

## **Section IV**

# **Education**

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**Facilitators**

**November Roundtable  
Education Group Abstract**

1. Financial responsibility for programs for the revitalization of native languages, which start with the help of federal grant money, should eventually be assumed by local agencies in order to provide program permanence and promote self-determination and community initiative.
2. Methods of teaching the native language in schools in grades K-12 need to be interactive and grounded in children's experiences at school, at home, and in the community. Develop immersion programs and use authentic narratives.
3. Recruitment of competent school teachers and on-going training of all school personnel in the native language, history, and culture are essential. All staff should be required to meet the minimum competency standard in the native language over an agreed period of time.
4. The interface between institutions of higher education and native communities needs to be defined more sharply. Changes need to be made in the certification and preparation of teachers by shifting to competency-based approaches and by bringing tribal leaders into the decision-making process.
5. Local tribal groups should be encouraged to seek "seed" money to begin serious planning for collaborative efforts: a) to enlist the support of tribal leaders in native communities; b) to begin serious national policy reform in schools in Native American communities; c) to implement programs for the revitalization of the native languages where there is local desire and willingness.

## **Education Group Summary<sup>1</sup>**

This group discussed how schools could best serve the goal of native language restoration and preservation. It identified key issues of sovereignty, policy control, self determination, local community initiative, teaching methods, and teacher training, which are discussed below. Appended to this report are the group's six recommendations for improving native language education in schools.

### **Sovereignty, Policy Control, and Self-determination**

Lucille Watahomigie maintained that unless the people, parents, children, and especially the tribal leaders, "own" a given education program, it will fail. There must be support at the local level. As a result, as Radford Quamahongnewa argued, language activists have a selling job to do at the local level. People have to believe that it is possible to remove former barriers, gain more control of the schools, and shape their own children's destiny in a more wholesome way. Children need self-esteem, which cannot come unless linguistic, cultural, and traditional values are restored to their proper place.

A key problem raised by Quamahongnewa was the matter of where, when, and to whom it is appropriate to teach the native language. Roberto Carrasco pointed out that it is also important to know where, when, and how the language is currently being used before, during, and after school. In some communities, especially among the Pueblos, the language or some stories in the language are not shared with outsiders or unqualified persons. There was substantial consensus that this kind of problem must be dealt with by tribal elders at the local level. However, where possible, the group agreed that all personnel working in the schools should study and meet proficiency requirements in the native language of the community.

Anita Pfeiffer and others see some Christian Navajos standing in the way of progress. She sees them as regarding native children as heathen and Navajo culture as evil. She stressed that many native children do not speak either Navajo or English well. They need to be convinced of the importance of learning Navajo. She also mentioned the intense problems of alcohol, drugs, suicide, and violence faced by native youth.

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<sup>1</sup>The education group met on November 17 and 18, 1995, and was co-chaired by Richard Littlebear, Alaska Multifunctional Resource Center, and John Oller, University of New Mexico. Participants included Roberto Luis Carrasco, Northern Arizona University; Damon Clarke, Northern Arizona University; Kristine Anstrom, National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education; Constantino Ghini; Juana Jose, Office of Indian Education, Arizona Department of Education; Lorene Legah, Navajo Community College; Gary McLean, Assistant Superintendent Tuba City Public Schools; Deborah Moon; Phyllis Norton; Anita Bradley Pfeiffer, Director, Navajo Division of Education; Radford Quamahongnewa, Northern Arizona University; Vernon Sells, Navajo Community College; Pamela Sharpe, Northern Arizona University-Yuma; and Lucille Watahomigie, Federal/State Programs Director, Peach Springs Public Schools.

### **Local Community Initiative**

Richard Littlebear and Gary McLean stressed the role of the home as the key to the transmission of the native language. Phyllis Norton noted the need for commitment at the local level. She asked why it is that in the seven schools where she works all the main administrators are non-Hopis and yet the children in the schools are mainly Hopis. Why is it that teachers are being recruited from Iowa, Kansas, and elsewhere, but not from among the Hopis? Students may be learning Hopi nursery rhymes but not understanding a word of any of them. The need for parental and community support for the language is not being well met. In many cases, the parents do not understand what the children are saying in Hopi. She emphasized the need for better methods of language instruction along with the development of a stronger support basis in the home.

