

# **Decolonization, Complete Bilingualism, Academic Achievement, and National Identity: Arguments for Literacy in Indigenous Languages**

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This paper presents benefits of literacy in Native American languages for four primary reasons: decolonization, complete bilingualism, increasing academic achievement, and national identity. The loss of American Indian languages is the direct result of colonization. As American Indian nations work on re-establishing their own languages, there is a pressing need to include literacy in those American Indian languages. Carmen Silva-Corvalán's (2014) study confirms the need for schooling in the heritage language to give a child complete bilingualism by adulthood. Moreover, this study supports Jim Cummins' (2003a; 2003b) work with bilingual populations in Canada, in which literacy in a child's mother tongue was the gel that set up further success in both languages. Additionally, research confirms the benefits of bilingualism in academic achievement particularly in reading and writing. The cognitive benefits of bilingualism have been strongly chronicled. Finally, literacy in a language can strengthen national identity as confirmed by Ellen Cushman's (2013) study of the effects of the Cherokee syllabary on Cherokee identity. Each of these research areas reinforce the urgency for groups who have decided not to write their languages to find methods and strategies to expand their language revitalization efforts to include more complex linguistic structures to create truly bilingual speakers.

There are several reasons why literacy in Indigenous languages must be considered for complete revitalization. Literacy in the language of the conquerors represents colonization in many countries, such as the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Mexico as examples. In a modern world, literacy occurs in school and is associated with academic achievement. Increased academic achievement is created by the acquisition of complex linguistic structures, the very structures that are associated with texts and academic writing, and it is the acquisition of these complex linguistic structures that allows for complete bilingualism. One final reason for advancing literacy in an Indigenous language is to promote a sense of nationhood, thereby completing decolonization.

## **Identity Crisis**

Educational colonization of American Indians did not occur in a vacuum, but within the context of educational policies and practices of the United States. In reality, from the beginning the United States is one of the few countries that required instruction at the college/university level in writing the common language

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Instruction has focused on developing “correct” language and appealing only to reason. These programs have been used as gatekeeping courses to “maintain” standards and keep Native Americans from achieving university degrees. Essentially these policies have served the same colonial function today and perpetuate the acculturation policy of English only instruction in schools.

American Indians were left somewhat out of the equation because they had their own separate nations. However, the policy of Manifest Destiny dictated the demise of domestic nations. While in the early years of the United States the question of language was debated, there was agreement that some form of English should be used as the standard (Battistella, 2013). Noah Webster, for one, promoted the idea of a national language in his statement that “Customs, habit, and language, as well as government, should be national” (quoted in Battistella, 2013, p. 218) whereas Jefferson favored allowing the citizenry to decide the language. Ultimately, speaking an American version of English became associated with enhancing the status of the emerging United States. In this context, language differences were viewed as social problems. While the language of the U.S. was being debated, most of those involved were multilingual and multiliterate. In fact, Benjamin Franklin was multi-lingual and multi-literate in French, Spanish, Latin, and Italian. Thomas Jefferson read Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, some Anglo-Saxon, and a little German, and Noah Webster, who is associated with American English, learned 26 languages in order to complete his dictionary (Merriam Webster, 2014)

English, however, was not the only language spoken in the former English colonies. According to Parrillo (2009), “Colonial America was a rich mixture of racial and ethnic heterogeneity right up to the Revolutionary War” (p. 43), creating a “patchwork quilt of ethnic settlements” (p. 44). Philadelphia in 1700 is a good example of this ethnic heterogeneity. While primarily a village of English and Welsh (who had their own language), there were also “Danes, Dutch, Finns, French, Germans, Irish, Scots, and Swedes” (p. 44). And among these groups there was additional diversity: “The 300 or so Germans, for example, were a mixture of Lutherans, Mennonites, and Quakers, each group remaining separate from the others” (p. 44). To accommodate the multilingualism of the early United States, “in 1777 the Articles of Confederation were printed in French, and the Continental Congress printed some proceedings in German. According to the 1790 census, about 20% of the new nation’s population spoke a language other than English as their first language” (Pearson, 2014).

