaching you this?’ They’re not as appreciative; they should be praising the students, ‘Oh, that’s good,’ correcting them in a good way instead of telling them, ‘Oh, that’s the wrong way!’” His concern about elders’ criticism is echoed by Sarah: “I know we always talk about ‘that family spoke it this way’ and ‘that family spoke it that way’, and I think that’s really good, and people need to open up to that, and knowing that just because they speak it, doesn’t mean that they’re gonna be really good at it. Or that they’re gonna use it correct all the time…that ‘they had better use it this right way; they’re not doin’ it the right way.’ Before, it [language] was kind of like a protected thing, ‘Oh, you can’t,’ people would correct people.”
There is often a feeling by those inside the language revitalization community that others outside it, not necessarily outsiders in the sense of non-Native, off-reservation, but in the sense of tribal members who are not invested in language revitalization, that they just do not understand. David commented, “A lotta people have misconceptions about immersion schools, that they’re just for language.” “People tend to believe that immersion schools are schools that are replicants of a public school classroom,” stated Moses. He continues, “I think maybe people wonder if immersion people are militants or somehow we’re treasonous, or we’re not upholding the American ideal;” further, he states, “No one really thinks of immersion schools as producing highly articulate language-acquisition-skilled children that can speak as well or better than their counterparts.”

Another issue seen as problematic in the community is the divergence of views between traditional and progressive members of the tribe. The researcher grew up in an era where the word breed (meaning half-breed, or not fully Indian) was heard often, sometimes in reference to her family members, and there was always a connotation of scorn from both Natives and non-Natives. It was a surprise to hear that word alive and well some thirty years later. Today tribal divergences are often spoken of in terms of progressives being those who, perhaps because of a lesser quantum of Native blood, (and it might be said, more formal education or influence from the outside), and traditionals being those who perhaps might have a higher degree of tribal blood and who may remain closer to their tribal traditions. This loose definition is not of the researcher’s making, and it was discussed as a crippling stereotype by Moses: “That word [traditionalists] is a word
I’d like to see disappear when we discuss Native Americans. Yet somehow traditionalists implies that people still speak their tribal language, respect their tribal ways, are somehow a residue of a primordial time, and it leaves no room for individuals who say ‘I speak my language; I respect my ways; I know my ways, and I’m very much a part of the modern world….the word traditionalist is [a] word that keeps us in a box.” Nevertheless, the divergence in viewpoints, regardless of how one characterizes the origins of that divergence, is still apparent. ”Some are tribal members, most of them are tribal members, but they’re breeds, they feel that culture’s not important,” Abraham said. In explaining the social history of his tribe, Mark explained, “Once the reservation was established, intermarriage with whites became the norm, and there was a divergence of half-breeds and full bloods, progressives and traditionalists. The half-breeds became middlemen, interpreters between the full bloods and whites and by doing so, established themselves higher on the pecking order than the full bloods. It gave them an advantage. A great part of the language loss is due to that dominant half-breed class on the reservation”.

A facet of that divergence and its effect on language loss is seen in the reminiscences of scorn that was directed toward people who spoke the native language a number of years ago. “[Our language] had such a low status that the conditioning against it, the propaganda and dogma that had been used on the tribe by the various institutions, religion and educational and political, had been very effective. They had in fact convinced….the populace to believe that their language had low status,” Moses said. In speaking of language loss on his reservation, Mark blamed the “I want my kids to
succeed syndrome, which means that they not be held back by [the native language], but that they speak English only.”

An understanding of the above-discussed traditional-progressive divergence is necessary to have some grasp of the complexities of tribal politics. The researcher has made it a life-long policy not to become involved with the details of tribal politics, and that policy continued with this study. It may be surmised that her ability to work with American Indian people has something to do with that hands-off practice, and for the purposes of this study, the issues raised by the participants from their perspectives are of primary importance.

Abraham, in imagining how he would bring about unanimity of purpose with his tribe, fancied, “Boy, if I was a good friend with the President [alluding to the President of the U.S., not the president of the tribe], I could go up there if we were good buddies. One day I’d say ‘You know, there’s one way you can really help me out, help my people out. You send a letter back to the tribe and say ‘Okay, I’m gonna give you six months. All of you people, if you don’t learn your language in six months, I’m going to dissolve the whole reservation, culture and everything.’ I’ll bet you in six months time, I’d have the whole reservation for my students; they’d be fluent speakers!” David described working for awhile with an immersion program run by a federal social agency, and in describing why he decided there might be a better way to pursue language teaching for children, said “It was just getting taken over by [agency] politics.”

The desire for community support was strong among participants. In recounting the history of an immersion program, Moses reported, “Fifteen years ago when we started
there was a lot of hostility in this community—people told us not to do it, we were not allowed to do it, who gave you the right, you could get in trouble, the church will come after you....I think a lot of people today still feel that way—that we’re doing something illicit and illegal by running a tribal school.” As she expressed the kind of support needed from their community, Sarah said, “What [our] people could do is always support [us]. Negative feelings, negative thoughts, are always bad.” David echoed, “Our own community here could support us better by using the language....they’re still afraid that they can’t, that it’s not possible, so they have these negative views of it, that it’s a waste of time, and they don’t see any reason for it.”

Sarah spoke of conflicting needs on the reservations: “There’s more to a community than just language. I know that we’re trying to make it important, but there’s so many other things that are involved in this community, that we need to be involved in and aware of.”

The simple fact that their neighbors do not always share their passion for learning and teaching the language was expressed by some of the participants. “As far as teaching the language, it’s getting so the Native American people, indigenous peoples, whatever you want to call them, are not interested in learning their language,” Joseph bemoaned. “We’re embraced very well by this community.” (Moses)

While the prior section treats all the negative factors that the participants saw occurring in their communities, an examination of community attitudes and what can be gained from communities would not be complete without seeing the mirror reflection of the foregoing comments.
This consolidated theme was drawn from five different themes that emerged from the interviews: adaptability of Native language to modern usage; community involvement is critical; language is a cultural conduit; status is raised by speaking the Native language, and language is a tribal resource.

As a counter to often-heard arguments that the Native language should die a natural death because it is useless in the modern world, participants had a great deal to say. “I know we’re gonna bring the language back as far as what we understand about it. I already see kids using, even myself and my peers, usin’ language the way they understand it. It brings in our own culture of using English, knowing basketball, knowing all the things that we do know—MTV and the things we grew up with, we’re bringing that into the language, and we’re using it the best way we know how....As far as bringin’ the language back, I think there’s a huge, great potential for everybody to be speaking it in their own way,” Sarah stated. “What we’re interested in is a dynamic version [of our language] created by children that refreshes and revitalizes this language, and then allows them to develop a cultural continuum,” Moses said. Ruth reported, “Some talk it outside on the playground!” Rebecca laughed, “[Our language] is a very descriptive language....the tribe has not agreed upon a word for computer, although they have words for typewriter and TV now.”

Probably because some people are beginning to see the adaptability of language, the status of being able to speak the languages has gained some ground following the reported status-lowering of some years ago. “Most people in the community would say
now, ‘Yeah, I want the language,’” Rebecca said, and “They [the students] possess something that everyone wants, and that is the knowledge of the language,” Moses stated. Moses also describes the rewards of hearing the language spoken in the community, “I’m at a pipe dance and one of our students serving the food understands the language.” David commented, “Having people who are in responsible positions value the language has raised its image.” And finally, Moses said, “We honor the people that can speak.” “We hold all those speakers, we hold them up high, because they have that knowledge; they’re able to speak,” said Sarah.

Because so many people see the language as a cultural conduit, its value to the community is asserted by virtually all of the participants in this study. In telling about his students’ study of the language, Abraham remarked, “They’ve learned more of the culture; they gain more out of the culture.” “We’re teaching language; culture is inherent in that,” Sarah said. “People don’t know these things [cultural details] and those are things that need to be shared,” Leah declared. “To a child that is biologically part of a thousand-thousand year old continuum, who lives in a community that has this fabric and this thread running through time beginning, if there is any elements within the primordial ooze that stay with us, then maybe this language is best suited to explain it, to take care of those people,” said Moses.

Language preservationists, both reflected in the literature and those who spoke in this study, declare that community support is vital to the survival of language revitalization programs. Support can come in many ways, and one of the ways can be to simply speak the language. “When people ask me what they can do to help, I say ‘You
know what? Use the language. If you know one or two words, use it. Even if you know a few words, that’s a few more words that are out there. If you only know how to count to three, use it. Tell people. I think that’s what language is all about is communication.

Whatever you can say in it, use it. You make people feel good to know that they have something...that’s unique!” Sarah declared. She envisions after-school programs using the language, with involvement from pre-school to the tribal college being vital: “All the people are gonna be involved—it’s a community thing.” David, who lives on a two-language reservation, says “This is the language of our area here and it should be spoken by everybody that’s here, at least understood. Businesses should have trilingual signs.

When you come to this area, to our land, people should have the feeling that they’re in a different country.”

Community support also means family support, because families make up the community, and their support for and involvement in language revitalization programs is crucial. “We don’t just wanna teach the student; we wanna teach the entire family,” said David. “Our language isn’t gonna be exclusive to the kids or the elders. When we teach these kids, their parents have to be involved. Their older brothers and sisters have to be involved,” asserted Sarah. “It’s our goal, to rebuild that process where parents are talking to their kids, and I think it’s then that we know that our language is strong again, when parents are talking to their kids in [the language]!” declared David. Parental support was important to the participants. “Parents were really glad they’d put their kids in there to really learn [our language], and they really supported me,” said Hannah.
General community support is important to people involved in language preservation. Moses recounted, “I think when I’m sitting in the restaurant and I’m having breakfast and a member of the tribe walks up, young man walks in, he sits there and he’s talking to me about the school and he gets up and gives me a $20 bill and says ‘I want you to give this to the school.’ These are very powerful indications from a subjective point of view.” In fact, the notion that the language was as vital a resource to the tribes as any natural resource was expressed: “Our language is just as valuable as the land, maybe more so,” said Paul.

Beliefs about Language Learning, Teaching, and the Specific Concerns of Language Preservationists and Teachers

This category of necessity is a conglomeration of all those issues that typically only pass the lips of those involved in education. The category is involved with teaching methodology, what teachers believe they know about the students, and what they know about themselves and each other as teachers.

One item that varied from individual to individual was whether or not a teacher had Title VII certification. This certification in the State of Montana allows individuals who are fluent in their native languages to teach in the public schools without first obtaining certification through formal channels. For some people, the certification was in fact a stamp of approval and a matter of pride to them. For others it was not seen as necessary for their work, and was therefore inconsequential. For some few the certification was seen as an unnecessary hindrance from the outside power structure, and was therefore not only not to be pursued, but to be assiduously avoided. In spite of the
differences in attitude toward possession of the certification, no correlated similarities or 
differences in the emergent themes was found. Individuals possessing the certificate were 
as likely to agree with the viewpoints of non-possessors as not, and disagreement in 
viewpoint was found between people who had the same certification status. No patterns 
were found to demonstrate a significance in population that might be generalized; rather, 
the lack of uniformity was further testament to the discrete individual natures of the 
stories collected from the participants.

"The most important method will be having a fluent speaker in with the kids." (Sarah)

The themes that were combined to make up this consolidated theme include 
culture specific themes; the usefulness of immersion as a way to learn in the home and in 
school; the importance of literacy; sign and symbol as non-verbal conduits of culture; 
storytelling or simply talking to the students as a way to teach; technology, the Total 
Physical Response (TPR) method; and sound of language prioritized over writing.

Teachers who taught around specific cultural themes often also taught using 
stories or simply speaking the language to their students. Often those who told stories 
also used sign language to bridge the comprehension gap for their students. "I guess the 
best way I've found is with sign language along with the stories that I tell," said 
Abraham. "I use sign language. Sign language is probably one of the most fun things for 
the little kids. Language is very simple in sign language," Nathan said. Sign language 
was seen not just as a simple augmentation to learning spoken language, however. "And 
when you do that [use sign language], it requires your brain [to be] powerful, it requires it 
to light up to about 100% to accomplish this. You have kids in immersion school that are
doing this, and they’re jumping from English to [the native language] to sign and they’re
doing this maybe thousands of times a day,” explained Moses.

