

Memoir and Insights of Darrell R. Kipp¹

Darren Kipp, Jesse DesRosier and Mizuki Miyashita

Darrell R. Kipp, named *Apinakoipiitaa* ‘morning eagle’ in Blackfoot, co-founded the Piegan Institute in 1987 with Dorothy Still Smoking and Edward Little Plum. The Piegan Institute is well-known today as the institute that established and runs the Blackfoot language immersion program Cuts Wood School (or *Nizipuwahsin*). It is a famous story that establishment of the immersion program was not their original plan, as the Piegan Institute is primarily a research institute (Kipp, 2000). In the 1980s, they conducted a community survey of fluent speakers and found that most (if not all) speakers were in their 60s. The realization that the language was not going to last very long unless younger people began to speak it prompted them to initiate the immersion program. The *Nizipuwahsin* school project began in 1995, emerging out of their desire to develop their education, their experience, and their vision to create new opportunities.

The *Nizipuwahsin* program encouraged many indigenous language community members within and outside the United States, and many in the field of language preservation and revitalization know Darrell as a legendary leader of the language revitalization movement. He was also known as a great language activist and as an inspirational public speaker for his powerful words and mesmerizing voice, and he fostered collaboration by bringing many people together to exchange ideas and lend their skills to projects.

The authors were one of many collaboration communities that were brought together by Darrell: Darren Kipp, Darrell’s son and a board member of the Piegan Institute; Jesse DesRosier, a former student of the school and now a student at the University of Montana; and Mizuki Miyashita, a linguist at the University of Montana. Although each one of us had different experiences with Darrell, we all feel the same way about him: he was a renaissance man. This essay is a memoir of Darrell Kipp, who departed for the Sand Hills in 2013.² The first five sections summarize the remarkable aspects of his life as a language activist; in the last three sections each of the co-authors relate some of their memories of Darrell.

Included in this essay are excerpts from an interview with Mr. Kipp conducted by Miyashita in the summer of 2007.³ The authors are pleased to carry Darrell’s voice and work forward.

The educator

The immersion school is a place to educate children, not merely a language school. Darrell believed that it should be like a ‘Gramma’s house’ (Kipp, 2000; 2009). It is a place of talking, listening and respecting. His curriculum philosophy was that students could acquire rich knowledge through spending time in the language:

Honoring Our Elders

When you are teaching in a language immersion program, say you bring in six or seven plants from the area. And as you begin to teach about the plant, you are simply teaching about this plant: you are teaching whether it is edible, medicinal, pharmaceutical, poisonous, whatever. And you are doing it in the language. Then, at the same time, you will be saying this plant is in this story, or this plant is in this song, or this plant has this relevance within the heritage. So as you become more and more specific about the different parts of the plant or the flower, you realize you have become very involved in it. And so as you begin to talk about just this one object, this plant or flower or whatever you may have, the language itself slowly evolves it into a major instructional unit.

The language, therefore, becomes the starting point for an entire instructional unit including botany, storytelling, music and any other topics connected to the object being discussed. Another aspect of the curriculum is the avoidance of any form of testing or labeling, including grades:

We also refused any hierarchical order of any sorts. We don't have honor roll; we don't have grades. We don't have As or Fs or Bs or anything. We stayed completely clear of any type of evaluation or assessment and also, the most important factor, we refrain from any form of competition between two students. So by refusing to go into any hierarchical form, we don't have top students and medium students or medium enhancement; we just totally kept away from all of that. So all children in our school are considered to be geniuses and you treat them as geniuses and you keep those spirits alive, and you do not in any way denigrate their performance.

Darrell wanted his students to compete against themselves. He was always looking for strategies within each student's world to help them improve upon their own skills or their own comprehension. His view on building an immersion program was not to create a language learning program; it was to raise young Blackfoot members with confidence and solid identities.

Nizipuwahsin students graduate not only with Blackfoot language skills but also with excellent English skills and content knowledge. They go on to public schools with high levels of confidence. The challenge for them becomes adapting to a learning environment that is no longer in Blackfoot and finding opportunities to continue their use of Blackfoot.