Schooling during this time focused primarily on the classics: grammar, rhetoric, and history. Some children were able to attend Dame schools that consisted of learning how to read and write simple words. Most girls never went beyond this while the boys may have attended a Latin grammar school, where in the middle colonies “they might also study classical languages, history and literature, mathematics, and natural science” (Education World, 2000). At the same time, some of the ethnic communities had their own schools in their heritage languages. For example, the Dutch had a keen interest in education, and this interest continued in the Dutch Colony of New Netherland (Manhattan). The

curriculum was similar to the Latin school for English speaking children, except that instruction was in Dutch. “Grammar at this time, when all learning was in Latin, included those elementary studies of the school which were designed to give a mastery of that language for the sake of subsequent study (Kilpatrick, 2010, p. 96). “Schools essentially served private purposes and educational attainment reflected the religious, racial, class, and gender differences in society” (Wagoner & Haarlow, n.d.). In fact, the later common schools furthered these same interests, particularly the ideals of Protestantism, and maintained existing classes and racial and gender differences (Soltow & Stevens, 1991).

From the time of the Revolutionary War until the late 1800’s, American Indians in the Northeastern and Southeastern parts of the U.S. enjoyed the status of domestic nations. The Cherokee and Choctaw were some of the first American Indian nations to have schools and to achieve high rates of literacy in their own languages. The Cherokee achieved literacy in the Sequoian syllabary outside of a school situation (Cushman, 2011). Like the Vai of Liberia (Scribner & Cole, 1981), literacy was primarily among adults and was learned from someone else who used the syllabary. The Choctaw, however, achieved their literacy from Sunday schools although this literacy too was primarily among adults (Morrison, 1978).

As the implementation of public education lagged, literacy became a primary function of Sunday schools in the early 1800’s. These efforts were principally for the purpose of reading the Bible and other religious tracts. This amount of literacy was seen as reforming, but not upsetting the social order by having laborers attaining the same level of education as gentlemen (Soltow & Stevens, 1981). In order to proselytize effectively among the Choctaw, these literacy efforts were done in the Choctaw language. Missionaries among the Cherokee also used the syllabary for this same purpose.

Seeing the potential of schooling for the survival of their respective peoples, the Cherokee and Choctaw nations invested in schools for their children with the hope that by taking on the trappings of European American civilization their nation status would be respected by their non-Indian neighbors. These schools were English only schools, generally taught by non-citizens of these respective nations and still run by missionaries. The primary purpose of the missionaries was to “civilize” the students. For men this meant becoming farmers, and for women this meant giving up their traditional role as farmers and learning the domestic activities of spinning, weaving, and sewing (Morrison, 1978; Perdue, 1998). Full bloods who still spoke their native languages usually did poorly in these schools, often returning to their homes.

After the Civil War, U.S. school curriculums focused primarily on literacy and literacy related activities. “Until age eight the typical curriculum consisted of only spelling, reading, and writing. . . . Provided a child began school at age 5 and attended regularly, he would be reading McGuffey’s 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> reader by age 11 or 12, which is well above the 8th grade level. Then, began formal study of grammar” (Soltow & Stevens, 1981, p. 113). Writing literacy lagged a little behind reading literacy. At this point, a child was considered literate and graduated

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to a grammar school. The grammar school curriculum “consisted of disciplined memorization and recitation and the curriculum was again comprised of Latin and the classics—reading texts from Classical Greece and Rome, becoming more precisely defined over the next several decades by the entrance requirements to Harvard College” (Dorn, 2008). Students spent all day in just Latin.

Schooling in other countries—Mexico, Canada, and New Zealand—served similar colonizing purposes. “During colonization, education was used by Spain as an instrument of domination to nurture political dependency among Natives (Andrade de Herrera, 1996, p. 26). In 1867 under Benito Juarez, three principles of education that continue to today were established: Schools are non-religious, free, and obligatory. Normal schools were established in 1910, and schools began to expand into rural areas, often dominated by Indian populations. Schooling was via the Spanish language. Like early education in Mexico, the Catholic Church was the primary provider of any schools in New France (Canada). After the British Conquest, schooling became a vehicle to the Anglicization of French speakers. As in the U.S., schooling was seen as a way to make better citizens of laborers and later immigrant populations. Schooling was used to assimilate First Nations people (Canadian Encyclopedia, n.d.).