When asked how she taught, Rebecca responded that with her kindergarten
students, she mostly just ‘talked the language.’ Learning the sound system through
simply listening was deemed to be an important initial step for learners. “One of the basic
ways of looking at teaching the language, I tell my people, ‘We’re not interested in
writing. At this stage of the game, we’re not interested in writing, we’re interested in
sounds. We’re not interested in translation; listen to the sounds. Get used to the flow of
the language.’ I’ll tell ‘em, ‘Listen. Look at me and listen. Don’t follow along in the
book.’ Or ‘Close your eyes and just listen to the flow of the language. Listen to the
sounds!’” Joseph described.

Learning names of objects, counting, days of the week and months of the year is
one way of teaching many languages all over the world and it is the same with American
Indian language teachers. “Starting with the beginning of the year, August, and we would
say the Harvest Moon, and then you have to teach them what this word is. And they have
to be able to make that connection with the translation...When the Leaves Turn Brown,
so September; October, When the Leaves Fall Off the Trees; November, the Winter
Moon; December, the Mid-Winter Moon, and January, the Hard Moon, difficult.
February is the Raccoon Moon; March, the Sore Eye Moon; April, the Moon when the
Ducks Return; and May, the Planting Moon; June, When the Turnips Ripen; July, When
the Chokecherries Ripen.” Leah recounted. She continues, “So they’re learning about
their culture as well as the language,” and “All this teaching, you know, [is] so they can
preserve their culture.” Much of the material of their culture that is taught is conveyed through the form of stories. The recounting of tribal social history is important. Leah said, “I tell them about their history of [the tribe]. How many bands there were, their names.”

One methodology was mentioned specifically, and it often was mentioned in conjunction with a philosophical stance on the ideal environment for language learning. Total Physical Response (TPR), and immersion schools were often mentioned in the same breath. TPR is taught best in a naturalistic environment. “I teach TPR where I have instruments, kitchen instruments mainly. I teach all the things you’ve got on the kitchen table…plate, bowl, cup, spoon, knife. Forks,” Peter recounted. Moses described the tribal immersion school as an attempt to “operate in something that’s close to Grandma’s house, where you’re letting the child sort of direct to some degree.” He continues, “When kids come to immersion school here, actually we’re taking them back to their childhood….I think TPR is the necessary component to internalize the language at an early age neurologically.”

Even if TPR were not supported as the best possible methodology for the setting, the immersion environment was in the study the most-frequently-mentioned positive learning situation for children. “I know I’ve always been told that the best way [to learn a language] is to just go and live with somebody,” said Abraham. “The modern day justification based on scientific knowledge is that immersion language programs are fantastic learning environments for Native American children,” stated Moses.
Everyone who mentioned immersion mentioned some connection with the home environment or with the ease of learning the language as a child from those around them speaking the language in a natural fashion. The immersion model is best built after the family, because the family is integral. Sarah stated, “It [language learning] carries to the family. And if there’s one thing about our people, our Native people, it’s that we involve the whole family.” A number of the participants recounted how and where they learned their native language. “I was with my grandparents, my great grandmother and my grandfather, and they talked [the language] to me,” recounted Ruth. When asked if her parents had been afraid to teach her the language, Rebecca responded, “No. That was the language they spoke, and my grandparents. That’s all they spoke, because they couldn’t speak English.” Participants who had learned the language in this way in their childhoods had seen nothing unique in their childhood learning, typical of young children in any situation—they see their childhood situation as normal, and only upon adult reflection, as is true of these participants as well, do they realize the special characteristics of their learning experience. “I never thought once that this was going to be gone, everything at a younger age, spoken in the home, all the time, that was your language, this was what you did,” said Abraham.

One language revitalization issue that is somewhat controversial in the literature is that of literacy, and the researcher found in this study that among the participants, literacy was universally accepted. First, they saw it as the saving grace for the retention of the language that they could refer to for historical knowledge, and they saw it as a means of teaching in the present and of carrying the language into the future. “With that
hymnbook they [the Jesuits] came out with, that was something that the priests had probably never thought in their life that it was going to be used for savin' a language....I always tell the students that this is the old people’s words right here; that’s the reason that the priests wrote them down; that’s the way they used them back in the 1840’s—these are the words,” declared Abraham. Naomi, discussing the work done on her native language by outsiders, reported “In 1973 Danny Alfred, the linguist, came to [our] reservation. In 1978 Wayne Lehman came to the reservation and did work on the language—I feel his orthography was a good codification of the language.” Moses, in describing the research he and colleagues did on his native language prior to developing an immersion school, reported “We collected 50-some boxes of materials, including probably about 50 dictionaries, at least 20 grammars, 5-6 PhD theses, an incredible amount of information! It was a fallacy when they said nobody wrote about the language.”

Secondly, teachers routinely used written material in teaching the language. Some teachers developed their own materials. “When I first taught it, it was spoken; then they said we had to have it written. So I wrote several books, books that have simple sentences,” recalled Rebecca. Others used supplementary material developed by others. “We use the Riggs dictionary, and the Johnson-Williamson thesaurus,” Leah said.

With regard to literacy’s benefits for the future, Paul stated, “It’s good to become literate in [the language], to perpetuate the language. It’s B.S. to think that to write it down will make the language become static, and contribute to its death—this is the anti-literacy argument.” In discussing how literacy had not contributed to the death of English, Paul expressed his gratitude for English being written from long ago in the
works of Shakespeare. He said “I found universal truths in both his tragedy and comedy that I could apply to my own experience with reservation life—I normalized what I read in Shakespeare.”

The language preservation literature is filled with references to technology being used in many ways to save languages and to interest young people in learning them. Despite the researcher’s being aware that at least one of the reservations has a website dedicated to language learning, technology was mentioned only once, by Matthew, in reference to doing a word search on the computer with children.

Teachers were not only eager to talk about their teaching methods and materials, but they also wanted to share stories about their students, both good and bad. Most of the discussion was positive and it obviously brought pleasure to the participants as they recounted stories about their students, often with tears in their eyes.

“They are so energetic, they just can’t wait for me to start teaching it.” (Peter)

This consolidated theme was comprised of the themes children need to hear native speakers; approval of non-Indians speaking the language; peer group pressure problematic in teaching teenaged students; school as a [language] catalyst for the entire community, and younger students receptive. The theme that was most surprising (and most touching) in this part of the study was the receptivity to non-Natives studying and speaking the language. This viewpoint emerged from not only participant’s philosophical stances, but also from their teaching experiences. The other issues are common in language learning and in ordinary school situations, and would appear to be typical issues of consideration for any teacher anywhere.
Participants often mentioned in the same context young children’s need to hear the language as young as possible, and those young students’ receptivity to their teachers and the language material. In speaking about an immersion classroom in the planning stages, Sarah offered, “As long as they can get the flow of the language, that’s what’s really important. ‘Cause the way I see it, those youngest kids, they [the teachers] just need to talk to them. Over and over and over again. That’s gonna be the most important thing for them to hear it being spoken by someone who knew it as a first language....I think the key to have the fluency is to have our students hearing it being spoken right out of their mouth, straight from their brain!” She continues, “As far as the language process goes, the beginning part of our school is gonna be on getting their ears prepared to hear the language, getting their mouths prepared to speak the language.” Ruth reported, “They all want to learn, and they’re polite, and you go into that classroom and they’re all quiet and waiting to learn.” Nathan, who teaches various age groups, commented, “Little kids are more receptive.” He also remarked on how receptivity and retention of the language decreased as the children became older. He mused, “If I could control kindergarten through third grade....they will take it [language]. But if they go back into the mainstream, the culture of high school, we don’t have an outlet for them, [and] they’ll lose it. So they will learn it by the time they’re in third grade and they lose it as their peer group becomes more important.”

In a conversation ancillary to the interviews, Mark remarked on his observation of the conflict between the values that are embedded in his native language and the changing values that he saw around him with the younger kids. Sarah saw the tribal
immersion school as a pivot in keeping those values alive in the language-learning
students and the community. “I see our school as a central point....The school’s a
different place to learn language, where before it used to be in our family, now it’s gonna
be in the school; yeah, we’re still gonna be involved in the family, but the school’s where
we start out.”

In recounting his pleasure at being greeted in a non-school setting by one of his
students, Joseph recounted being greeted by “A blue-eyed woman. People were looking,
‘What’s she saying?’ She was totally—what is the word—unashamed of speaking the
language!” Not only were some participants supportive of non-Indians speaking their
languages, but some were passionate about their non-Indian neighbors being able to
speak. “Non-Native people, they live in this community, I think they should learn about
the language of this area,” stated Isaac. Ruth remarked, “It’s nice for non-Natives to learn
it. There’s this one little boy....I had three little non-Indian students in kindergarten. They
learned a lot and they picked it up quick. I had this one [non-Native] student, when he
graduated, he did his speech in [our language].”

If teachers were almost universally pleased with their students, they were also
supportive of one another, with the exception of some abstract criticisms that they were
not at all afraid to voice. The tone of the discussion about the teaching and revitalization
community was equally respectful to that of the discussions about students.

“We say it as one voice...for our language, we have to be together!” (Sarah)

This composite theme was drawn from the themes of isolation of language
teachers; need for leadership in language programs; monetary resources needed for
language programs; the opportunity to learn [more about language] while teaching; shared goals and passions between preservationists of all languages; and teachers need to be trained. Because the negative comments were far fewer than the positive, those comments will be considered initially here to dispense with any misperceptions of their overweening importance.

Concern for the future success of language programs was couched in terms of concern for the professionals who would manage and teach in such programs. David, in explaining why he had abandoned an earlier attempt with a program, stated, “There was nobody leading it. There was just a bunch of people together with the same kind of goal, [but] no leader though.” Sarah, expressing the need for language-teacher training, said, “I think that’s the biggest problem with all the languages that are troubled, because they’re just speakers; they’re not language teachers….They don’t understand what it is, that needs to be done as far as teaching you. They want to talk and that’s what they go from.”

The other two prevalent struggles that seem to be ongoing for many language programs is the need for monetary support to sustain them, and the isolation that teachers and preservationists often feel in their own communities. “I think money is our biggest obstacle right now,” Isaac said. Some programs engaged in grant-writing for federal grants; others worked for support from private foundations; some did private community fund-raising, and some did a combination. When asked what other Native people could do to help the cause of their language preservation, Moses responded, “They could send money….the language efforts….are run by private organizations.” He went on to describe community reliance on those who were educated in the language to open
ceremonies with the language, and pray for public functions in the language. “If we’re going to let somebody else do it [perpetuate the language for cultural uses] then the least we can do is to support those other people who’ve taken it on themselves to do it.”

Abraham, in reflecting on his status as a life-long speaker of the language, in contemplating what might happen at the language’s demise, said, “I often wonder what it’s gonna be like, the future.” He envisioned a situation where he and one other speaker, an elder man, were the only two alive still speaking the language. “And all the other speakers are gone and I run across [him] or something and I’d be so hungry to speak the language.” Matthew echoed the loneliness of being a speaker of a language no one around him seemed to be able to or interested in speaking. “I’m the only person that speaks the language to myself.” Sarah described the opportunity to meet with others interested in revitalizing her language. “It was really good for us to get together and bring our thoughts together.” Continuing, she comments, “It was very good to have that support while I was teaching….sometimes I think language teachers feel like they’re alone out there.” “Language people tend to go off in their own direction….there’s so few Native American immersion programs right now. We know each other almost like a friendship gang,” Moses said.

Because they had come so close to the precipice of seeing their languages die, many participants mentioned the delight in re-learning facets of their own language while teaching it. Abraham recounted, “I learned a lot with my teaching. This was my first language…I found out I still don’t use the real big words the old people have.” Ruth reported, “There were a lot of words that I forgot and had to learn all over again with the
kids, but they gradually came back.” Joseph said, “It’s been life-long. Learning….I always had time; I learned from my grandfathers….you learn something from all languages.” And Matthew declared, ”I speak better than two years ago. Why? Because I’m teaching the children.”

Those who work together to save their languages and to teach adults and children how to speak, while having some philosophical differences about fund-raising or methodology, still share a common passion. “We’re all here together because we wanna….for our language, we have to….work as a team,” Isaac said. “We [language preservationists] all know each other on a personal basis, because we all work with each other” Moses said. While claiming personal responsibility and urging their fellow tribal members to become involved, participants had no objection to, and even encouraged, those outside to share their passion for the revitalization of Native languages. “I don’t think you tell non-Indians to ‘get away’ or ‘leave me alone.’ You say, ‘Look, we’re in this together, because the only difference between you and I….is I live on the reservation and you don’t.’ Unless non-Indians think that ‘I’m not responsible for the sins of my grandparents.’ Nobody is saying you are. You go on who you are today; are you a generous, fulfilled person? In that case, you help--you help, period. You help them on the basis that someday they’ll take care of themselves and they’ll help someone else. That’s what this is about,” stated Moses.