Blackfoot is not a language that you can walk down the street and easily find people who speak it. Therefore, it is critical to encourage children to become fluent speakers, to raise new generations of speakers. The founders of Cuts Wood School created a place where children can learn and speak the language at least until they go to high school. Darrell knew that the effort involved provides rich rewards for the community:

Every time you create a young person fluent in our language, it imbues in them a certain love of language, a certain ability of language, or a certain greater understanding of language, in their knowledge and appreciation of poetry... I think it enhances their ability, their verbal abilities or imagination. So what we were really thinking is, these children become highly appreciative of their own abilities plus the innate qualities of the Blackfoot language.

The community linguist

Darrell cautioned immersion programs and language activists about hiring linguists for language revitalization work. He realized the differences in goals between the language community and linguists (e.g., Rice, 2009). Although it varies, linguists' main concern is the language itself, and language community activists speak of their language as what it means to them.

However, Darrell also bridged the two communities with his passion for revitalizing the Blackfoot language and his fascination with and understanding of language systems. After publishing the Blackfoot lessons compiled mainly by Jack Holterman, who lived and worked on the reservation and studied the language without formal training, Darrell used this work to teach himself his tribal language beginning at age 40. His skill with the language was such that when he opened his conference talks with a greeting in Blackfoot, the audience would not realize that he had not spoken it all his life.

In an indigenous language immersion setting, it is inevitably necessary to come up with new words. Darrell's understanding of this need and his way of handling it shows his balancing of language activism and linguistics. He understood and acknowledged that all languages are dynamic, even English:

I give the example that back in the '20s they had the terminology *23 skidoo*. I don't know what that means anymore. When I was much younger, in college, the works of Elvis Presley and the Beatles were there and the terminology then was *cool man* and *go cat go*. Then later on, I heard my own son in his youth, he used the term *awesome* and I have no idea what they use today. But we know that languages constantly are in change, but the structure of them doesn't change. It's just the word usage and the idioms change. So yes, we came upon the challenge much like when they saw the horse [for the first time].

Here he is referring to the Blackfoot word *ponokaomita* 'horse':

People today often think that horses have been with the Indian for ages, but horses were something new to *nitsitapiiks* 'Blackfoot people,' as they were brought to the continent in the 1700s. The Blackfoot people then called a horse *ponokaomita* by combining *ponoka* 'elk' and *imita* 'dog,' and this word is standard today.

Honoring Our Elders

Darrell's philosophy was not to borrow English words but to create a new usage out of existing vocabulary – and to include his students in the process of making new words when appropriate. He understood that involvement of children is the key to maintaining the language:

Once you get them involved, children are particularly adept. I think that's why it's important to have children in your language revitalization because they are really the ones that bring the dynamics. As an illustration, they wanted to go to Pizza Hut. So they couldn't say *Pizza Hut* so they took *kinii* which is 'wild hip rose' and added it to *napayini* which is 'bread' and *oyis* which is a 'shelter or lodge' and they came up with *kininapayinioyis* or 'tomato-bread-house.' So that makes perfect sense to them and that's *Pizza Hut* in our book.⁴

The community leader

Darrell's journey of immersion school establishment began with facing a wall of resistance within his community. Most of the generation that the founders of Piegan Institute encountered in the 1980s believed that the language should not be spoken. There was a hostile reaction in the community when he and others decided to start studying the language and to start revitalizing it:

Yes, there was a very distinct, hostile, certainly confused reaction. And somebody might even say, 'No, don't do that! You are going to get in trouble. You will get in a lot of trouble. You will cause a lot of trouble.' There was a sort of warning sense to it. So it's ironic, you know, [how people felt about learning their own language] by 1990 when President Bush signed the Native American Language Act.⁵ That was kind of a stupendous move, but [most people in America] don't think about it that it was not until 1990 that Native Americans were sort of given the green light to study their own languages.

Consequently, student recruitment was a significant challenge. When the immersion school began, the only parents who brought their children there were students of the language themselves. They had already gone through at least a year or two of studying the language and had known the benefits of it or had "sensed the beauty of it and benefits of it," as Darrell said:

So they [the parents] were moved. Actually, the school was built because of the parents wishing to put their children in here. As time has gone by, again, through the success of the school and the students today, you find any number of parents who are on a waiting list trying to get their kids into this school. So you can tell how community attitudes change as time goes by, and the revamping of people's attitudes about their own languages over 14, 15 years is illustrated here. The hostile, self-damaging attitude toward something precious to them has been overturned, and,

consequently, today even people that have no knowledge of the language respect it. So that is always a move in the right direction.