The Māori, like the Cherokee and Choctaw, were keenly interested in literacy. “While missionaries saw literacy as the key to the scriptures, Māori were more interested in understanding the European world with its tall sailing ships, firearms and iron tools” (Caimen, 2013, p. 2). Also, like the Choctaw and Cherokee, the Māori soon started their own schools although, in this case, the teachers were Māori. These early schools taught in the Māori language while instruction in English lagged. These Māori run schools were replaced with schools in English and vocational training, and, by the late 19th and early 20th Century, children were strapped for speaking the Māori language.

### **Bilingualism in the U.S.**

Multilingualism was the norm during the colonial period of the U.S: “There were eighteen languages spoken on Manhattan Island as well as Indian languages” (FacultyStaff, n.d.). Education was bilingual. The Germans in particular established schools via the German language and a federally funded German College in 1776. While schools for the masses pushed education through English only, educated men were still multilingual. Education in the United States began with studying Latin and grammar and reading the classics. Within this system, students—boys—spent all day in the Latin language. As a result of this, educated men could talk extensively in Latin. “It was common for learned works written in the vernacular to be quickly translated into Latin in order to reach an international public” (Herlander, 2010, p. 7). German schools followed a similar pattern of schooling with boys being educated in German and Latin.

In addition to continued education in Latin, various states authorized education via multiple languages: In 1839, Ohio authorized education in English, German, or both; in 1847, Louisiana authorized education in English, French, or both; in 1850 several states, including Pennsylvania, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa,

Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, Territory of Arizona-New Mexico, and Oregon authorized education in languages other than English. Greenwood Leflore, a principal chief of the Choctaw Nation at the time of removal, spoke English, Choctaw, Spanish, French, and Chickasaw. As a member of the Mississippi state legislature, it is rumored that he filibustered at least once in Choctaw in protest of the use of Latin by his fellow legislators. “German-language schooling prevailed until the early 20th century, notwithstanding external pressures to phase it out in favor of English instruction” (Genzuk, 1988). One of the Cherokee elders in New Mexico recalls that the only school in a small, eastern New Mexico town was a German school, so she learned to read and write first in German (Fran Hill, personal communication, April 13, 2013). Instruction via German and German speaking communities continued into the 1970’s in Texas (Estelle Szegedin, personal communication, March 6, 1972).

Through the mid-nineteenth century, individual bilingualism was fairly common. Charles Curtis, born in 1860, was Kaw, Osage, and Potawatomi. From his mother and maternal grandparents, he learned Kaw and French, and, from his paternal grandparents, he learned English. In 1929, he was inaugurated as vice-president of the U.S. In addition to being the only American Indian vice-president, Curtis’ ability to speak multiple languages was fast becoming a thing of the past. There are several factors helped to boost the push to have instruction in English only. First was increased immigration. From 1887-1960, public and private bilingual schools decreased “while this era saw the largest influx of non-English speaking immigrants. Between 1887-1920, more than twenty distinguishable European languages, other than English, were spoken by U.S. citizens. Also during this period numerous Asian languages were brought into the United States” (Gunzuk, 1988).

During this same period, there was a heavy push to complete the assimilation of Native Americans. Boarding schools in the eastern part of the United States were one solution for doing this. Children as young as six were taken from their families and placed in dormitories where their names were changed and they were punished for speaking their native languages: “If they were caught “speaking Indian” they were severely beaten with a leather belt” (Native American Public Telecommunications, 2006, p. 2). The Māori in New Zealand experienced similar punishments for using their language in school, thereby creating a language loss for an entire generation in both populations. These assimilationist practices disrupted the transmission of the languages and cultures: “All told, more than 100,000 Native Americans were forced by the U.S. government to attend Christian schools where tribal languages and cultures were replaced by English and Christianity” (Native American Public Telecommunications, 2006, p. 2). Battistella (2013) described this policy as a foreshadowing of “Orwell’s theme of language as a mechanism of conformity and social control” (p. 219), quoting Atkins, Commissioner of Indian Affairs in his 1887 annual report.