Summary

That something irreplaceable has been lost to Native Americans was apparent through the remarks of all the participants. An ineffable sorrow was present in the
background context of even the most enthusiastic storyteller. That loss, and the potential for even greater loss, seems to be a great deal of what impels the language revitalization movement forward with such impetus. All the participants are people with hope and with optimism, and they have chosen to focus that hope in language revitalization efforts.

People seem to realize, without question, that culture and language are inextricably bound to one another. Even the skeptics who made comments outside the purview of formal interviews seemed to acknowledge that language, however they deemed its future existence, has been important to the cultural identities of their peoples. Reaffirmation of cultural identity through language was present throughout the study.

Community and family support and its importance were recurring themes across all the reservations studied. The greatest concern people have is for the future, and how their revitalization programs will impact the success of the future for their children and grandchildren. As one participant expressed it, if the immersion school with which he is involved closes some day due to lack of interest on the part of the community at large, the building that houses the school will not be sold. It will, he said, be left vacant, as a monument to the lost hopes and broken dreams of those who tried but failed to revitalize their tribal language.
Chapter 5

Analysis

This chapter discusses (a) the categories that emerged from the data, (b) the process of thematic consolidation used to derive those categories, (c) implications from the categories including lessons learned and what is possible for the future, (d) a Vital Indigenous Language Model (VILM) that reflects indigenous languages’ impact on identity, resiliency, and collective empowerment, and (e) recommendations drawn from the features of the VILM.

Emergent Categories

The emergent categories, based on consolidation of 51 themes, include:

1. Beliefs about language and the self;
2. Beliefs about language and its relationship to the culture and community; and
3. Beliefs about language learning, teaching, and the specific concerns of language revitalizationists and teachers.

Interrelatedness of Emergent Categories

Figure 2 depicts ways in which each of the three categories intersects with the others, and Table 6 lists the components of each category. The figure and table are best understood when referenced together, reading the figure counterclockwise from the top in conjunction with the themes in Table 6.
The findings described in this chapter are derived from personal reflections on the results of the study and are not intended to encompass the entirety of what can possibly be drawn from such a socio-linguistic study. My personal reflections led me to group 51 loosely-related themes into three major thematic groupings or categorical themes.

Figure 2. Interrelatedness of Emergent Categories.

Thematic Category 1: Beliefs about Language and the Self

There is reason for elucidating the meaning found in this category before proceeding to a discussion of the other emergent categories. Before one can extrapolate beliefs about one’s culture and one’s possible role in that culture as a language
Table 6. Key to Interrelatedness of Emergent Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category I</th>
<th>Themes Related to Categories I and II</th>
<th>Category II</th>
<th>Themes Related to Categories II and III</th>
<th>Category III</th>
<th>Themes Related to Categories I and III</th>
<th>Themes Related to All Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51. Internalized racism</td>
<td>50. Natives not interested</td>
<td></td>
<td>23. Monetary resources</td>
<td>40. Technology</td>
<td>49. Sound prioritized over writing</td>
<td>46. Younger students receptive</td>
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<td>24. Non-natives speaking</td>
<td>41. TPR</td>
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<td>28. Peer group pressure</td>
<td>48. Rival issues</td>
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<td>33. School as catalyst</td>
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<td>35. Sign/symbol</td>
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<td>42. Tribal politics</td>
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<td>43. Language as a resource</td>
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<td>44. Urgency of saving language in this generation</td>
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professional, one must first come to terms with the meaning of the Native language to the private and individual self. That language and personal identity are inextricable is evident in far more literature than that reviewed prior to this study.

We speak of one’s command of a language; we refer to orators as powerful speakers. Silver-tongued, we say. We judge people by how they speak: how many sitcoms have mocked southern accents? How closely do we examine verbal scores on the SAT, the GRE, and other standardized tests screening people’s admittance to the academy?

While falling far short of the world’s standard in numbers of languages spoken by individuals, U.S. citizens stand in awe of bilinguals. The irony is palpable. Those tribal peoples who spoke an indigenous language in addition to English have not been acknowledged historically by other U.S. citizens. We on the outside have failed to see the value in indigenous peoples speaking their languages, and many within the borders of the reservations where these bilingual people live have failed to see the value in bilingualism as well.

The self-respect that ought to be inherent in being able to handle two tongues has not always been the case with those people who maintained their Native languages.

Having the ability to speak that language was sometimes a negative factor in one’s self-image. Occasionally in talking to a participant, one could see both remnants of that old self-denigration coupled with a new-found pride.

In the course of the interviews, self-respect and pride were evident. Those people who had maintained their language as a result of learning it as either children or adults,
and who continued to speak it even before the language resurgence toward the end of the twentieth century, were thankful that they had kept the language alive inside them. They were happy that there is new interest in their Native languages, not only by their own people, but also by outsiders.

I spoke with a young Cheyenne man at a language conference held at Montana State University last summer. He only recently had begun learning Cheyenne through a Master-Apprentice program at Chief Dull Knife College. During our conversation, he revealed his pride in being able to take home his new vocabulary and teach it immediately to his little daughter. I spoke with him further later in the summer, and his vocabulary and sense of self had continued to grow. Like many Native people, this man had struggled with the questions of who he was and what his role was in this modern world. Finding his language, and being able to speak in a unique and expressive way, a way that was part of his indigenous heritage, was an obvious source of pride for him—not inflated pride, not bragging pride, but simply a strong sense of who he is and where he is going with his life.

In a series of conversations with a young Gros Ventre man who has become virtually an adopted member of my family, I have seen the recovery and grace borne by learning his heritage language. He knows that many things about his language are unique; he knows that his language has deep, rich ways of expressing concepts, ways of expression that are not necessarily available in English. Part of the way he thinks, he knows can be shaped by his accessing his ancestors’ language. He writes songs in his heritage language; he eagerly teaches White Clay (Gros Ventre) greetings to his
classmates. For someone who speaks only English, being able to converse with someone bilingual in English and a Native language is an opportunity to see the world in new ways, to consider alternate possibilities. My young friend's access to his Native language, and his willingness to share what he is learning as he grows in that language, is a bridge and a gift to me and anyone like me who has only to listen. His healthy identity contributes to my healthy identity as a Montanan and an educator. He has brought his hand drum to class, sung in his heritage language, and the other students have wept. As a resource to teachers, young Native students like him—who will share their languages and cultures with others—are invaluable to us.

Why Themes Were Placed in Category I

The following themes were placed within Category I, Beliefs about Language and the Self: awakening, identity, inspired by elders, personal responsibility, spiritual conduit, and internalized racism.

Awakening was placed in this category because an awakening is an individualized experience. It may often be triggered by outside events and other individuals, but the process of internal awareness is very much a personal, private one. Identity, likewise, is something that is crafted within the self as an individual internalizes values, beliefs, and social markers. A child's first interactions with elders are usually one-on-one, and while it may be the case that many of the participants were inspired by elders at a later period in their lives, the fact is that their regard and attentiveness, as well as their need to seek approval from the elders, was inculcated at an early age as a major component of their cultures. Personal responsibility falls easily into the category of Language and the Self,
because many of the participants indicated their willingness to shoulder the burdens of language revitalization as a part of their private responsibility, even though the efforts and goals of that revitalization are part of a public agenda. Spirituality for Native people may be demonstrated in a communal way in various cultural ceremonies, but it is also a private, daily practice that individuals take on despite their community circumstances. And finally, while racism is often evinced in collective ways against an entire group of people, my observation in this study emphasizes that those who internalize it do so in private ways, converting outward hatred into inward self-loathing.

Thematic Category 2: Beliefs about Language and Its Relationship to the Culture and Community

When American mainstream students first are asked to engage in a discussion of culture, their response is often that we do not have a culture; that other countries have cultures, but that we do not. Growing up near American Indian families, and listening to the rhetoric from white people about Indians, I heard no acknowledgement of cultural difference; rather than expressing different ways of doing things as cultural difference, some non-Natives commented on Natives doing things the wrong way, having different standards, not living like they should. I have heard this same rhetoric about Mexican-Americans when I have visited relatives in states where the Mexican-American population is higher than in Montana, and I have heard it about African-Americans as well.

Language and its relationship to culture and community must be fed from the inside as well. Ignorance from the outside should not be allowed to poison the attitudes of community members against their own languages and cultures. Likewise, interference
from outside observers should not presume to fix what those observers think they see. Healing and community involvement belong to the members of those communities. Besides, mainstream Americans have plenty of work to do on their own culture without feeling that they need to impose their value system on indigenous peoples.

Mainstream Americans are obdurately mono-cultural, to the extent that they do not realize that their values and worldviews are parts of a particular culture. Mainstream Americans are centrists, seeing their way of life as central, normal, and everything surrounding it as either peripheral, wrong, or, the farther away another culture exists, exotic.

My Native friends as I was growing up often tried to minimize cultural differences. Those cultural differences were simply not discussed in my own mixed-culture family, because to mention them would be to give them credence, perhaps, or to awaken sleeping dogs. My Native friends and I never discussed their Indianness or my whiteness, but rather focused on our shared interests, as children and teenagers do. They seemed to demonstrate no sense of American Indian identity, and because their ancestors' history was not accessible to me in school, and they did not speak of what oral history they had been told, there was no revelation about what our collective history might have been. Beyond the nearly-forgotten grandma words of my childhood, the only intimate glimpses of the culture occurred at Viet Nam-era funerals when my classmates were grieved with burning sage and prayers in Salish. That decades-long silence is our mutual loss.
Somehow, despite the silence, the history persisted and has been made available to all of us these past decades. That American Indian people have a sense of who they were historically and of exactly how their cultures have survived into the present day is of benefit to all of us. We have all been the victims of a mythological mono-culturalism; we have been washed in the blood of the Melting Pot and it has not cleansed us. The United States was never mono-cultural in the sense that we all saw the world through the very same set of cultural goggles. That many immigrants abandoned their cultures to become real Americans was their choice; that Native Americans were forced to abandon much of their cultures, including their languages, is another matter entirely. All of us who are awakening to the realization that the United States is enriched by its diversity can only be thankful that the First Americans were resilient enough to cling to their cultures and many of their languages. Having cultures of a different texture and style woven through our mainstream culture only makes the weave stronger. We would not be the same people without the cultural and linguistic contributions of our Native brothers and sisters here on the North American continent.

*Why Themes Were Placed in Category II*

The themes that related primarily to Category II, Beliefs about Language and Its Relationship to the Culture and Community are: church oppressed language, cultural conduit, boarding schools oppressed, and progressive/traditional divergence.

The Catholic Church with its missionaries attempted in collective fashion to Christianize as many Natives as possible. The Christianizing experience was shared by
entire communities. That language is a conduit for culture has been evidenced by this study as well as entire libraries of cultural disciplines. Because Native cultures are collective, their languages impart values and societal standards that apply to their entire cultures. Like the Christianizing movement, in fact, many times a part of it, boarding schools were a group experience for many tribal people. Their forced deportations from their homelands to attend far-off schools where their hair was cut, their traditional clothing was removed, and they were punished for speaking their languages and praying in their own ways were all communal experiences no matter what the tribal affiliations.

Finally, the divergence between those characterized as traditionalists and those characterized as progressives occurs on every reservation, and every reservation has groups of individuals who are seen as (or who self-characterize as) falling into one or the other of the groups.

**Thematic Category 3: Beliefs about Language Learning, Teaching, and the Specific Concerns of Language Revitalizationists and Teachers**

Part of my appreciation for what indigenous language teachers said came from my experience in teaching English as a second language. I was able to empathize with the satisfaction a teacher has when she knows a linguistic concept has clicked with her students. I was able to recognize descriptions of students’ increasing confidence as they mastered parts of a language.