### **Teaching Methods**

Richard Littlebear thought there was too much stress today in classroom second language instruction on superficial grammatical analysis that just does not work. It makes no sense to have students who can name colors, body parts, and the like in isolation, but who cannot participate in conversations, give simple directions, tell a story, take part in a drama, carry out instructions, and the like. Littlebear preferred Asher's Total Physical Response method or other more holistic approaches. The group generally agreed with him. They saw the key to successful language teaching as teaching in context with a rich scaffolding of actions, story-line, dramatization, acting out, and other "see-and-do" experience-based approaches.

John Oller talked about methods of language teaching that work.<sup>1</sup> He described the successes of the Rotary Foundation language and literacy program in Australia and Thailand. These programs stress two methods, the use of stories and activities. Both of these involve the senses, actions, and language. The problem is to articulate the relation between language and experience. This involves unpacking of the surface forms in terms of their sounds (phonology), word forms (morphology), sequential arrangements (syntax), and meaning (semantics). If the pragmatic relation with the student's own experience (going along with Radford Quamahongnewa's arguments for holistic education and in line with Vernon Sell's arguments for student-centered education) is shown through the senses (by dramatization, pictures, showing and telling, and so forth), the language can be acquired in the same manner native speakers acquire language. Otherwise, as Richard Littlebear said, if teachers focus on the surface forms without linking them in sensible ways with the meaningful stories and activities of the children's own experience, language teaching will fail.

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<sup>1</sup>For example see Dr. Oller's *Methods that Work: Ideas for Literacy and Language Teachers* (2nd Ed.) (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1993) and *Teaching All the Children to Read* (co-authored with R. F. Walker and S. Rattanavich) (London: Open University Press, 1992).

### **Teacher Training**

Anita Pfeiffer expressed concerns about how many hours of native-language coursework teachers should have and what kinds of native-language proficiency standards teachers should meet. Vernon Sells had a number of ideas about how education and the use of time could be more effectively channeled. Why, for instance, do we not take advantage of the time students spend on buses? He also insisted that it is time that the institutions of higher education were brought into the local communities. There was some discussion of how native communities might build and run their own colleges. There was substantial agreement that the native communities must gain greater control over teacher certification requirements, teacher training, and the administration of schools in their communities at all levels.

### **Conclusion**

A number of participants expressed concern about the present meeting not just turning into “just another talk session.” Constantino Ghini echoed some of the sentiments placed on the table by Anita Pfeiffer relative to school dropouts and young Native Americans who are struggling with an alien system of higher education. He recommended the approach of a “bondsman” or facilitator who serves as a mediator between the youngster and the system. This, he said, has worked with the Chitimacha Nation of Louisiana. He also insisted on reforming higher education in the direction of competency-based approaches instead of relying on the mere accumulation of certain (arbitrarily decided) number of hours, a medieval system at best. On this idea, there was much agreement and considerable discussion as to how movement could be effected towards more competency-based approaches to the training and certification of teachers.

Richard Littlebear wrapped up the session with the poignant observation that he would like to have to repeat this whole conversation when he is “an older old man.” To that end, with much thought and consideration, the group offered the following recommendations:

### **Recommendations of the Education Group**

1. If grant money is used from OBEMLA or other sources to help start up programs for the revitalization of America’s native languages, it should be used as seed money under the control of native governing bodies from the start who will eventually assume financial responsibility at the local level because self-determination and local initiative cannot thrive in an environment of dependence on federal funding.
2. Methods of teaching native languages in schools need to be interactive and grounded in the real experience of the children at school, at home, and in the community. These methods must involve such proven approaches as those seen in effective immersion programs using Total Physical Response, natural language instruction, experience-based literacy, and the like. Further, all such approaches need to be grounded in culturally, historically, and linguistically au-

thentic narratives and narrative-like activities where the senses (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling) are involved along with appropriate actions and discourse. The key is to enable language learners to understand the highly articulate relations between forms of the native language and their own personal experience. In order to do this, especially in the initial stages, it is essential that learners be given a rich scaffolding based on students' experiences of seeing, hearing, moving, and acting-out stories (e.g., appropriate personal, historical, and communal stories) and performing of procedures and activities (e.g., making a kayak, weaving a blanket, shearing a sheep, making a native dish, and so forth). These experiences need to provide students with sufficient scaffolding for them to discover the meaning and uses of the relevant forms of the native language. As this experience of unpacking and repacking texts in the target language is expanded, learners can acquire the full richness of the target language. The group sees such methods in the schools as the first necessary step towards the full restoration of native languages to their proper places in American Indian communities.

3. Recruitment of competent teachers and the ongoing training of all school personnel in native languages, histories, and cultures are essential. High quality language teaching, integrated throughout the whole curriculum, including the skills of mathematics and literacy, as well as history, sciences, and the arts, can only be achieved by incorporating invigorating staff recruitment and training procedures to prepare them to work with students. All staff should be required to meet minimum competency standards in the native language of the community, as determined by criteria set by local language experts (usually themselves tribal elders). These local experts should work over a period of several years with tribal leaders and specialists in successful language teaching and assessment approaches. Those who cannot meet the native language standards should be encouraged to seek employment elsewhere. The goal is for every staff member to attain reasonable proficiency in the native language of the community within a reasonable time frame to be determined, together with milestones, over a period of time agreed to by community leaders (but probably in not less than three years or more than about five years).

4. Changes need to be made in the certification and preparation of teachers by institutions of higher education by shifting to more competency based approaches and by explicitly bringing tribal leaders into the decision making process. If native communities are to have genuine self-determination in the future, they must achieve a higher degree of control over the schools their children attend. Wherever possible and in all feasible ways:

- a. the educational experience should be shifted from the distant educational entity (e.g., some university or college away from the community) back to the local community;
- b. credit should be allowed for demonstrated competencies as shown through experience, test-performance, and on-the-job training by

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- all school personnel, including paraprofessionals and other teachers recruited from the local community; and
- c. locally recruited personnel should be co-certified along with all other staff and should be involved in the training of all staff members.

The model we are seeking is one where the local community assumes more and more of the responsibility of the language, policies, management, and development of curriculum in the schools that serve native children. Outsiders, including all non-tribal members, who choose to remain and work in such contexts must show their good will and competence at the local level by meeting language and possibly other locally set standards determined by tribal leaders. The long-range objective will not merely be to meet minimal educational standards in English (as Bureau of Indian Affairs and public schools generally seek to do), but to exceed any such educational standards first in the native languages and eventually in English as well.

5. Changing the nature of teacher-training institutions is perhaps the most difficult task ahead. These institutions need to shift from the present system of accumulating a certain number of hours to competency-based certification. In this shift, models of successful community participation in education at the local level can provide a critical impetus.

6. To accomplish the foregoing objectives, it is recommended that local tribal groups (working in concert with the present participants already assembled with the help of OBEMLA) be encouraged to seek 'seed' money to begin serious planning for collaborative efforts to:

- a. enlist the support of tribal leaders in native communities;
- b. begin serious policy reform in schools throughout the nation in Native American communities; and
- c. implement programs necessary to begin the revitalization of native languages wherever there is a local desire and willingness to do so.

Parents and tribal leaders must be consulted and informed concerning the opportunities to save native languages, cultures, and communities that will soon be lost forever if we do not act. Explicit in the planned expenditures must be detailed plans for:

- a. communication and enlistment of support from leaders at the local level;
- b. staff training and recruitment of new personnel where needed; and
- c. baseline research on language use prior to, during, and at intervals after the program of language restoration and renewal is fully underway.