Finally, two world wars with Germany created a strong anti-German sentiment in the U.S. and, along with the Spanish American War and the Korean Conflict, strengthened the position of English only instruction. Restrictions

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included revoking certification for teachers caught breaking these laws and suspension and ridicule for students using other languages in school. The twentieth century was a time for the U.S. to consolidate its position as a world power and consummate the Americanization of all its citizens. This Americanization even extended to the territories of Puerto Rico and the Philippines and to instruction in foreign languages in 15 states (Gunzok, 1988). During this period, the use of English became equated with good citizenship. “Non-English speakers were viewed with suspicion, so they tended to stop speaking their native language and to discourage their children from learning it” (Gunzok, 1988, p. 5). Many Native Americans followed suit, sometimes even denying their Indian identity and claiming to be Mexican so that they could find work (Gregory, 2002)

Despite the push for a common language, by the 1970’s there were still more than 25 European languages, various Asian languages, and the majority of American Indian languages spoken in the U.S. Because of the consciousness-raising of the 1960’s, many groups became interested in preserving or reviving their heritage languages. The Black Panthers recruited youth, gave them literacy and job skills, and taught them an African language, Swahili (Bloom & Martin, 2013). Mississippi Choctaw and Navajo children still came to school speaking only their Indigenous languages.

### **The Role of Literacy and Schools in Bilingualism**

Some of the former British colonies, such as Canada and New Zealand, have recently become officially more tolerant of multilingualism than the U.S. As a result, much of what is known about bilingual schooling comes from Canada. One of the strongest proponents of literacy in a child’s heritage language has been Jim Cummins (2003). Like Battistella (2013), Cummins (2003) notes that “assimilationist policies in education discourage students from maintaining their mother tongues.” Not providing education in a child’s language violates the rights of a quality education to a child and forces the discontinuation of a heritage language by “undermining communication between children and parents” (Cummins, 2013). Education in a child’s heritage language is essential for educational development, noting that over 35 years of research shows that when a child develops literacy in two or more languages a person is better able to compare how reality is organized in each language. This ability is sorely needed in the current globalization. Cummins (2013) further notes that a child’s development in his/her heritage language is the best predictor of development in the second language.

It is generally accepted that schooling and literacy aid in a child’s language development in English. The more complex verb tense-mood-aspect of English, such as perfect aspect and passive mood, tend to be found in forms associated with written uses of language, hence schooling (Biber, 1988) because literacy primarily occurs in school. Additionally, the acquisition of relative clauses seems to reflect the language of the adults who the child hears. As a consequence, some forms of the relative clause, such as genitive and adjunct are not acquired before going to school (Diessel, 2007). Additionally, understanding of many adverbial clauses is

not acquired until after a child enters school (Diessel, 2007). It is this data that has also fueled Cummin's support of literacy in a child's heritage language.

Carmen Silva-Corvalán's (2014) study supplies specific information about what a person loses in a heritage language when schooling is not continued. Silva-Corvalán (2014) studied the acquisition of Spanish and English of her two grandchildren and calls this acquisition Bilingual First Language Acquisition, or BFLA (p. 7). While the study focuses on preschool acquisition, its findings have implications for why literacy in a language completes its acquisition. "The overall goal of this book is to find out the effect that different degrees of exposure to and use of English and Spanish has on some aspects of the emerging grammars of two developing bilingual siblings" (p. 164).

To address concerns about acquisition of the dominant language, one aspect of the two languages that was compared was the use of subject pronouns. Spanish unlike English does not require an overt subject pronoun. The study revealed that the lower amount of exposure to Spanish resulted in deviations in the acquisition of overt subjects in Spanish while English, the stronger language, showed no negative effects from exposure to Spanish. "On the contrary, the siblings start using subject pronouns and MLUW [mean length of utterances/words] compared to monolingual English speaking children, and reach adult use at about age 2;0" (p. 164). This conclusion addresses a concern that BFLA might negatively affect a child's acquisition of the dominant language.

Another concern might be interference from language on the other. A further difference between Spanish and English is position of the subject. Spanish allows for post-verbal positions of verbs in declarative sentences whereas modern English does not. There have been few studies on the acquisition of subject position in children. "It is in no way surprising, then, that even in a fixed SV-order language like English, toddlers produce VS utterances when the subject conveys newer information. . . . It appears, however, that these non-adult orders are rare" (p. 185). As a consequence, it appears that children learn grammatical word order of their language early. According to Silva-Corvalán (2014), the question motivated by the simultaneous acquisition of English, a fixed order language, and Spanish, a flexible word-order language, is whether there is crosslinguistic interaction: Does Spanish influence English such that children are delayed in reaching complete mastery of the invariant preverbal subject position of English? Or, rather, do children tend to copy the fixed preverbal subject position of English, thus evidencing a higher proportion of preverbal subjects in Spanish compared to the adult input, and to monolinguals" (p. 215).