What I could only imagine was the knowledge that one is personally a conduit for a threatened resource; that every student whom I could teach the language was a victory; and that I was personally a large part of history in teaching a threatened language. One of the study participants put it well when he compared Spanish and French teachers to...
people who taught their fragile indigenous languages. The teachers of the world’s major languages have many resources; they can spend some time in Spain and France and improve their pronunciation or deepen their understanding of linguistic concepts. People who are teaching their threatened indigenous languages are standing on the last remaining ground where their languages exist. If a teacher of French decides to quit teaching, there are few ramifications other than someone making a career change. If a teacher of Salish decides to stop teaching, the ripples are powerful enough to be felt to the extent of the language-learning community. I was not able to empathize with that sense of personal responsibility; I could only respect it from the safe distance of someone whose native language is not threatened and for whom there is no personal responsibility in perpetuating it.

*Why Themes Were Placed in Category III*

The themes that cluster within Category III, Beliefs about Language Learning, Teaching, and the Specific Concerns of Language Revitalizationists and Teachers are: isolation of those in the language revitalization community, leadership needed, literacy, learning while teaching, shared goals, story telling, technology, Total Physical Response (TPR) method, younger students are more receptive, teachers need to be trained, and sound prioritized over writing.

Activists in many areas have experienced the feeling that they are alone in their efforts and that no one else understands their particular predicament except one of their own. Language revitalization is an activist movement, and people who are in the movement are as likely to feel that they are struggling alone as anyone else who takes on
a social burden out of personal commitment. And while activists are willing to shoulder overwhelming private burdens, they also speak of a need for leadership in the movement. Literacy may be seen as a theme that has some crossover to the community and cultural category, but I placed it in the third category, because in the case of Montana language revitalizationists, there seems to be no controversy about the use of literacy in their cause. As was seen in the literature review, some tribes from other areas are cautious about the introduction of literacy, but for the Montana revitalizationists with whom I spoke, literacy is seen as a valuable tool, a more autonomous means of aiding language preservation and teaching than some out-of-state tribes may see it. As with teachers in all disciplines, language revitalizationists who taught their languages experienced a joy in re-learning, learning anew, or seeing new ways to analyze their languages through their teaching experiences, and among language revitalizationists, sharing those insights was one of the many ways that unanimity of goals is achieved. While different teaching practices may be followed according to cultural standards or even individual teachers’ philosophies, that all revitalizationists share a zeal and a hope-filled desperation is clear.

The ways language is taught appeared to be quite different in some cases, but even on those reservations where active TPR methodologies are used, the importance of embedding learners’ experience in storytelling is clear. The narrative styles of the cultures with whom I worked are the primary form of discourse: stories are told by a story teller, whether it is an elder or the camp cook, and listeners listen. Telling and listening, without significant interruption and conversational breaks are the means by which many kinds of messages beyond the simple story line or plot are conveyed. Those
messages may include moral lessons, conveyance of personal feelings without having to
directly explain how one’s feelings were impacted by an incident, community shame or
pride, thought processes involved during certain activities, and reasons for behaving in
particular ways. To turn a narrative into a non-Native-style back-and-forth conversation
is to destroy the fabric of an important discourse structure in American Indian cultures.

Technology, while seldom mentioned by participants in this study, falls into the
purview of educational efforts. Likewise, Total Physical Response is a particular
language-teaching method of little interest to people outside language-teaching programs.
Among language teachers, it is a strongly supported method and is seen as a way to be
creative, culture-specific, and appropriate to all ages. Among all teachers with experience
teaching various ages of students, they describe a significant break in attentiveness
between the lower grades and high school aged students. The older students, for the most
part, lose their responsiveness to language learning. Several teachers characterized this
break in responsiveness as “the time when the hormones take over.” I venture to say that
any public school teacher of any ethnic or cultural group could attest to this universal
phenomenon.

While there was some divergence in teaching methodologies, the issue of teacher
training, either through formal pedagogical training or through traditional means, was
seen as important, and is a concern primarily of those who are within the revitalization
movement. And finally, the issue of sound being prioritized over writing is an issue that
probably does not concern those outside the language-teaching community.
How Themes Intersect Across Categories

The points of intersection of categories provide more complex insights into the cultures and worldviews of the participants. While I grouped the themes as part of the data analysis, the grouping was not done arbitrarily, but followed insights gained through nuance and direct statement in the discussions I had with participants.

Intersection of Category I and II

The themes that relate to the intersection of Categories I and II – Language and Self, and Language and the Culture and Community are: children need to hear native speakers, connection to ancestors, pessimism about language, status lowered by speaking language, status raised by speaking language, and Natives not interested in the revitalization of their own languages.

The intersection between Categories I and II, while perhaps not yielding the greatest number of themes, is an important one. Native cultures are high-context, meaning that there are a great many unwritten rules that people as part of the community are expected to know. Those rules are not always conveyed orally; there is less need for detailed, exhaustive verbalizing in Native culture, compared to non-Native, mainstream culture, which is low-context, meaning that we have few unwritten rules and must therefore verbally spell out a great deal more of our rules which are often created ad hoc and situationally. Further, non-verbal communication is much more viable in Native cultures than in mainstream culture, and people within the culture understand subtlety and nuance by non-verbal means, and community opinions, attitudes, and values are internalized often without a word being said.
If children are to hear native speakers, ideally, they must first hear them in their
own homes, and those speakers are members of their own extended families. However, if
the languages are to be healthy and grow to the level of at least Fishman’s GIDS stage 6,
if not 5, then children must hear native speakers at the gas station, at the post office, at
the doctor’s office, certainly at school—in all venues of their daily lives as members of a
community.

Ancestors, while sometimes mentioned and sometimes not, because of cultural
mandates against speaking of those who have passed on, are nevertheless considered to
be ongoing members or strong influences on community practices. That language binds
people to their own ancestors was mentioned; that language binds a community to its
communal ancestry follows. Cultural mores and values have been shaped by those same
ancestors. A disconnect with those ancestral values is seen as unhealthy, and individuals
who have fallen away from the tie to their cultural values are seen as lost or ailing.

Participants who spoke with me often mentioned years of their lives that were spent in a
fallen-away status because they had lost the connection to traditional cultural values that
they had been taught by their grandparents—values that had been passed down for ages
by elder people in the tribe.

Even among optimistic members of the revitalization community, threads of
pessimism appeared. That pessimism was not self-directed, but rather sprang from a
concern about the languages being embraced by their communities. People feared that if
languages were not seen as of paramount importance, lethargy and disinterest would
contribute to their striving in isolation, with little spread and strengthening of their
languages occurring. Community support for the languages will be the single most important factor for all of these language revitalizationists. If communities support the rebirth of their languages to the extent that bilingual signs are placed on every imaginable commercial and public entity, to the extent that the acceptable greeting becomes a phrase in the indigenous language, and to the extent that most young parents are absolutely committed to their children learning the language, then these now-often-isolated revitalizationists will feel that they have succeeded. Until that day comes, all of the participants with whom I spoke will no doubt have some small apprehensions about their communities’ involvement in the language revitalization movement.

Speaking a language is not an isolated act; people have to have someone to speak to. Most poignant was the recounting of one participant who said he used to talk to himself in order to keep the din of the language alive in his own head. As native speakers, many of the older participants recounted years where they were careful about to whom they spoke the language, because to be overhead speaking their native tongues was seen as a negative factor. People who continued to “talk Indian” were seen as non-progressive, as slow, as stubborn, as unable to assimilate and pursue mainstream values with any success. There may be some vestiges of that attitude on the reservations, although I was not witness to it. Rather, I heard direct assertions that speaking the language is becoming a prestigious skill that raises status. One participant with whom I spoke holds a high position in his community, and he commented that it helped the status of the language that he, a leader, spoke it. He commented that speaking the language was no longer seen as a thing associated with old people and people who could not be successful, but rather,
was seen as a talent that leaders should possess. In my classes, I witness the pride of
students who speak at least a little of their languages. The positive value that the
community leader reported to me seems at least anecdotally to be trickling down to
young people in indigenous communities. When the youth take up a value, it is hard to
imagine its not being perpetuated. The first spark for learning and maintaining a language
may be the result of cultural pride, but the effort undertaken to learn the language is a
private effort.

A final theme in the intersection of Categories I and II is that of Natives not being
interested in saving their own languages. That situation occurs because individual people
see no value in the language for themselves, and as members of communities, do not see
the language being a cohesive force. The devaluing of the language to the community
may be occurring for two reasons: either community membership itself is not that
important to the individual, or the individual sees the community as viable without the
language.

Intersection of Category II and III

The intersection of Categories II, Language and Its Relation to the Culture and
Community, and III, The Concerns of Revitalizationists and Teachers, is the most
extensive. This is probably because those people, who sometimes because of a personal
epiphany returned to their homelands to learn, re-learn, and then to teach or promote their
languages, ultimately see the languages as the health of the community. They spoke not
only of the social health, the political viability, and the economic strength of their
communities, but they also spoke clearly of their languages as a spiritual force for their
people—a connection to ancestral values and wisdom, and a source of enlightenment and guidance.

The themes that I placed within the Categories II and III intersection are: adaptability to modern usage, community involvement critical, culture-specific themes taught, immersion, misconceptions of outsiders, monetary resources, non-Natives speaking the language, peer group pressure, schools as catalysts for language, sign and symbol in language, tribal politics, language as a resource, and rival issues deterring from the perceived importance of language revitalization on the reservations.

Language teachers, while admitting varying degrees of the flexibility of their languages to the changing lexicon inherent in a technology-gripped mainstream culture, are aware that their languages need to be adaptable to twenty-first century usages, or the children will not take up the languages and employ them in daily, informal fashion. Likewise, language revitalizationists know that while they are the spark igniting language fires, those fires will die of exhaustion if a great deal of the burden of language spread and extension is not taken up by community leaders. The teachers also know that language is the carrier of culture, and that many concepts that are culture-specific are difficult to explain or discuss without the language in which the cultural practices are embedded. Issues as profound as medicine bundles that may not be able to be opened in the future because no one speaks the language are serious worries to language revitalizationists.

Among all teachers, there was a clear recognition that the ideal environment for language learning had been taken from their people a generation or two ago with the
advent of the boarding schools. Children had been taken out of their homes and communities. Immersion in the language as simply a part of daily life is absolutely the best way to acquire language. No method can surpass immersion, and the participants in the study know this. Revitalizationists also know that people outside their movement often do not understand their motivations, their goals and objectives, their reasoning, or their methodology. In most cases, the people inside the movement want to share all the relevant details with anyone who is interested enough to ask and to listen; in some cases, long-term frustration has led revitalizationists to push on, with or without outside comprehension of why they are doing what they are doing.

In all cases, with varying degrees of emphasis, the ongoing need for monetary support of programs was mentioned. This is seen not as a need for government support only, by any means. Participants stated that when their community embraced their efforts, contributions would follow, and not necessarily contributions in monetary form, but in services. One gentleman stated that all he had to do in his community now was to mention that he needed a screen door fixed, or a window repaired at the school, and someone would be there to help. Many participants recounted their efforts in grant-writing, and were savvy about foundations and institutions that are solidly behind language revitalization. In some interviews, it was clear that revitalizationists from one reservation had consulted with more experienced revitalizationists from other reservations in terms of funding sources as well as methodological and philosophical consultation.
In varying degrees on all reservations studied, language revitalizationists supported non-Natives gaining at least cursory communicative ability in their languages. Many of the participants acknowledged that it did not matter who was speaking the language; the more people spoke the language, the healthier it would be. A second reason behind not only tolerance for, but support for non-Natives speaking the languages in their communities is a sense of community or cultural identity prevalent in the language. In fact, whether intentional or not, the implication of sovereignty inherent in the languages was stated more than once. Revitalizationists wanted outside people to be aware that when they crossed reservation boundaries and encountered such hoped-for features as bilingual traffic signs or signage on shops, when they were greeted in the indigenous language, that those outsiders would be acutely aware that they were in “another country.” However, far from seeming to be belligerent statements (as some who might be opposed to sovereignty might interpret them), the comments about sovereignty had to do with tribal identity. It was expressed by some participants, that just as when traveling in Europe, in passing from France to Spain to Italy to Germany, one expects signage in a different language and greetings to change linguistically, all without offense taken, one should have that same experience in passing into a sovereign nation within the state of Montana.

Peer group pressure is both a concern of the community and of teachers, as well. If the community can do nothing to foster language learning and status, it is difficult for teachers to inculcate language value in students of any age. However, schools, while not being able to take up the entire burden of language revitalization throughout an entire
community, can still be standard-bearers and catalysts through a variety of programs that extend beyond the simple boundaries of the classroom. In harking back to the comments about bilingual signage in sovereign nations, the importance of sign and symbol is an important community value acknowledged by a number of the participating teachers. The classroom can offer important lynchpins for language learning and pride, but the community must take up those emblems as well.