Darrell's leadership succeeded persuading community members to once again believe in the beauty of the language. Today, because of the work of the Piegan Institute and the success of the school and its students, it is very rare to find a hostile attitude toward language revitalization activities within the community. Students who have studied at Cuts Wood School are the ambassadors of the language. They go out into the community and speak Blackfoot, and there are many other members who wish to speak and learn the language. This story encourages communities with a similar situation.

The world's activist

Darrell may be best known as the person who developed a Blackfoot immersion program in Montana, but his influence extends far beyond the reservation. He had a philosophy during his project development, and this philosophy applies not only to other language revitalization activities in other communities but indeed to activist projects of any type. The booklet with the long title "Encouragement, Guidance, Insights, and Lessons Learned for Native Language Activists Developing Their Own Tribal Language Programs" is probably the most read and cited piece of his work among indigenous language activists, indigenous education specialists (e.g., Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Francis & Reyhner, 2002; Hermes, 2007), and linguists who work with indigenous language communities (e.g., Grenoble, 2006; Hinton & Hale; Walsh, 2010). In this publication, Darrell describes how the language program was developed, including struggles he faced and solutions he devised. He shares the secrets he learned for moving a program forward, which he calls his Four Rules:

Rule 1: Never Ask Permission, Never Beg to Save the Language

Rule 2: Don't Debate the Issues

Rule 3. Be Very Action-Oriented; Just Act

Rule 4: Show; Don't Tell (Kipp, 2000, pp. 5-19)

The first rule immediately grabs the heart of activists who have been told no by an authority. Many of us are trapped in this concept of permission or acceptance. Things such as financial opportunity or lack of time might be holding us back from starting an activity. This first rule gives us a solution. "Don't ask permission. Go ahead and get started, don't wait even five minutes. Don't wait for a grant. Don't wait, even if you can't speak the language. Even if you have only ten words. Get started. Teach those ten words to someone who knows another ten words" (Kipp, 2000, p. 8).

The second rule teaches us to not waste our time debating a thing that does not help language revitalization. It is important to not sit around saying, 'Oh, is this good or is this bad? Will this work? Will this not work?' Issues discussed are usually not simply debatable, and debating negates people's energy. Instead, as

Honoring Our Elders

the third rule urges, Darrell focused on action without asking permission, without debating, in order to see results or answers. At this point, the fourth rule applies: “Show, Don’t tell.” Darrell was, in his own words, “more interested in showing a result as opposed to talking about it.”

The Four Rules have become a powerful message to those engaged in language revitalization work. In her collaborative project to start an Ojibwe-language immersion school, Hermes reports about her colleagues’ experience visiting Darrell: “He told them, ‘Just do it,’ and that is exactly how we started” (2007, p. 59). Gresczyk confirms this. “The call to action [of the Ojibwe program] was reinforced by Kipp (2000) who urged other language warriors not to ask permission nor to debate the issues, but to go ahead and get started. The results would speak for themselves” (2011, p. 32). In his dissertation considering the possibility of an Okanagan immersion program, Cohen remarks that “Darrell Kipp, cofounder of the Blackfeet immersion school project in Montana, provided advice that saved me a lot of grief and frustration” (2010, p. 220). Seifert (2013) talks about guidance she received from Darrell when she was conducting her research on humor. His message, such as “be very action-oriented,” is extremely encouraging to people in many fields who work hard to achieve their goals.

The visionary

Looking back at 20 years of his work as the co-founder and director of the Piegan Institute, Darrell realized that language revitalization is a highly unpredictable field, full of surprises, simultaneously very challenging and highly rewarding:

It causes you to bring every skill, every dream, every prayer; everything has to be brought to this. This is not an 8-to-5 type of endeavor, or even a professional endeavor. You often use skills that you don’t even think you have. The idea is that you are working to really preserve a living species. This language is thousands of years old and maintains a linguistic thread through all of our history as Indian people. I think that we have found some, if you may, profound truth when we work with revitalization of a language. In fact, some profound truth will be revealed to you that really has impact on how you see the rest of the world.