By age 2;6, both siblings had acquired SV order of English, free of any influence from Spanish. Additionally, the differing amounts of exposure to Spanish did not appear to create an adverse effect on the acquisition of the flexible subject position in Spanish.

Perhaps the most significant finding that indicates a need for continued schooling and literacy in a language is the acquisition of verb morphology: tense, aspect, and mood. Verb inflection in English has been lost in its modern version while Spanish retains a rich inflectional system. First, errors made by the BFLA

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siblings were consistent with those made by monolinguals. However, having less exposure to Spanish created effects on the acquisition of TMA (tense-mood-aspect) in Spanish. One effect is that the more complex verb forms in Spanish were not acquired by age six. In a comparison of Spanish tense-mood-aspect compared across bilinguals, (near) monolingual children (5:0-5:11), and two bilingual adults, “all the bilinguals evidence instability in the use of the imperfect” (p. 346). Further evidence “shows that the siblings and another English-dominant bilingual child with reduced exposure to Spanish at home display the same feature characteristic of adult bilinguals in Los Angeles, namely the extension of imperfective marking to stative verbs used in perfective discourse contexts” (p. 346). It is this incomplete acquisition that strongly suggests the enhancement of exposure to the weaker language through schooling and literacy.

Wayne Holmes (personal communication, April 26, 2011) voiced a similar concern about acquiring TMA in Navajo during a presentation celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Navajo Language Program at the University of New Mexico. At that time, he was discussing differences between the Māori and Navajo languages and the kinds of language programs that the Navajo language might need in order for Navajo students to acquire a complete verb system. In addition to the verb system, Navajo has a complex pronoun system that is used rhetorically. McCreedy (1989) analyzed three Navajo genres: prayers, coyote stories, and personal narratives. One of the differences she found was difference in pronominal reference. “Tracking a referent is largely accomplished through the matching of pronominal categories with referents, both of which tend to remain constant across clauses in texts” (p. 139). Despite the use of elaboration by elder Navajos, many children may not have acquired all Navajo linguistic complexities by age six, before they enter school. Neundorf (1983) stated that Navajo parents prefer elaboration in spoken Navajo, noting that there is no such thing as “baby talk.” “They [Navajo adults] tend to use the same elaborate form of the language with the youngsters. For the adult Navajo, the more picturesque and elaborate speech, the better. Metaphor, simile, and personification are used as a matter of course” (p. xiii). Navajo linguistic complexities, like Spanish and English linguistic complexities, would benefit from continued acquisition in a school setting.

Other Indigenous languages have their own complex grammars that will not be acquired by bilingual children prior to attending school. Additionally, some Indigenous children may not encounter their heritage languages except in a school setting or primarily in a school setting. This is the case for Choctaw children in Oklahoma. Some aspects of the Choctaw language that need to be taught include kinship terms, which unlike English, do not exist in the abstract, but “only exist in relationship to a particular possessor,” such as *amafo*—my grandfather (Broadwell, 2006, p. 57). Like Navajo, Choctaw has a complex verb system with some verb tenses that only exist in texts from the 19th Century. In another case, the Osage language has no native speakers, but has several fluent second language speakers of Osage. One aspect of the Osage language that will have to be taught is differences in men and women’s language (Cameron Pratt,

personal communication, April 15, 2010). The Māori have probably come the furthest in promoting literacy in their language as some universities now offer a Ph.D. in the Māori language, thereby requiring writing a Ph.D. thesis in that language. Because of these efforts, there are now academic discussions regarding the rhetoric necessary to write well in the Māori language (Houia-Roberts, 2004).

### **Bilingualism and Academic Achievement**

There was a time when a child's speaking another language was considered detrimental to academic achievement. This was particularly true if the child came from a poverty background. Despite years of research, indicating that not only does being bilingual not create poor academic achievement but also, in many cases, actually enhances academic achievement, many legislators and even educators still believe being bilingual is detrimental to learning. Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel (2014) make the argument that much of what is practiced in education in U.S. schools is actually folklore without any foundation in empirical research. To a certain extent, Scribner and Cole's (1981) study of three types of literacy indicate just how much reading instruction is based upon cultural beliefs and practices.