Tribal politics are a factor in all decisions on the reservation. I am not speaking of formal elections and of office-holding officials (although their involvement may sometimes be the case), but rather, of the collective nature of Native communities. In collective communities, the approval of the group and the importance of group consensus are of vital importance to people. Language teachers know this, and people in the revitalization movement are well aware that the murmurs of dissent among members of their community can be unhealthy for them if they are unsupportive. Likewise, revitalizationists are aware that communal murmuring can also be supportive, and so revitalizationists, while trying to operate out of their private ethos, are attentive to political trends in their communities. Revitalizationists would all like to have full community support for their programs and for language rebirth. They are aware, however, that that is not the case at all times, and so they are often enacting a delicate balance in their professional lives as they attempt to move forward with their goals without incurring the collective ire of their fellow community members. While this issue may sound trivial to non-Native members of our mainstream individualistic culture, it is
extremely important on the reservations, and should not be trivialized just because we do not entirely understand.

In echoing the notion of sovereignty, language is seen as a resource to the community by revitalizationists. They know that command of the language, and public use of the language, is not only a matter of individual pride and collective connection to ancestors and spirituality. Indigenous language use is also a clear indication to non-Natives that tribal lands are a discrete entity upon which people live, raise their families, work, pray, and speak their own tongue. Finally, revitalizationists are acutely aware that rival issues on the reservations may detract from the perceived importance of language revitalization. There are health issues and health care problems; there may be need for infrastructure; water rights and other resource concerns abound; there are social ills that exist in all our twenty-first century communities that need remediation—in short, language is not the only thing happening on our Montana reservations.

Intersection of Categories I and III

The intersection of these two categories—Language and the Self and Revitalizationists’ concerns—provided some of the most positive and reaffirming thoughts expressed by revitalizationists. The themes in this intersection include: bilingualism, I did it my way, joy when students speak the language, optimism in teaching, pride in being a teacher, and the urgency of saving language in this generation.

One’s language is part of one’s personal identity. That the people with whom I spoke could speak two languages was a contribution to their identities. While some of them recounted periods of discrimination due to their speaking their native languages, the
current state of affairs is such that their possession of the ability to speak two languages
enhances their positive self-image.

Revitalizationists expressed self-confidence when they spoke of their teaching
efforts. That they were able to find their own best ways to teach students signaled their
self-worth, and when their efforts yielded fruit in the form of students speaking the
language publicly, teachers felt a deep personal satisfaction for themselves and a pride in
their students. That their pride is laced liberally with deep affection was evident, and that
reason to care deeply for their students enriches the personal lives of those who spoke to
me.

Optimism is a personality trait evidenced by all with whom I spoke. They did not
allow their fears about the potential disappearance of their languages to paralyze them;
rather, their fears were used to fuel their own hopes and beliefs about the equally-strong
potential for their languages to continue as a vital part of their cultures. It was clear in
remarks participants made that they are proud of their efforts, that they are proud of being
from the cultures they are, and that they are proud to be carry the identity of a teacher.
That urgency propels them only makes their cause nobler, and the nobility of that cause is
reflected in the self-respect they carry.

*Intersection of Categories I, II, and III*

The final area of intersection concerns that where all three categories intersect.
While it could be argued that there are many themes that thread throughout all areas of
the study, it was impossible for me to place the following four themes into discrete areas
or even into discrete intersections of two categorical components in my analysis.
Therefore, because of their importance across all thematic categories, the following themes are considered to be of importance across analytical boundaries: admiration for elders, criticism by elders, inspired by children, and optimism about language. It is my observation that these four themes are of primary importance because they speak so well to closely-held cultural values. Elders are important people in tribal culture. Their approval is sought out; their advice is asked; their disapproval is feared. While one participant felt somewhat constrained by cultural reliance on the opinions and advice of elders, most other participants seemed to feel a debt of obligation and an acquiescence to the importance of elders in a culture. Language teachers recognize that too much criticism of language learners by elders is a real liability in their communities, because of that very importance placed on elders’ opinions—criticism by an elder of a younger Native person will carry more import than that same criticism uttered to many non-Natives. Not only are elders important in Native cultures, but children are also important. The Native cultures that I visited did not seem to be child-centered in the same indulgent way that I have observed in mainstream culture. Rather, children seemed to be honored in a way that they are not in mainstream culture. Indulgence and respect are different phenomena. Native children are valued as the future; I did not observe behaviors that would indicate that they were ego extensions of the parents. The children are taught to be quiet and respectful when an elder is present, but at the same time, they are not relegated to a separate play area while the adults converse. Their presence is welcome, and as parts of collective communities, many communal hopes seem to lie in the futures of the children. And finally, while I have spoken directly about the minor chord of pessimism...
that I heard even among language revitalizationists, the overwhelming attitude across individuals, as teachers, and community members, was that of optimism. I believe this has a great deal to do with cultural values as well. My observation of Native people with whom I interacted was not one of defeatism; rather, I observed a great deal of resiliency in the language revitalizationists and their supporters with whom I spoke.

Implications From The Emergent Categories

Lessons Learned

Because of my background and years of experience with different Native people, a great deal of what I experienced with the participants in my study was not necessarily new information, but in discussing my findings, it is appropriate that I should treat all pieces of knowledge that are possible to be gained by a non-Native person as new information.

First, I cannot stress enough that Native American cultures are not mutants of or aspirants to mainstream culture. They are a different kind of culture. Each culture that I visited had both significant and subtle differences from the others, but all are high-context cultures. High-context cultures possess a collective consciousness. There are many unwritten behavioral rules, and thus less reliance on verbal explanations of behavioral mores. Collective cultures place higher value on the transmission of traditional knowledge, and often do not possess the same kind of straight-line discursive style as mainstream culture. The fact that story is of such importance as a teaching device speaks to the value placed on listening, and the contextual meaningfulness of silence in Native cultures. Quiet may just be quiet in mainstream culture, depending upon the situation, but
quiet often signals a reaction in Native cultures: perhaps simple respect, perhaps
disapproval. One has to watch with both eyes in order to ascertain what quality is being
carried in the silence. Too often perhaps, mainstream culture has interpreted Native
silence as acquiescence or simply non-responsiveness, and that misinterpretation is one of
many that are possible in the encounter between high- and low-context cultures.

A second contrastive feature that can be noted is that of ritual and ceremony.
Now-ubiquitous stories have been told of U.S. business people breaking rules of protocol
as they attempted to build working relationships with Japanese corporations. Japan, like
our Native cultures, is high context. Non-Natives run the risk of offending,
misinterpreting, misunderstanding, or even misappropriating the cultural features of
ritual, ceremony, or even protocol. Unwritten rules in cultures dictate who may speak to
whom, under what circumstances, and in what time frame. Impatience breeds disrespect,
and speaking prior to careful listening and watching is a sure way to unwittingly offend
our American Indian neighbors. I cannot stress enough the importance of seeking
mentors or guides in Native cultures and of being willing to listen carefully and to follow
the guidance one is given, no matter if the instruction seems trivial or inconsequential to
the non-Native. I can assure non-Natives that these rules of protocol exist for important
reasons in each of the cultures one might visit, and those protocols should not be
breached. If one does break protocol through simple unknowing, rather than deliberate
rudeness, it has been my experience that Native people are tolerant and forgiving of those
who apologize for their mistakes. By the same token, we cannot expect people coming
from high-context cultures to step into our mainstream low-context culture and to know
what to do immediately. We should be forgiving and willing to instruct, mentor, and guide. If we expect tolerance for our transgressions with people from high-context cultures, we should extend an equal degree of tolerance to them. And if people from those high-context cultures demonstrate a willingness to help us learn how to behave appropriately in their cultures, we should accept their instruction with grace and humility.

There are many humorous comments made about time in Native cultures. American Indian people may tease one another about “being on Nez Perce time” or similar comments. In a situation of solidarity, people often joke about similar issues. Comments about “Indian time” from outsiders are unwelcome and may reflect lack of knowledge about cross-cultural concepts of time. Polychronic time prevails in cultures where events begin when all the necessary participants are gathered. It is a respectable and valid notion of time. Monochronic time prevails in cultures where time is set for events such as meetings, and meetings begin at the time set, whether or not all required participants are yet present. This also is a respectable and valid notion of time. However, when these two culturally-based notions of time clash, there is often a criticism in either direction of the other culture’s rudeness or lack of understanding of priorities. It is my belief that in terms of time, one should always acquiesce to the prevailing time construct depending on the culture one is presently inhabiting. Time is an abstract concept without value, and yet its application is laden with value. People’s characters, motivation, work ethic, and humanity are misjudged in situations where their use of time has been incongruent with that of the prevailing culture.
A fourth cultural component worth mentioning as a learning device for non-Natives is that of Native spirituality. I write about this issue with extreme caution, because I have witnessed the co-option of parts of Native spiritual practice by non-Native people, who, in their innocence, have seen no harm in borrowing parts of various spiritual practices, whether Native, Buddhist, or Druid, to create their own bouillabaisse of religiosity. I have strong negative opinions about the co-option of what are essentially private, serious, and deeply spiritual practices, and of all the pillagings of Native culture that have been done and that continue, this co-option brings me the most shame for mainstream culture. A Native man said there is no reason for non-Native, Christian-based people to need to borrow Native practices. He told me that we mainstream people have our own spiritual warrior. He did his own vision quest; He hung from a cross and in effect was a sun dancer to atone for His people’s transgressions. Honor your own, the Native man said, and he said it far better than I. Having made this clarification, I have this to convey about non-Native misunderstanding of Native spiritual practices. Some non-Natives, I believe, probably equate non-Christian spirituality with paganism or animism. Others, in going to the other extreme, have romantic and fanciful notions of Native peoples’ spiritual lives. The two clearest observations I have made are this: spirituality is not a once-a-week public affair for Natives, but a daily, private practice. They do not speak of it, and therefore, we non-Natives may draw the wrong conclusions from their silence. Secondly, there is a deep tie with nature, but we outsiders have to be careful about how we characterize that tie and how we might wish to emulate it in our appreciative zeal for all things Native. Trivializing the depth of Native commitment to
their landscape is as egregious as romanticizing that same commitment. Suffice it here to say that I talked with many deeply spiritual people in my study, and my life-long respect for the genuine integration of Native peoples’ spirituality was affirmed. I am not making the case that every Native American one would ever meet is non-Christian or is closely in touch with traditional spiritual practices. There is diversity of belief and worldview among Natives just as there is among non-Natives. However, for those who are tied to their traditional practices, especially through the vehicle of their indigenous languages, my observation holds.

My worldview was forever changed by those who taught me during this study. Although I was warned that there might be antagonism (and indeed there was from one tribal gatekeeper to whose reservation I did not go) and suspicion, people seemed willing to give me the benefit of the doubt. They allowed me to introduce myself and my project; they were respectful. They observed my behavior carefully, I believe, and for any unknown transgressions in protocol or courtesy that I may have committed, I sincerely apologize, and appreciate people being willing to tolerate my ignorance and to teach me what they knew about language and its teaching.

**What is Possible**

I am a teacher. I have the opportunity to enlighten many students and colleagues. As an optimist, I choose to believe that I can make a difference with my students both Native and non-Native. My belief system tells me that Montana’s indigenous languages are not only precious heirlooms of the First Montanans, but are precious conduits into a shared future for all of us. Education is both an empowerment and a liberator, and my
role in the public education system will be to take my experience with Montana’s indigenous peoples, and my belief in the importance of their languages in the direction of empowerment and liberation for all of The University of Montana’s students, but most particularly her American Indian students. That is the very least I owe them, given their relatives’ generosity to me.

Identity, Resilience, and Collective Empowerment

The three areas I wish to discuss are (a) language is key to identity, (b) language use and identification provides resilience, and (c) language is a means to collective empowerment. In effect, my attempt is to hold up a mirror. So many times as I sat and listened to one of the participants telling their stories, I would get a dizzying sense of identification and definition of myself. Far from being self-involved, those moments were intense experiences of shared humanity, almost Jungian in the way I was taken from myself to a common ground where I knew the story teller and I were together more than we were apart. It is in this spirit of common ground and hopes for the future that I offer these recommendations, based on the strongest features that emerged from the data. The features will be discussed, followed by recommendations that incorporate observations from all the features. The recommendations will include a Vital Indigenous Language Model that incorporates the features under discussion.

