

Introduction

It has been a decade since the first Stabilizing Indigenous Languages conference held at Northern Arizona University brought together community members and university researchers interested in Indigenous language revitalization. The 10th annual conference held in 2003 and hosted by the Ho-Chunks broke new ground as the first conference sponsored by an Indian Nation. Over the last decade more and more tribes have expressed interest in language revitalization and have hosted regional language conferences. For example, in 2003 the Colorado River Indian Tribes hosted a Yuman language conference and in 2002 the Mashantucket Pequots hosted an Algonquian language conference. This upsurge of interest in Indigenous language revitalization bodes well for the future of Native languages.

This publication is a sixth in a series of monographs published by Northern Arizona University focusing on the revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures. Jeanette King in this volume writes about the various metaphors used to describe Native languages and revitalization efforts. One of the most powerful metaphors about language revival comes from the Maoris of *Aotearoa*/New Zealand who called their initial efforts *kohanga reo*. This name for their pre-school “language nests” evokes an image of parents feeding their young their mother tongue. Another powerful metaphor often used is of language as a living being needing nurturing to ensure growth. We, the editors of this volume, think that this metaphor is especially appropriate, and want to thank Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley of the University of Alaska at Fairbanks for suggesting the title to this volume, *Nurturing Native Languages*, in his keynote speech to the 2001 Stabilizing Indigenous Languages conference that begins this volume. Kawagley in his speech expresses eloquently how “as we lose our Native languages, more and more of us begin to take part in the misuse and abuse of Nature” and cautions about blindly embracing new technology. In the second keynote speech presented here from the 2001 conference, Gary Owens, Education Specialist with the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community O’Odham-Piipassh Language Program, describes how his people resisted the suppression of their language and how new ideas are needed to nurture its growth.

As indigenous language activists and teachers share their experiences, it is becoming increasingly apparent that immersion language programs provide the most effective ways to implement language revitalization in schools, and this volume’s first section focuses on this topic. The first paper in this section by Jon Reyhner gives an overview on the emerging field of language immersion. In the second paper, “Assessing the Impact of Total Immersion on Cherokee Language Revitalization,” Lizette Peter and her colleagues focus on the planning required to establish a total immersion language program. In the third paper Wayne Holm, Irene Silentman, and Laura Wallace describe immersion teaching methods that promote students’ conversational fluency.

The second section focuses on the use of technology in language classrooms. While technology is not a substitute for well-prepared immersion lan-

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guage teachers and extensive curriculum materials, it can be used as a supplement. Courtney B. Cazden discusses how the Internet can connect language students and be used to promote indigenous language use while Ruth Bennett describes how computers, tape recorders, and radio can be use as language teaching tools.

The final section of this book discusses a variety of issues surrounding language revitalization programs. Leanne Hinton in “How To Teach When the Teacher Isn’t Fluent” focuses on the difficult situation faced where languages are severely endangered and fluent speakers are difficult, if not impossible, to find to teach the language. In the second paper in this section, Heather A. Blair, Donna Paskemin, and Barbara Laderoute focus on establishing a program to prepare language teachers. In the next paper, Jeanette King discusses the various metaphors used to describe indigenous languages as treasures, as nourishment, and as growing plants. She finds that as more people learn a language the more it is seen as benefiting the learner while where there are fewer speakers, the metaphors used tend to emphasize how the language benefits as it gets more speakers. In the fourth paper Evangeline Parsons Yazzie and Robert N. St. Clair describe the critical role of elders in language revitalization efforts. In the fifth paper Florencia Riegelhaupt, Roberto Carrasco, and Elizabeth Brandt show how even so-called international languages can be regionally threatened. The sixth paper by Walter P. Kelley and Tony L. McGregor discusses American Indian sign languages and one particularly threatened Pueblo sign language. In the next paper Sara L. Begay, Mary Jimmie, and Louise Lockard describe how primary students used their Navajo language to learn the history of their community. The eighth paper by Qwo-Li Driskill describes how the theatre can be used to promote Native language use. The final paper by Navajo language teacher Evangeline Parsons Yazzie looks at Protestant Christian Navajos’ attitudes towards teaching their Native language in schools.

Interspersed with the papers are quotes collected by Jennie DeGroat from the 1994 Native American Language Issues conference held in Glorieta, New Mexico. These quotes express eloquently the concerns of conference participants in regard to nurturing their languages. In addition, there are inserts of advice for language teachers developed by the Navajo Nation Language Project.

As editors of this volume, we hope that these new papers along with the papers from the previous five monographs will afford language activists and teachers ideas that they can use in their communities and classrooms to nurture their children through the teaching of Native language and culture. We want to conclude with a quote from Leanne Hinton who is co-hosting the 2004 Stabilizing Indigenous Languages conference: “Believing in the language brings the generations together.... If there are any seeds left, there’s an opportunity to grow.”

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