Cummins (2003b) summarizes the importance of literacy to academic achievement with his two concepts of BICS/Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills and CALP/Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. His primary concern is that educators are not giving bilingual students sufficient language instruction for them to achieve academically in the dominant language. For Cummins, literacy is critical for this academic achievement: "Cummins also pointed out that the construct of academic language proficiency does not in any way depend on test scores as support for either its construct validity or relevance to education..." (2003).

As students progress through the grades, they are increasingly required to manipulate language in cognitively-demanding and context-reduced situations that differ significantly from everyday conversational interactions. In writing, for example, they must learn to continue to produce language without the prompting that comes from a conversational partner and they must plan large units of discourse, and organize them coherently, rather than planning only what will be said next (Cummins, 2003b).

Han's (2009) study provides evidence to support Cummins' proposition. Han (2009) measured bilingual academic achievement in literacy and mathematics with a group of Latin American and Asian students who entered kindergarten in the 1998/1999 school year and were followed through 5th grade. Reading and math scores increased for both groups. In fact, bilingual children learned at a faster pace than monolingual English speaking children. "Overall, the results showed that despite starting with lower math scores in kindergarten, Fluent Bilingual children fully closed the math gap with their English Monolingual peers by fifth grade" (Han, 2009, p. 37).

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In another study, Marian, Shook, and Schroeder (2013) reported the results of a bilingual two-way immersion program: “Results revealed that bilingual Two-Way Immersion (TWI) programs benefited both minority-language and majority-language students. Minority-language students in TWI programs outperformed their peers in Transitional Programs of Instruction, while majority-language students in Two-Way Immersion outperformed their peers in Mainstream monolingual classrooms” (p. 167). They begin with a statement that there is increasing evidence that providing some instruction in a child’s heritage language benefits academic performance (p. 167). The two languages in this study were English and Spanish and, like the Han study, included data from kindergarten to fifth grade. Also, like the Han (2009) study, children in the two-way immersion programs showed increasing test scores while those in transitional programs did not.

One study with Native Americans that showed increased academic achievement through dual language or bilingual instructions was done with Alamo Navajo students in Magdalena, New Mexico (Smallwood, Haynes & Keri, 2009). Half the population of the Magdalena public school are Navajo students from the Alamo Navajo community. Seventy-five percent of the students from Alamo are dominant Navajo language speakers. Because most Navajo students enter school speaking Navajo, the Navajo language program at Alamo itself consists of learning to read and write in Navajo (Tyanne Benally, personal communication, May 9, 2008). In the four year demonstration program at Magdalena, students received English as a Second Language instruction and instruction in Navajo language and culture: “The program offered Navajo language arts classes for Grades K–5 and Navajo language and culture classes for Grades 6–12” (Smallwood, Haynes & Keri, 2009, p. 2). As in other studies of bilingual students and academic achievement, “students exhibited increased involvement and pride in their school and improved reading, math, and science scores on standardized tests. Their parents also became more involved in school” (p. 1).

One possible reason why there have not been more success stories from bilingual education is that for a long time bilingual education programs were transitional programs from a child’s native language to English. Despite this emphasis, successful bilingual programs have produced proficient speakers and academic achievement. Two examples of these are Rough Rock Demonstration School and Peach Springs School. Rough Rock was an outgrowth of the federal War on Poverty programs. A contract was established in 1966 “among the local Navajo board, a tribal board of trustees, the BIA, and the Office of Economic Opportunity. The school was named Tse’ Chi’izhi Diné Bi’ Ólta—Rough Rock (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). It was 1966. The purpose of the school was two fold: to have greater control by the community so that traditional knowledge could be passed down and to improve the academic achievement of community children. Learning in classrooms was built to be socially, linguistically, and cognitively compatible with the community, and instruction was in both Navajo and English. Navajo staff and teachers developed the Navajo curriculum. After 4 years in the program, the mean scores by the participating students on locally developed measures of English listening comprehension rose from 58% to 91%.

Scores also rose in reading and math. “Bilingual students who had cumulative, sustained initial literacy instruction in Navajo over 3 to 5 years made the greatest gains on local and national measure of achievement (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 125).