*Language is Key to Identity*

Among the accounts of lesson plans, fund-raising, and social structures on the reservations, I heard the stories people told about themselves. They relished telling me who they had been, who they had become, and how they continued to grow as a result of
their roles with their language. In all cases, when someone told me of a life crisis or a turnaround time in their lives, the indigenous language was seen as the heart of the positive change. When someone talked about others who were learning the language, and how those others’ lives had gained focus and direction, language was given the credit. Language cannot be seen as a panacea for every possible problem that may arise as part of being a human being in this life. However, in places where people have been traumatized by a series of events from outside, language as a foothold to identity is crucial. Speaking a language that identifies one with a certain group provides an anchor in a collective society. Making the language attractive and possible for all students from pre-school through high school and on into the tribal colleges is desirable.

Language Use and Identification Provides Resilience

Resilience in a people, and in students in particular, is a much-discussed concept in academia these days. What makes students strong? What makes them able to withstand the pitfalls that every student encounters at one time or another in his or her educational experience? Why can some students solve problems without giving up? What enables students to set goals and then go about achieving them?

Languages incorporate a vast body of cultural knowledge. The history of Native America is one of strength, the ability to survive, to adapt, to endure great hardships, and to continue on. There are most likely ways to express these concepts in the indigenous languages that are different from the way I am now expressing them in English. If students identify with a language as part of their personal and collective identification, they may be quite likely to internalize cultural values imparted through that language
because they will see those values as relevant to who they are as individuals and members of their communities. What may be defined as staying the course in English-shaped concepts may not necessarily be defined in the same way in an indigenous language. Coping methods, prioritizing, ways to handle stress, and the means to set goals are all valuable skills for any student, but accessing the reality of those skills may be more meaningful through a language that says things in the way the ancestors and one’s modern community says them. We are much more likely to take advice from someone whom we feel has empathy, who understands us and fits that advice to suit who we are. We are not so inclined to listen to generalizations that may be quite inappropriate to our identities. Our identification with the language in which advice is offered is as important as with the one who offers the advice.

*Language is a Means to Collective Empowerment*

Not only should Native educators and language revitalizationist activists be concerned about individual identity, but for the future health and vibrancy of their communities, they should consider the notion of collective empowerment. Individual empowerment is very much a concept of low-context culture, while collective empowerment is a concept that belongs to high-context cultures. The notion of collective empowerment is important to sovereignty. If the members of a sovereign nation are united not only by tribal affiliation, shared values, family structure, and common practices, but they also speak the same language, they are not only culturally powerful, but they are also politically powerful. Sovereignty is an issue that will only grow in the future as concerns about resources, parity, and self-determination continue. A nation that
can present a united front and a clear identity through its language will have advantages that are not available to communities where the indigenous languages have been lost. In one of the strange conundrums of history, the very people whose ancestors assisted in eradication of the indigenous languages tend to look upon Natives whose languages have survived as remarkable and worthy of special respect.

**Vital Indigenous Language Model**

Since these features of indigenous language are interrelated with one another, have an effect on the entire community and are effected by the entire community, the Vital Indigenous Language Model (see Figure 3) graphically displays the relationship among these three areas and the community. Figure 3 demonstrates the foundations of community wisdom and support, beginning with foundational and traditional wisdom set down by ancestral leaders, and perpetuated by the elders of the community who are able to serve as teachers in the current era. Children are raised not just by parents, but also by their entire extended families including grandparents, aunt, uncles and other relatives. Community leaders are drawn from the same group of elders and family members who raise and support the young children in the community, and teachers also contribute to the knowledge base that the young acquire. The youth are pictured as the top layer of this community synergy both because they are chronologically the youngest and because they represent the future, and thus are the next foundational layer for their children to come. As community members age, their roles allow them to progress to a deeper level of their community’s wisdom construct, until at some point in time they are elders, and then join their ancestors. Through all these layers of an indigenous community, the elements of
Figure 3. Vital Indigenous Language Model

resilience, identity and communal empowerment relate to and are supported by one another.

Figure 4 illustrates the factors of the model that comprise the elemental components of each feature. The elemental components are those factors that build and

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strengthen each of the features – Resilience, Identity, and Collective Empowerment.

Included are recommendations for enhancing each feature by developing and strengthening the elemental components.

**Resiliency:**
- Problem solving
- Analysis
- Prioritization
- Goal setting
- Interpersonal
- Stress mgmt.
- Coping with fear
- Overcoming
- depression
- Time management

**Identity:**
- My history
- My tribe
- My community
- My family
- My spirituality
- My role
- My goals
- My vision
- My language

**Collective Empowerment:**
- Shared history
- Cultural ties
- Community ties
- Familial ties
- How we work together
- How I can contribute
- Who I can help
- Who can help me
- Solidarity in sharing language

Figure 4. Elemental Components of Vital Indigenous Language Model.

**Feature-Oriented Recommendations for Language Revitalizationists, Educators, and Community Members**

In light of the language issues that foregrounded themselves in the study, I make the following recommendations, with greatest respect, to both my Native colleagues and neighbors, and to my mainstream colleagues who work beside me in the field of higher
education. These recommendations are all made in the direction of the youth, our future, both because I am an educator and because I have faith that the younger generation will not fail our dreams. However, the recommendations involve the entire indigenous community, as illustrated in the Vital Indigenous Language Model, and in some cases, also involve my colleagues at our universities.

**Resilience**

As demonstrated in Figure 4, the components of resiliency skills involve interpersonal skills, problem-solving ability, analytical ability, the ability to prioritize, to set goals and break long-term goals into attainable pieces, the ability to manage stress, cope with fears, manage time, and overcome short-term situational depression.

The ways indigenous language learning and use can augment development and retention of resiliency are as follows:

- Students grow up with the language, so that its sounds, and later, seeing it in writing, provides a comfort zone for them, reinforcing family and community ties.

- Students’ language abilities have been fostered in an environment that has made language use appealing to them. Language will not only have enabled them to have nice conversations with their grandmothers, but will have provided a haven of solidarity with their peers.

- Language use is seen as prestigious by students. They have a self-image that is enhanced because they can use their indigenous language. Using the language among peers should be “cool.” Having language-use models that are “cool” will foster students’ enthusiasm.
• Students will have learned culture-specific terms and concepts in their indigenous languages to enable them to break problems into manageable parts and to analyze situations. They will have been provided models of self-talk, or even prayers in their language that will help them deal with fears and situational depression.

Identity

As illustrated in Figure 4, the components of identity are my collective history, my tribe, my community, my family, my spirituality, my role with my family and community, my goals, my vision, my language. While the language that articulates these facets of identity may seem unduly individualistic and self-important, the concept involves a young person seeing himself as worthy amidst his or her collective surroundings. If students persist beyond the tribal college level and attend mainstream universities, the issues of identity will be particularly important in coping with the competitive and individualistic nature of mainstream education.

The ways indigenous language learning and use can augment and strengthen a sense of identity are as follows:

• Students will have a self-image that incorporates the value of their culture and demonstrates the value of its knowledge and skills. Such a self-image allows a student to approach members of the dominant culture with greater confidence.

• The Native students I have known possess a thorough knowledge of their collective history as Natives and as members of a particular tribe. This indigenous history teaching is something that American Indian people do far better than our mainstream educational system does. It should continue.
• Role models are important in demonstrating to young people how a community can be impacted by just one person. If that person is a good collaborator in a community sense, as well as a leader, he or she is an ideal role model. Role models can not only appear at schools and community functions, but could also function as one-on-one mentors if they could be persuaded to give some of their time to the community’s young people.

• Family health should continue to be fostered in whatever ways are deemed appropriate by the community. Young couples, before they even become parents, should learn the value of helping their children to grow up bilingual.

• Inculcating spirituality is another element of indigenous teaching that is being done right. It must continue.

• Early on in their education, students should be exposed to the possibilities of who they might become. Career exploration is one component of the examination of possibilities, through mentoring, shadowing, and road-mapping—models of how one gets from a small town to a university, step by step. High schools, through the tribal colleges, could strengthen relationships with our state’s institutions of higher education, so that counselors and students could meet some people from each campus. Most students from any small community are intimidated by university professors and the entire bureaucratic structure of universities. The process and the people should be demystified, particularly for our Native students.

• The retention of indigenous language skills should be fostered in students who elect to attend four-year institutions. This could be done from both ends—the
home community and the host university. If students were sponsored by a community entity, whether the tribal council or some other body deemed appropriate, that sponsorship might or might not include financial support. The sponsorship could include a component of reporting back, and the medium of reporting could be the indigenous language. Specifically, beyond academic progress, a student could articulate his or her own use or development of the features of the Vital Indigenous Language Model that were pertinent to his or her life at the time. On the part of the host university, talking circles that encouraged and fostered indigenous language use could be implemented. Depending on the critical mass of students in various indigenous language groups, groups could either function as conversational circles for a single language, or as groups where students could gather to discuss how different concepts are expressed in their particular languages. These discussions could be referenced particularly with regard to the Resiliency component of the Vital Indigenous Language Model.

**Collective Empowerment**

As illustrated in Figure 4, the components of collective empowerment are shared history, cultural ties, community ties, familial ties, an understanding of how community members of a particular culture work best together, a sense of how one now and in the future can make a contribution to that community viability, a willingness to seek help when needed, and solidarity built through shared indigenous language use.

Montana Native students are often coming from insular and protected communities where they know everyone and are known by everyone. Outside culture is
becoming increasingly depersonalized, and a major feature of Native American students’
culture shock is the depersonalization of themselves. They often see this is as a deliberate
reaction to them as tribal peoples, rather than as the universal dehumanization that is
evolving in our road-rage, take-a-number-and-wait mainstream culture. Internalizing the
empowerment that they gain from being members of a collective culture will be of great
value as they move into higher education.

The ways indigenous language learning and use can build collective
empowerment are as follows:

• Shared ties can be seen as either stultifying or as empowering. How those ties are
  articulated to young people can make all the difference. A sense of obligation and
family duty are not to be completely rejected, because they have a valued function
in Native culture. However, family and community ties can be articulated as
buttresses for the young person as he or she moves forward, and, in fact, one sees
this occurring as young people are publicly honored by their tribes for various
educational achievements. This practice should continue and grow. It sets an
example to the outside communities as well.

• Mentoring should permeate communities. Not only should community leaders,
  spiritual leaders, teachers and parents mentor, but older students should mentor
younger students. The ties among people should be as strong and interconnected.
Those going ahead should reach a hand back to help the next one up, and those
staying behind should lift up those who are continuing their educations.
Language should bind the community. If indigenous languages have terms that honor levels of achievement, or kinds of achievement, those terms should become common knowledge. Students, if the language and culture allows, ought to be able to aspire to being publicly named a Good Mentor, or a Strong Student, or a Community Helper. English fails in this endeavor where indigenous languages could no doubt succeed. Since respect and honor are so rich and valuable a part of indigenous cultures, those values should bind the communities in their empowerment. Being respectful and honorable are among the most-admired character attributes of Native American people. Whenever they do not already do so, they should look at one another to recognize the value of their collective existence. To name something is to give it power. Use the language. Name the good. Empowerment will follow.

Concluding Thoughts

Neither the participants in this study nor I have any control over history. In a sense, we are all shadowed by the past—indigenous peoples by overwhelming colonialism, non-Natives by a lingering sense of guilt and self-doubt. To stay in that shadowed place, however, is to remain a victim of what cannot be undone. Our best efforts are in the here and now, directed toward the future of all our children.

We non-Natives need to shed our non-productive guilt and ask our Native neighbors how we best can support them in their efforts. Our Native neighbors’ sense of sovereign cultural identity should be respected and cultivated—their empowerment is not a threat to us, but a benefit. We all need each other beyond the point of simple permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
expediency; we need each other’s respect, friendship, and cooperation in many efforts including indigenous language revitalization. The meaning found in Montana’s indigenous languages is significant not only to Natives who use those languages. We non-Natives are blessed to live in this place where enough hope exists for people to dream and aspire and work toward their Native languages being fully alive again, as they were the unfortunate day our ancestors met.
Chapter Six
Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter discusses (a) the research questions, (b) general recommendations for community members and non-Natives, and (c) implications for further research.

The over-arching research question is: What are the experiences of those attempting to revitalize their native languages in twenty-first century Montana? The sub-questions are as follows:

1. What specific meaning has the language and its revitalization attempts brought to the life of the individuals questioned?