It is certainly a remarkable fact that Darrell and the school energized the Blackfoot language community. Before his work, it was static; there was nothing going on and no chance of reviving the language. No community activities, no healing of the historical traumas suffered by the language and its speakers. Darrell himself best expresses the shift in the community and its hopes for the future:⁶

I will quote a visitor, a friend of ours, Frank Weaselhead from our relative reserve. During the [early] days [of our program], a lot of the older speakers came here: often ceremonialists, holy people, if you may, or people well-steeped in the language and the heritage of our

tribes. They would come here; it was very profound for them to come and see this. Again, all their lives they have been taught to give up the language. They were excellent speakers. They should have passed it on. They were responsible people. But the admonition not to speak it was so powerful that they honored it. They followed it. Suddenly in their later years, they have realized that they have made a serious mistake. And they are wondering about it. They began to realize, ‘what happens if this language disappears?’ We essentially disappear with it, our entire past disappears with it, and our future disappears. As Indian people, we have a future but it’s different than the one we have had.

But Frank came with some older people and they were with our children. . . . And they were just, you know, they were overwhelmed with the children speaking the language. They were profoundly amazed; they were profoundly joyous with the occasion. And. . . he said, ‘Does anybody give you compliments? Has anyone come in here and complimented you folks?’ And we said ‘No, not really,’ you know, compliments are kind of hard to come by anywhere, but no, we have not necessarily been complimented about this. And he said, ‘Good. Don’t look for compliments. You are not in this for compliments. You don’t need any. You are successful in what you are doing.’

In the Blackfoot cosmology of the afterworld, when we pass on we go to a place called Sand Hills. . . . So he said to us, in the language, ‘After we have all departed for the Sand Hills, and we are gone,’ he said, ‘then someone will come to this community, and they will meet people. And these people will still be speaking the Blackfoot language years from now. And [they] will astound [the visitors] because, for the most part, all the languages will be gone from other tribes. They have lost their languages, and there will be very few different languages in America. But here they suddenly come here and here is a group of people speaking the Blackfoot language.’ And he said, ‘Then they will ask them ‘How is it that you still speak your language?’ and they will say ‘Well, years ago, there were these crazy people, and they put our great-grandpa and great-grandma in this school and taught them the language and that’s why we still have it.’” And he said, ‘And that will be the day you will get your compliment.’

The inspiration (by Jesse DesRosier)

The most precious accomplishment in my life is that I learned my native tongue. This gift that I received through the immersion school truly gave me an identity in life; I never had to question who I was, and it strengthened my cultural value and all the other senses of what it is to be *Nitsitapii*⁷ ‘Indians (real people).’ Darrell’s vision when he first created this school was how much the language can help people.

I was in public school until third grade, and that year my younger brother was enrolled in the Cuts Wood School. I saw him playing sports at the school,

Honoring Our Elders

and that's what really drew me in there at first. I was enrolled there the following year to become one of the Cuts Wood Fighting Muskrats. Later I joined the older kids from 5th to 8th grade and we took on the name "The Lost Children" or *Litookskitahks*, a name from an oral story passed down to us. The environment was so much more accepting and pleasant than the public school. Everyone seemed so happy at the Cuts Wood School—not just the students.

The atmosphere was like a home and people there were like family. It was a fun and relaxed learning environment. While I was in the school, I learned the language without even realizing it. I was never forced or stressed. By the time I went to the public high school, I was right along with my peers and above some of them. I believe it was the loving and caring environment that helped me retain that amount of knowledge, and the school was just the better place to be over all.



Cuts Wood School, Browning, Montana
Photo by Mizuki Miyashita, 2014

Looking back, I think Darrell himself was modeling for the teachers how to create such a nurturing setting. Every time we would see Darrell in the school, he was always very kind and loving and there was never any worry with him. He would usually make a joke or two, but he just made us real comforted. He would always say, "You kids are the best kids around, you are the most handsome kids, you are the smartest kids." And we believed him. This was the environment in which I learned to think and speak in the Blackfoot language. The amount of respect everyone had for him kept us in line, and his kindness toward everything and everyone made it a wonderful experience.

In 2000, when I was in about 6th or 7th grade, Darrell took me and another student to travel along with him to Washington, D.C. I remember we made moccasins earlier that year and wore them in D.C. We got to speak Blackfoot in front of Senator Inouye at the hearing for the Native American Languages Act Amendments. Then we got to explore the city with Darrell, and it was funny to see other people come up to him and refer to him as ‘Dr. Kipp.’ We saw the respect Darrell received from Harvard graduates, professors, non-Natives and many others. And it was interesting for us to see that, because we just looked at him as our Uncle Darrell. It was amazing to see the number of people and lives he touched with his vision.