The bilingual program at Peach Springs in the Hualapai Nation on the edge of the Grand Canyon began in 1975 primarily through the efforts of Lucille and Philbert Watahomogie. At that time, 90% of the fifth grade students were referred to Special Education because their primary language was Hualapai, a Yuman language. In defiance of the principal’s forbiddance of teaching in the Hualapai language, Lucille Watahomogie began using Hualapai in the classroom. Because Hualapai was not a written language, an orthography needed to be created. This was done with the help of linguists, beginning with the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The Watahomogies decided that they would become their own linguists. As a result of their work, they and the curriculum committee developed “a series of teaching units on Hualapai cultural-environmental studies, literacy, mathematics, and science, as well as dozens of attractively illustrated Hualapai-language children’s books” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 128). Despite initial opposition from non-Hualapai teachers and some community member who had been educated in an English only school environment, “children’s positive responses to the Hualapai materials and their improved academic achievement gradually defused these objections (project evaluations showed consistent improvements in children’s English-language achievement as well as high school graduation rates of 100%)” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 128). Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) concluded that in all of these programs, including the Hawaiian programs, children acquire Native language “without cost to their English-language learning or academic achievement, performing as well as or not better than comparable peers in nonbilingual programs after a period of 4 or 5 years” (p. 132).

### **National Identity and Decolonization**

There is one final argument for literacy in Indigenous languages, national identity. As the Cherokee and Choctaw nations were creating their republics in the 19th century, literacy played an important role in creating and maintaining a national identity. In fact, it was this literacy that played a key role in creating the republics and sustaining citizens of both nations. Cushman (2011) does not refer to this use of literacy as national identity per se, but calls this identity “peoplehood.” Both nations produced a body of literature in the language, including the Bible, religious tracts, hymnals, newspapers, school texts, almanacs, legal documents, personal letters, and poetry (Cushman, 2011; Gregory, 2009). Cushman (2011) made the argument that it was literacy in Cherokee that allowed the Cherokee to reorganize themselves after removal and to rebuild after the Civil War. Even after statehood, literacy in both languages continued to be used within churches in the writing of the minutes of meetings of various church organizations. Cushman (2011) summarized the role of literacy for the Cherokee this way: Literacy

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was “fostered by nationalistic movements that simultaneously serve a tribal core and present a ‘civilized’ face to outsiders” (p. 217).

Before Cushman, Greymorning (2004) summed up the importance of Indigenous languages to nationhood status this way.

Prior to the birth of the United Nations, language did more than symbolize who a people were. It also played a significant role in defining nations. This is most easily made evident by looking at the names of numerous people, languages, and nations. For example, the Chinese speak Chinese and comprise the nation of China; the French speak French and comprise the nation of France.... But language goes far beyond this symbolic reference to a people and their nation. Language also plays a role in shaping how a people make sense of and give meaning to the world in which they live (pp. 11-12).

Not only do nations have languages, but they also have laws and literature and other literate uses of language. Essentially, having a national language is part of what makes a nation, and literacy in that language is an integral part of its sovereignty.

### **Decolonization and the Academy**

Despite an intense focus on creating literacy in the early years of the U.S., there was a perception that there was a literacy crisis during the period of 1875-1885. In 1870, Harvard University became aware that students coming from Latin grammar schools and academies—academies were conducted in English, but still studied Latin—“were having problems with its demanding classical courses. In response, Harvard instituted its first written examinations in written English in 1874” (Connors, 1996, p. 48). This began a movement from teaching the classics and using literacy to gain knowledge to focusing on literacy as an end in itself. “Previously, writing was seen as a means to producing better oral presentations. Suddenly, reading and writing became a focus of teaching: Indeed, by the twentieth century it was to become the primary focus of education. The on-going need for Freshman Composition was fueled by on-going perceived literacy crises in the U.S. Part of what was creating the perception of a literacy crisis was that institutions of higher education were having to serve populations, such as veterans returning from the Korean Conflict going to school on the GI Bill, who previously had never attended a university. Holladay (1991) described these students: “Most of our students are non-traditional and at risk and are locked in chaotic, crisis ridden lives” (p. 30). The attitude in this statement harkens back to the attitude missionaries of the 19th century with their Sunday School efforts.