2. What was the language-learning environment like for teachers, and how have their learning experiences impacted their teaching styles?

3. What are the greatest hopes and greatest concerns of those who hope to save their languages?

4. What connectivity is there between community, culture, and language revitalization programs?

Research Questions: Summary Reflections

Before proceeding to answer the over-arching research question, a discussion of each of the sub-questions should ensue. A synthesis of the answers to those questions is necessary to a meaningful interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants in this study.
Sub-Question #1: What specific meaning has the language and its revitalization attempts brought to the life of the individuals questioned?

The breadth and depth of the answers to this question are perhaps the most valuable in the study. What emerged from the individual stories was not a sterile overview of a program, but a montage of personal portraits. Language revitalizationists share some goals and dreams, but their approaches and the way they internalize their experiences create personal meanings that resonate with common themes, and those meanings are particularized to the individuals who spoke so honestly with me.

That language revitalizationists’ identities are being shaped by their work with their language is unquestionable. One teacher told the story of a young man who was just beginning to learn his language. He was at a public function and an elderly woman who is fluent in the Native language spoke to the young man in English, asking him to bring her a cup of coffee. He said to her, “I am Cheyenne. Speak to me in Cheyenne.”

Language-borne identities take many shapes. Many of the participants were well-traveled, well-educated activists who engaged in the professional jargon of linguistics with ease. These academically-trained men and women are those most comfortable in explaining their mission and their role to outsiders like me.

Another type of participant was the kind of person who had never lost his or her identity in the morass of boarding school aftermath. These people had perhaps not gained an outside formal education to the extent of the former group mentioned, but they had spoken often and willingly of their cultures to outsiders. Interestingly, it was this group of people who seemed to reach the most intimate levels of communication with me. One might speculate that this has something to do with their maintaining an intact cultural
identity throughout their lives, and that this personal integration allowed them to speak with ease in that intimate fashion that I have experienced all my life with my Native friends. It was also intriguing to note that some of the people with whom I talked became my intimates in the course of the research, and it can be surmised that their comfort with intimacy has something to do with their personal cultural intactness.

However, some of the aforementioned individuals had gone through some rough times in maintaining or rediscovering their identities at some point, and that gives them something in common with a third group of participants, those whose identity had been bruised as a result of their parents’ experiences and their personal childhood and even adult experiences. These people made some of the most touching remarks and spoke honestly of the hurt they had endured and the strategies they had devised in order to keep on being Indian in a world that did not seem to have a place for indigenous peoples. This group of people was often given to making self-effacing comments and to be most intimidated by me. Consequently, I spent a great deal of time attempting to assure these participants’ comfort and feelings of equality with me; the rewards for this additional effort were well worth it. One participant, Matthew, offered some of the most profound insights and revealing honesty in his shyly-offered comments. That his identity was being profoundly affected by his experience with the language revitalization movement was evident.

A second chord running through the meaning of their experiences was that of healing and wholeness. Even those who had studied far from home, lived off the reservations and traveled extensively, having more experience of the world than me,
recounted experiences of being outsiders, of trying to find ways to pursue their ambitions. They told stories of odysseys to professional worlds off the reservations and how they had lived full lives in urban areas, at universities, fully involved in academia or other careers. And yet they returned. They returned from a feeling that something was missing; that there was something more they needed; that they perhaps ought to try to close the circle in their lives. And for those who had never left the reservations, who had hidden away inside their languages, the blossoming that was apparent in their teaching and their grandchildren’s use of the language was apparent.

Connectedness is a part of Native culture that I have observed in countless other contexts. Native American people who are healthily part of their cultures seem to have a connectedness between all the parts of their lives and their worlds, and that observation continued in this work. The links between all the parts of their lives were apparent as I talked with a group of lively young language revitalizationists. Their refusal to compartmentalize their language efforts was characteristic of all the participants I spoke with. Their language is not a fact about them, it is them.

Integration of language into one’s daily life seems commonplace and almost begs the question for us mono-lingual speakers in the dominant culture. For those indigenous peoples who have had to speak the language of the dominant culture almost, if not all their entire lives, however, language integration is another matter entirely. Some of the more elderly participants mentioned having to run English through the strainer of their native languages and back again in order to try and understand what was going on around them. Other participants mentioned knowing their languages orally, and only learning to
read them as adults, or even not knowing their heritage languages until they had reached
adulthood. As their proficiency grew, language integration grew, and among all of them,
The desire for their students to have that integration was apparent.

Working to preserve their native languages carved a kind of clarity into life for the participants. Each found a purpose or mission in their work. Some of the mission statements were huge, akin to climbing Mt. Everest; other people expressed their purpose by simply getting up each day to go to their classrooms to be with their children. Some participants looked outward to those young students for the image of meaning they needed; other participants turned that examination inward, finding that the act of teaching or working on their languages had fed some inner hunger.

The specific meanings of their experiences with language preservation were as varied as the participants. It would be a gross overgeneralization to attempt to distill their private experiences into one overall notion. The one true statement of all participants is that they all were clearly engaged in the meaning they had found. No one said, “I want to stop this.” One participant, gravely ill, came to spend some time with me. I asked her, if she got well enough to return to the classroom next year, would she? Quietly, with a little smile, she told me she would.

Sub-Question #2: What was the language-learning environment like for teachers, and how have their learning experiences impacted their teaching styles?

What people said to me in response to this question perhaps was most revealing of the differences in the language communities. Some people learned their languages at their grandparents’ knees and spent most of their lives on the reservations. Others had been away from their reservations and had returned to help with the language revitalization.
movement with their people. Those who had grown up with grandparents and even parents speaking their indigenous languages were those most likely to teach their students by story telling or just talking to them. These teachers had been raised in an environment where children were taught to listen quietly and pay attention to their elders, and these teachers’ characters and values have been shaped by that quiet listening. They believe that it is culturally appropriate for their children to learn in the way their tribe has been traditionally taught. The sounds of the language, the history of the people, the stories and themes that have helped shape their cultures were deemed to be the most important elements of their teaching strategies. In all cases, I noted the kindness and patience of this kind of teacher. They know how to tell stories and how to teach from stories.

Language revitalizationists who have been involved in the language revitalization movement at the national level or who have had formal education in linguistics or language-related areas are apt to be more familiar with currently-touted language teaching methodology. Those revitalizationists speak with passion about the efficacy of the methods they have adopted, and in many cases, have pursued outside quantitative research to establish the veracity of the methodology they have adopted. Many of these participants studied were individuals who had not studied their own languages, at least not the written aspects, until adulthood, but had found their life’s mission in those languages. They work on their languages with an informed desperation. A comparison to the fervor of religious converts would perhaps be too extreme, but at the same time, the passion and absolute commitment of these adult linguistic baptisms cannot be overstated. When speaking with these participants, I often mused to myself that this is what it must
have been like to know Martin Luther King, Jr. Prior to meeting one of the most noted figures, many of whose articles I had read prior to my visit to the reservation, I confessed to the tribal gatekeeper, much to his amusement, that I felt as though I were going to meet Mick Jagger.

Sub-Question #3: What are the greatest hopes and greatest concerns of those who hope to save their languages?

This question garnered the most unanimity of answers. The answers are simple, but profound. People fear that the children of their tribe will not care enough to learn their languages. They fear that outside influences will denigrate the children's desire for their own cultures and languages. They are afraid that the twenty-first century will render their languages irrelevant. They fear that they will be left alone, with no one to speak with. At the same time, the same people with the darkest fears hope that their children will learn the language and will use it in their daily lives. They hope their children will grow up, marry someone who speaks the language, and raise an indigenous-language-speaking family. They hope they will hear newscasts in their native language; they want to see signs posted in their native language. The participants dream of a day when people speaking their language will be taken for granted; they dream of their people speaking easily, so that no teacher teaches out of desperation; they dream of a time when no one needs to waken from nightmares of language loss.

One hope, separate from the purely language issues, was expressed by several participants when they were asked if they had anything they wanted the researcher to tell the outside world. Tell them we're human, they requested. “Tell them we have blood and hearts; we have language and culture, and we're just human. We just want them to
respect us and think of us as humans like them” (Esther). This hope and this message, while not part of the linguistic issues pursued in this research, cannot go unremarked. Nor should these participants’ hope, simply to be recognized as full human beings, need any further explication.

**Sub-Question #4: What connectivity is there between community, culture, and language revitalization programs?**

Language programs, when accepted, recognized, and supported by the communities in which they are located, provide a strong source of pride and culture-building opportunity. By the same token, communities that support their local language programs are vital to the mental and emotional health of their language teachers, if not to the financial survival of the programs. In some situations, there is a great deal of connection between the programs and their communities. In others, there is some sense of alienation on the part of the language revitalizationists. This occurs when the community at large sees no particular benefit in pursuing language preservation; they have, in fact, given up on the notion that language is vital to their culture. In this study, there was no attempt to quantify which attitude is more prevalent in the surrounding communities. The individuals formally interviewed were inside the language preservation cocoon. Therefore, despite the coffee shop, pow wow, picnic, and dinner table conversations with community members who were not necessarily supportive of language preservation, no attempt was made to evaluate either how overweening or how unimportant those negative community attitudes might be. It would be a disservice to the research, however, to simply report the results of the interviews without setting the community context in which they occurred. That context was gained through numerous conversations, both
casual and serious, but always sincere and amiable, with people of all ages and walks of life.

**Over-arching Research Question:** What are the experiences of those attempting to revitalize their Native languages in twenty-first century Montana?

An amalgam of positive and negative issues is found in the experiences of the study participants. Not one participant was entirely positive; not one was negative to any great extent. Nevertheless, despite their being dreamers, leaders, forward-looking optimists, the participants all had a sense of reality that was both reassuring and poignant. These are all people who know themselves, or who are coming to know themselves better each day. These are people who have decided that despite the obstacles they see, they will persevere.

To those outside the language revitalization movement, these people are invisible. As members of a suppressed minority, they are rivers running under the ice. They are unseen unless one stops beside the frozen water to listen to the hidden sounds of movement. These people live that invisibility; surely they experience a sense of futility from time to time. Most of them seem capable of shrugging off their doubts in order to continue the work to which they have dedicated themselves. If one word could perhaps be used to describe them all, it would be strong.

**General Recommendations**

What follows are recommendations based on the findings of the study and on my years of experience as a sociolinguist and an educator; many of these practices already exist on Montana reservations, and should be applauded. Implementation of any of these recommendation is the prerogative of individual communities’ cultural self-governance.
There is an ongoing need for tribes and schools to work together to assure success in long-term projects such as language revitalization. All those with whom I spoke recognize that saving languages will take a major intervention and a wholehearted effort by entire communities. This is not a small task, and it cannot be accomplished by individuals acting alone. If these precious languages are to survive, we must act, and act now. The strength of these recommendations is based on my deep concern for the languages, for those people who speak them, and especially for those children whose loss it will be if their ancestral languages become extinct.

- Teach the languages in all schools from pre-school through high school, and make the classes mandatory, or as close to mandatory as your cultural practices might allow for.
- Give the language teachers enough time in the school day for the students to digest the language. Thirty minutes once a week is not enough.
- Whenever possible, move students into content-based classes that are taught through the medium of the indigenous language.
- Involve the parents and the other family members. Whether it is through after-school programs or in-class volunteering, invite the parents to be part of the process.
- If pre-natal or parent education classes are offered in your communities, make one component of those classes about the language. If parents speak none of the language, they could perhaps learn a few basic phrases that they could speak to permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
their children. The content of those phrases should be determined by cultural appropriateness.

- Find or train some coaches who can work with students in the indigenous language as they play basketball or other sports. Incorporate the language into the Boys and Girls Club or other similar organizations.

- Allow for, or create, other non-classroom, casual situations where the language may be learned and employed with as little fear of criticism as possible.

- Do what you can about signage on reservations. This recommendation is made with full awareness of funding and of making changes through proper channels. It would not only be good for non-Natives coming to your land to be aware of your sovereignty through bilingual signs, but it would also validate the language to community members.

- Language wields great power. Numbers of indigenous lawyers continue to increase and the work of law is through the medium of language. Consider how these two seemingly-disparate disciplines may strengthen one another.

- Consult with elders and community leaders as your cultural mandates guide you. I am in no position to tell anyone how to set priorities or enact programs.

- Use the language to greet people in all situations on your reservation.