As a child, I was not fully aware of the emergency state of the language. I was just learning and speaking the language. I recall when we would speak Blackfoot for our school presentations in public, children of our ages would not know what we were saying and didn’t see the importance of it. Our parents’ generation saw the importance but they couldn’t understand a lot of what was being said. But when the elders would come to our presentations, we would see their eyes just get teary from hearing our words in the language. These elderly people started to get more involved with us in the school, and we saw and felt how much it touched them and inspired them. It was like we were a bridge over a gap, we children represented a voice for our elders—who in their time were prohibited from speaking the language, and therefore, for the love of their children, never passed it on. And our parents saw the healing power of our language, through the confidence we displayed.

However, it didn’t really sink in with me what was really going on until after I graduated the school and started the public high school, where I saw the struggles some of my peers had with their identity. I realized then how special and how important the gift was, and even more so even after graduating high school. Today, even my peers who went through public schooling and never tried to learn the language understand the importance of maintaining the language. They often ask me about words in the language.

Knowing your language and the ability to say *nistonnaan amsskaapipikani* ‘we, the southern spotted robe people’ gives you identity and confidence in who we are: that’s the language of our ancestors that has been around for hundreds of thousands of years. I realize how important it is and how much it really affected my life and benefited me to this day. I was fortunate enough to receive all these gifts through Cuts Wood School, through Darrell’s dream. In English there is a loss of descriptiveness that many native people don’t see until they understand the language. For me, learning how to *nitsitapiksimstan* ‘think native’ helped me gain respect not only for myself but everything living.

The next step, for me, is to continue learning the language and to pass this gift on to my people. It has to be alive, used and passed on. Currently, I’m attending college and studying various fields, including linguistics. As I research my language in more depth, I am coming to understand that adults and children may learn a language differently and at different rates, that some people may understand the language but not necessarily be able to speak it, and that there

Honoring Our Elders

are many different language teaching methods. I am learning as much as I can. I don't think I can ever stop or take a break from it.

I don't like to use the words "language preservation," because where are we preserving it? For which museum and what audience? Our language has power and has to be spoken and used, not just recorded on files and books for someone to pass by and maybe open one day. As long as we are here we need to use our native language.

Eventually I want to move back to the reservation and teach at the immersion school. That's where my heart is. The gifts I received through Darrell's dream have to be returned to future generations. I feel the only way to show my gratitude to Darrell and his vision is to pass on the gift of language to a younger generation and give them the ability to speak their native tongue.

The collaborator (by Mizuki Miyashita)

I first met Mr. Kipp at a language teacher conference held at Cuts Wood School in August 2005. A few days before the meeting, I contacted him by phone to inquire about possibility of studying the Blackfoot language through his research institute, the Piegan Institute. On the phone, he taught me *oki tsanita'pii* 'hello, how are you' and *iiksoka'pii* 'good.' At the time, I was not able to even pick up these phonemes. Because of my interest in researching Blackfoot, he suggested that I join the meeting.

On the day of the conference, I arrived at Cuts Wood School after driving for four hours from my home. I arrived ten minutes late for the 10 a.m. meeting, and a speech in Blackfoot had already started. Mr. Kipp, who was sitting right by the entrance near the podium, noticed me entering the building and pointed to an empty chair right next to him. Quite embarrassed, I sat and listened to the speech—without, however, understanding a word. It might have been a prayer, because everybody was listening quietly.

I thought Mr. Kipp might have gotten a bad impression of me because I was late for the meeting, but at the end of the panel presentations, he called for the audience's attention and held my business card up in his hand. He announced my name in front of the whole crowd: "Mizuki ... Miya...shi...ta," he said, pronouncing it carefully, "wants to know you. We don't have time. We will welcome any help we can get." I was humbled and honored.

After my first meeting with Mr. Kipp, I visited the Piegan Institute several times just to talk to him. Mostly I listened to him talk: the story of how he started the immersion school project, how he learned the Blackfoot language, how he felt about language endangerment, how he worked with native speakers, and so on. Every meeting with him was an important experience for me. I was energized, and Browning became like a sacred place for me.