It is this perception of students that continues to ensure the existence of college composition programs, which are “known as the gatekeeper in higher education. It performs the sorting operation that is called tracking in public schools” (Chaplain, 1996, p. 169) and have become an extension of public school

education policies: “So completely is mass education caught up in the rise of the nation-state that many fair-minded observers have described the principle function of public schooling as the inculcation of normative values and behaviors rather than the dispersal of knowledge per se” (Spellmeyer, 1991, p. 40). This inculcation is manifested in good essay writing that Bartholomae (1996) described as “techniques of vertical integration... organized to minimize human variability and uncertainty in the production process” (p. 13). Veeder (1995) describes this writing as lacking spirit: “There is something about Western rhetoric as we have come to know it that separates the spirit from discourse” (p. 2).

Furthermore, there is little empirical evidence that these courses further the writing literacy skills of students. The first controlled study of the effectiveness of college composition in the late 1920’s found that “no measurable improvement in composition was apparent after three months of practice” (Connors, 1996, p. 52). This ubiquitous college composition requirement appears to be unique. It is not a universal requirement at Canadian universities and universities in New Zealand do not have this requirement. Courses are called papers and students work with tutors, usually graduate students, to help them write the papers.

Veeder (1995) refers to writers whose voices have been excluded from academia as the Fourth World: “The definition of the Fourth World has since been associated with sub-nations within nations, and the definition of Fourth World peoples has expanded, through the efforts of the United Nations, to include the interests of ethnic groups deterritorialized with a borders of a country and to women, not only in America but throughout the world” (p. 2). Heath (1996) echoed this call for more inclusion when she pointed out that literature in classrooms has silenced the voices of minorities and women or ignored them. She advocates programs that are spirit renewing. Veeder’s (1995) Fourth World encompasses the Pueblo idea of the Fourth World, the complete world in which people emerged. Additionally, it is important to remember that Indigenous people have their own rhetorical traditions, and these traditions can serve as the basis for literate rhetorics in Indigenous languages. An earlier study by Gregory (1993) illustrates one way that Indigenous students bring their own rhetorical traditions to college composition. In this one-of-kind study, Navajo-English bilinguals illustrated their understanding of the rhetorical task of constructing arguments by using rhetorical strategies from Navajo rhetoric.

Perhaps, the Hawaiians and Māori have made the greatest progress in bringing an Indigenous rhetoric to the academy. The Māori particularly have the option of writing their papers and taking exams in the Māori language. Some dissertations have been written in the Hawaiian language. The Māori, like the Choctaw and Cherokee, have a history of literacy that includes many different genres: legal documents, personal letters, religious materials, newspapers, poetry, song, essays, and minutes of meetings. Other groups, such as the Navajo, still have a variety of oral genres from which written genres can spring. Lyons (2000) made the argument that since American Indian sovereignty was eroded through rhetoric the development of rhetorics in native languages would go a long way to restoring that sovereignty. Berlin (1996) believed that “students deserve an

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education that prepares them to be critical citizens of the nation that now stands as one of the oldest democracies in history. In the United States, it has seldom been considered sufficient to educate students exclusively for work” (p. 223). This ideal for education is equally applicable for citizens of Indigenous nations.

Hill (2012), a Canadian writer, proposes that universities create spaces where sharing of knowledge can begin the decolonization process and to learn to respect and offer support for common goals. It may be necessary to go beyond this by challenging the dominant colonial discourse. To do this, Indigenous people must control the process. One idea supporting this control of indigenization is “the continued practice of one’s language ...[as] a facet of positive resistance” to colonization (Gross, 2007, p. 39). As a treaty right for the Indigenous people of Canada and the United States, Indigenous nations need to demand that the academy supports the survival needs of its citizens. Recently, the Māori have associated the protection of te reo, the language, with the protection of the taonga, or treasure, that is covered in the Treaty of Waitangi.

## **Conclusion**

In addition to the arguments put forth here, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a century of multi-media and print. Indigenous children interact with print and via print everyday. Indigenous youth expect language in print, and language revitalization is for the youth: It is for the future. The cost of not having a future is too high for Indigenous people. In a study done in Canada, not only was the inability to use one’s language a reliable predictor of suicide, but youth suicide effectively fell to zero ‘in those few communities in which at least half the band members reported a conversational knowledge of their own ‘Native’ language” (Hallet et al., 2007, p. 392). Having written languages records the past and paves the way for a future that allows Indigenous languages equal political and cognitive footing with dominant languages.

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