Recommendations for Non-Natives

In the spirit of cross-cultural parity, I have some recommendations for my non-Native colleagues and neighbors as well. The nuance of some of these recommendations
is found within my discussion of how themes were included in the three major emergent categories, but re-emphasis is valuable.

- When you visit our Native neighbors on their sovereign lands, treat them as not only fellow Montanans, but as citizens of their own Nation. If you can learn to greet them properly, do so. In fact, if you do not already know a greeting, ask one of your Native colleagues to teach you one.

- Listen.

- Find a mentor or guide if you wish to approach Natives or a Native institution with an offer of help with any of their projects. Even the most well-meaning non-Native people who do not follow cultural protocol are not appreciated. It is a matter not of ingratitude, but of basic courtesy and consideration. I remember a story I heard long ago about some USAID workers who went to Africa, pocketbook in hand, and without consulting with the people who lived there, proceeded to build toilets. The Africans were appalled. They did not feel they needed toilets. What they wanted first was a clean water supply, but they had not been consulted. Therefore, the toilets were used primarily by the USAID workers. The lesson here is that we must be careful of not carrying our value system along with our pocketbook. If we genuinely want to lend some support for tribally-determined issues, then it is best we offer through the conduits and protocols appropriate to the tribe we are interested in, and those conduits and protocols are best articulated through a tribal liaison who can assist us.
• Do not compare; do not judge. Observe. Remember that mainstream United States culture is one of many possibilities in terms of worldview, values, and ways of doing and being. All other possibilities are equally valid. Respect is a renewable resource; give it and it will come back to you.

Implications for Further Research

Time is clearly of the essence in language preservation. Those who are interested in indigenous languages and what they mean for American Indian people and for us non-Natives should move with all due respect for protocols, but should move with the zeal of those same language revitalizationists with whom I spoke.

Of interest in language and its various meanings would be first, the issue of how indigenous-language communication practices have impacted twenty-first century language practices. Even if Native peoples do not speak their indigenous languages, or speak only a bit of those languages, have their communication styles been impacted by the cultural milieu embedded within the language? If one wished to examine the nature of empowerment in language, one could study one language group intensively, or one could do some comparisons across reservations, although care would have to be taken that the study was not seen as evaluative. The elements of language empowerment are crucially important to identity. Always of interest to sociolinguists, communication styles between males and females, if noted, and how those differences might have sprung from indigenous language practices, are possible topics to be investigated. Generational communication differences could be studied. The specific ways that language fosters both personal and communal identity are particularly intriguing areas for study, and finally, to
see if a model could be developed that would reflect exactly how resilience could be fed by, among other efforts, indigenous language, would be of great value. Research on the rhetorical structure of Native stories should be performed in order to better teach Native American students necessary skills for writing mainstream western-tradition essays.

It should go without saying that as more American Indian linguists and educators are trained, they should be the ones conducting the research. Outside researchers can and should certainly fill in the gaps because of the urgency of the task, but one of the main concerns for we outside educational researchers is how best to mentor Native students to take up the standard.

Summary

Ever since First Contact, outside culture has been taking things from American Indian people: their land, their belief systems, their languages, even their names for themselves. That Native peoples have survived is in itself a kind of miracle; that as many of their languages have survived is also a miracle. And that those languages are now undergoing a resurgence that contributes to a strong sense of identity and self-direction for Native peoples is an expanding miracle. Each one of us deserves to know who we are. Each one of us deserves to be proud of who we are and to have a sense of how we can make a contribution in this life. The health of American Indians—their identities, the perpetuation of their cultures, the viability of their languages—is the health of all of us. It may be difficult for a dominant culture to admit, but we are dependent on the survival of all the suppressed indigenous cultures around us. They remind us of where we have been and where we ought to be going. *Neta vohe sea sevo’ estane heveaoma.*
Endnote

The Importance of Story

In reflecting on the linguistic features of the interviews that were conducted with participants, one feature is common—that of a narrative thread. Rather than being linear, discrete survey responses, the answers of the participants were woven into a far greater, far more important story than just the one told in this document. If the research task was to find meaning in the study of the case of American Indian language revitalization in the state of Montana, then that meaning is found within the body of the narratives.

Abraham recounted how he and his family used to dig bitterroots in the area where the present-day Shopko store now stands. He bemoaned the fact that many younger people from his tribe do not like the taste of bitterroot. “I like it,” he told me. “but it’s not a way of life for these young people.” When people talked to me about language, they told me their personal story of the language: how their grandparents talked to them, taught them necessary skills and cultural values in the language; how certain words or phrases had always been evocative of an earlier time and place in their lives; how being able to use their own language to re-word an English phrase helped them to clarify it; and how having their language inside them made them feel whole, healthy, and at peace.

Interwoven with the stories of good times were the stories of bad times, and people were equally forthcoming about both. They trusted me with their stories. In effect, they trusted me with the narratives of their lives, threaded through the loom of my
questions about language. I am honored because they answered far more than just my simple language questions. I recounted some of my own early struggles coming from a reservation community to one of the tribal gatekeepers. She listened kindly while I told her my own story, and then she replied, “This work you’ll do, coming to the reservations, it’ll bring you some peace.” Indeed it has. My story is now just one among many, and all the narrative threads in the stories are good, for they’ve brought us along to this place and this time.

One hot afternoon I sat on the tailgate of a pickup truck in the woods, watching two men shovel out a level place to set up a sweat. I commiserated with one man who worked in the sun with his long hair falling down his back. “You get used to it,” he said, and I told him that my brother, who has always done manual labor, had gotten used to having long hair too. “My Cree brother,” I clarified. “Oh, you have Natives in your family,” the other man commented. “That ought to make you worth at least a couple ponies.” The banter about my value went back and forth, the numbers of ponies increasing the more I demonstrated that I knew things about Indian culture as much from experience and love as from book-learning. After adding up all my attributes, real and imagined, my by-then-friend concluded, “Well, you must be worth at least 17 ponies.” For that afternoon in the sun, for the hours sitting beside them, for the music of their voices and the beauty of their stories, for the meals they shared with me and the kindness they showed me, there are not enough ponies on the plains to assess the value of these friends. I will never presume to speak for them, but I will always speak with them. All they have to do is ask.
References


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Estes, J. (2002). How many indigenous languages are spoken in the United States? By how many speakers? AskNCELA No. 20 (pp. 1-7)


Appendix A

Native American Languages Act

of 1990
Appendix A. Native American Languages Act of 1990

SEC. 102. The Congress finds that—

(1) the status of the cultures and languages of Native Americans is unique and the United States has the responsibility to act together with Native Americans to ensure the survival of these unique cultures and languages;

(2) special status is accorded Native Americans in the United States, a status that recognizes distinct cultural and political rights, including the right to continue separate identities;

(3) the traditional languages of Native Americans are an integral part of their cultures and identities and form the basic medium for the transmission, and thus survival, of Native American cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values;

(4) there is a widespread practice of treating Native American languages as if they were anachronisms;

(5) there is a lack of clear, comprehensive, and consistent Federal policy on treatment of Native American languages which as often resulted in acts of suppression and extermination of Native American languages and cultures;

(6) there is convincing evidence that student achievement and performance, community and school pride, and educational opportunity is clearly and directly tied to respect for, and support of, the first language of the child or student;

(7) it is clearly in the interests of the United States, individual States, and territories to encourage the full academic and human potential achievements of all students and citizens and to take steps to realize these ends;
(8) acts of suppression and extermination directed against Native American languages and cultures are in conflict with the United States policy of self-determination for Native Americans; (9) languages are the means of communication for the full range of human experiences and are critical to the survival of cultural and political integrity of any people; and (10) language provides a direct and powerful means of promoting international communication by people who share language (Section 102, p. 1).
Appendix B

Interview Questions
• What are some of the ways the language is taught [by you]?
• What are some of [your] greatest successes in teaching the language?
• What have been some of [your] greatest challenges in teaching the language?
• Are [you] optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the language on your reservation?
• Could [you] talk to me about what it’s been like to be a teacher of language?
• Are there some things about language acquisition that I should know that I didn’t ask you about?

The questions meant specifically for those who have been involved in the start-up of
Language revitalization efforts include:
• Do you think it’s important for the [________] language to be retained/revitalized? Could you tell me why you feel that way?
• Could you talk to me about what it’s been like to be in this process of getting a [________] program started?
• I would guess there are some things about starting up a program that focuses on revitalization of an Indian language that non-Natives don’t understand. Could you talk to me about some of those things that I probably just don’t know about?
• What are some things that [________] (Native) people could do to help out this cause of saving the [________] language?
• What are some things that non-[________] (non-Native) people could do to support your cause (other than just get out of the way and let you do it?)
Appendix C

Demographic Questions

Used to Open Interviews
1. What is your age range?
   - 18-28
   - 28-38
   - 38-48
   - 48-58
   - 59 or older

2. Do you have a Title VII certificate for teaching language?

3. What is the language you teach?

4. Was that language your first language?

5. If not, when did you learn the language?

7. How long have you been teaching?

7. What ages or school years do you teach?
Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

and Emergent Categories
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
<th>EMERGENT CATEGORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For Indigenous Language Teachers</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Beliefs about language and the self.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What are some of the ways in which you teach the language?</td>
<td><strong>2. Beliefs about language and its relationship to the culture and community</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are some of your greatest successes in teaching the language?</td>
<td><strong>3. Beliefs about language learning, teaching, and the specific concerns of language preservationists and teachers.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What have been some of your greatest challenges in teaching the language?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of language on your reservation? Please explain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Could you talk to me about what it’s been like to be a teacher of language? Tell me about it.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Are there some things about language acquisition that I should know that I didn’t ask you about?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Is there anything else I should know?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional Questions for Program Start-Up Professionals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you think its important for your language to be retained or revitalized? Could you tell me why you feel that way?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Could you talk to me about what it’s been like to be in this process of getting a language program started?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I would guess there are some things about starting up a program that focuses on revitalization that non-Natives just don’t understand. Could you talk to me about some of those things?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. What are some things that Native people could do to help out this cause of saving your language?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What are some things that non-Native people could do to support your cause (other than just get out of the way and let you do it)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Derivation of

 Consolidated Themes
Derivation of Consolidated Themes
For each section, all themes are listed, followed by the derived short-list of consolidated themes

Language and the Self Themes

2. Admiration for elders who kept language alive
3. Awakening, embraced language as part of
4. Bilingualism a positive skill
8. Connection to ancestors
13. I did it my way
14. Identity
16. Inspired by children learning to speak language/desire to pass language on to children
17. Inspired by wish to speak with elder (relatives)
19. Joy at having students speak the language to them (teachers) in public
26. Optimism about future of language survival
27. Optimism, function of in teaching language
29. Personal responsibility, sense of in saving language
30. Pessimism about future of language survival
31. Pride in being a teacher
36. Spiritual conduit
44. Urgency of saving language in this generation
51. Internalized racism

Consolidated to:

- Ancestors and elders
- Identity and spirit
- Pride, Optimism and Joy
- It’s up to Us!
- The Down Side

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Culture and Community Themes

1. Adaptability of native language to modern usage
5. Catholic church oppressed language
7. Community involvement critical
9. Criticism of learners by elders
10. Cultural conduit
12. English language/boarding schools as oppressor
22. Misconceptions of those outside language-teaching community
32. Progressive-traditional divergence
37. Status lowered (speaking the language)
38. Status raised (speaking the language)
42. Tribal politics
43. Tribal resource, language as a
48. Rival issues take community’s attention away from language
50. Natives not interested in learning

Consolidated to:
- A Negative Past
- Negative Views in the Present
- Positive Views in the Present
Language Learners, Teachers Questions

6. Children need to hear native speakers
11. Culture-specific themes taught
15. Immersion, usefulness of
18. Isolation of language teachers
20. Leadership, need for in language programs
21. Literacy, importance of
23. Monetary resources a problem in teaching
24. Non-natives speaking the language, approval of
25. Opportunity to learn when teaching
28. Peer group pressure problematic in teaching teenaged students
33. School as catalyst (for language in entire community)
34. Shared goals/passions between preservationists of all languages
35. Sign/symbol/artistic conduits of culture
39. Story-telling or just talking as a way to teach
40. Technology
41. TPR (total physical response)
46. Younger students receptive
47. Teachers need to be trained as teachers
49. Sound of language prioritized over writing

Consolidated to:

- Ways to teach
- What we know about the students
- What we know about each other—our fellow teachers