Mr. Kipp was fully aware that my essential work was linguistic research. He was very encouraging and I conducted my first Blackfoot project, documenting lullabies, with Ms. Shirlee Crow Shoe as my research associate — a native speaker introduced to me by Mr. Kipp (e.g., Miyashita & Crow Shoe, 2009; Miyashita, 2011).⁸ In the following year, I began another collaborative work with

Ms. Rosella Many Bears, also introduced to me by Mr. Kipp. We co-authored a paper (e.g., Miyashita & Many Bears, 2010), and our research relationship is ongoing.

As my recording project progressed, I did not want to be seen as a linguist who was only interested in the language structure or in gathering data for theoretical studies. I wanted to be recognized by Mr. Kipp as a linguist who was eager to work with him and the language program. I wanted to show him that such collaborative work could contribute to language revitalization activities. Once, I asked if there was anything he needed me to do. He did not say anything; I soon learned about his “Four Rules,” the last of which is “show, don’t tell.” Then I realized that I needed to simply do something that I could present to him as useful for his goal.

From that point, my policy as a linguist became that my research must include components that contributed both to linguistics and to language revitalization. This remains my policy today: I am currently conducting research in Blackfoot phonology which includes documentation of complex verbs that can be listened to and used for language learning and teaching.

I feel very fortunate to have had time to exchange thoughts and ideas with Mr. Kipp. When I was meeting with him, he and I would sometimes simply talk about our lives. The summer I conducted the interview with him used in this article, my daughter had just started to walk. Mr. Kipp encouraged me to enjoy every moment I spent with her because time passes so quickly. He related his own story about Darren Kipp, showing how much he loved and cared about his family as well as the students at the school.

The renaissance man (by Darren Kipp)

“The Big Guy,” my father, was a renaissance man. He was the storyteller, the filmmaker, the writer, the mentor, the builder, the artist, the comedian, the genius, the warrior, the leader. Yes, all of that was my father.

When he started to take on language revitalization, I was a high school student. The Piegan Institute inception and the creation of Cuts Wood School were stimulating to my adolescent mind. So much changed in our family life: Conversation topics at the dinner table changed 180 degrees. There were people visiting us almost every day, talking about everything relating to language revitalization. I met so many people, and it was inspiring. I remember him saying that a man who works to save the language has to first get along with his family. He made conscious efforts to spend more time with us, above and beyond our already good father-son relationship. Taking just this one anecdote, you can tell that he was very action oriented, living his Rule #3.

In my career, I took a different path from my father, and I became a filmmaker. My expertise came in handy as a ‘tech guy’ and so I was also actively involved in the immersion school with my camera and recorder. Through the lens, I saw young children becoming beautiful, confident and fine individuals over time. I also captured important events such as classroom activities, elders’ speech, teachers meetings and conference meetings. There are thousands of

Honoring Our Elders

tapes and videos now. My father knew that these recordings were very useful and always will be.

On Nov. 21, 2013, my father departed for *ómahksspatsiko* ‘the Sand Hills.’ My father never let other people find out his health condition. To some people, it must have been sudden and unexpected news. On the day of his funeral, a memorial dinner was held in the Cuts Wood School’s classrooms, bringing together many of the people my father touched in his life: family, friends, relatives, elders, students, researchers, revitalizationists. My father’s inspiration, high spirits, and powerful messages touched these people, and they came together from near and far to share words, experiences, and memories. The classroom gave us flashbacks of my father, slowly walking into the room, calling out to people who he saw first, greeting everyone with great respect and breaking the ice with his witty jokes.

A few months have passed, and things are slowly settling down. Mizuki Miyashita reached out to me to share insights for an article on my father based on an interview she did with him. This gesture manifests the application of Rule #3: Be Very Action Oriented. The quotations embedded here bring me back to the warm summer evenings along St. Mary’s Lake. I can hear my father’s voice. I spent years on the front porch at the cabin, listening to conversations about the importance of the language to our community.

Now I am more involved in my father’s dream than I was ever before. As he used to say, “technology is the key in today’s revitalization efforts.” In the last few years of his life, I began creating language learning materials in collaboration with current students, former students, language teachers and other interested and skilled people. We are working together to continue creating a nurturing environment for the Blackfoot language, working to continue my father’s student-oriented philosophy and methods. He treated every student as the community’s treasure. He recognized that they are the ones who can make the community healthier and stronger. Working with former students who are now college students, I am finding out first-hand that the school gave them not only the ability to speak the language, but also high confidence, self-esteem, and respect.

In my father’s honor, I want to send this message to you: “Never Ask Permission” to speak our native languages.

Notes

¹We are grateful for being given the opportunity to write a memoir of the late Darrell Kipp, who was part of our lives and taught us so many things. We thank Drs. Akira Yamamoto and Kimiko Yamamoto for their support and for encouraging us to make the interview into a paper. And we appreciate Dr. Reyhner’s great assistance in including the paper as a chapter in this volume.

²In the Blackfoot cosmology, when a person dies he goes to the Sand Hills, which are located in southwestern Saskatchewan, northeast of the Sweet Grass Hills at the border of north central Montana (McClintock 1910).

³The interview was conducted on June 13, 2007, at the Piegan Institute in Browning, MT. The questions were developed by Miyashita’s students at The University of Montana (June 2007). The interview session lasted about 40 minutes.

- ⁴*kinii* is an animate noun referring to rosehip (*Rosa acicularis*) in Blackfoot. It is also used to refer to tomatoes (see Frantz & Russell 1995).
- ⁵The NALA Act (Public Law 101-477) was passed in 1990 to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages (Hinton 1994).
- ⁶This story is also mentioned in the article by Mr. Kipp (2007).
- ⁷This is how the Blackfeet nation in Montana refer to themselves in the language. It is the southern branch of the Blackfoot confederacy, located in Montana.
- ⁸This project was supported by Phillips Fund of the American Philosophical Society in 2007-08.

References

- Cohen, W. A. (2010). *School failed coyote, so fox made a new school: Indigenous Okanagan knowledge transforms educational pedagogy* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of British Columbia).
- Francis, N., & Reyhner, J. A. (2002). *Language and literacy teaching for indigenous education: A bilingual approach*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Frantz, D., & Russell, N. J. (1995). *Blackfoot dictionary of stems, roots, and affixes* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press.
- Grenoble, L. A. (2006). *Saving languages: An introduction to language revitalization*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gresczyk Sr, R. A. (2011). *Language warriors; Leaders in the Ojibwe language revitalization movement* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota).
- Hermes, M. (2007). Moving toward the language: Reflections on teaching in an Indigenous-immersion school. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 46(3), 54-71.
- Hinton, L. (1994). *Flutes of fire*. Berkeley: CA: Heyday Books.
- Kipp, D. R. (2007). Swimming in words. *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 31(2), 36-43.
- Kipp, D. R. 2000. *Encouragement, guidance, insights, and lessons learned for Native language activists developing their own tribal language program*. St. Paul, MN: Grotto Foundation.
- Lomawaima, K. T., & McCarty, T. L. (2002). When tribal sovereignty challenges democracy: American Indian education and the democratic ideal. *American Educational Research Journal*, 39(2), 279-305.
- McClintock, W. (1910). *The old north trail: Life, legends & religion of the Blackfeet Indians*. London: Macmillan and Co. Reprinted in 1992 by University of Nebraska Press.
- Miyashita, M. (2011). Five Blackfoot lullabies: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 155(3), 276-293.
- Miyashita, M., & Crow Shoe, S. (2009). Blackfoot lullabies and language revitalization. In J. Reyhner & L. Lockard (Eds.), *Indigenous language revitalization: Encouragement, guidance & lessons learned* (pp. 183-190). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.
- Miyashita, M., & Many Bears, R.. (2010). Academic-community collaboration: Data collection, linguistics research, and language teaching. 44th International Conference for Salish and Neighboring Languages. *UBC Working Papers in Linguistics*, 27, 116-123.
- Rice, Keren. (2009). Must there be two solitudes: Language activists and linguists working together. In J. Reyhner & L. Lockard (Eds.), *Indigenous language revitalization: Encouragement, guidance & lessons learned* (pp. 37-59). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.

Honoring Our Elders

- Seifert, N. R. (2013). *The cross-cultural classroom in the context of radical language shift: Humor, teasing, and the ethnolinguistic repertoire in the Blackfeet Nation*. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas-Austin.)
- Walsh, M. (2010). Why language revitalisation sometimes works. In J. Hobson, K. Lowe, S. Poetsch & M. Walsh (Eds.), *Re-awakening languages: Theory and practice in the revitalisation of Australia's Indigenous languages* (pp, 22-36). Sydney: Sydney University Press.