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Lakǰótiyapi kiŋ uŋglúkinipi (We revitalize our Lakota Language):  
Native Language Revitalization at Standing Rock

by

Tasha R. Hauff

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Critical Theory

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Thomas Biolsi, Chair

Professor Leanne Hinton

Professor Shari Huhndorf

Professor Keith Feldman

Summer 2019



## Abstract

Lakǰótiyapi kiŋ uŋglúkinipi (We revitalize our Lakota Language):

Native Language Revitalization at Standing Rock

by

Tasha R. Hauff

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Thomas Biolsi, Chair

In recent decades Native communities have been dedicating time, energy, and resources to maintaining, reclaiming, and revitalizing their languages. Native languages serve as keys to accessing Native epistemologies and pre-contact perceptions of the world. Moreover, in settler societies like the United States—wherein settlers seek to eliminate Native bodies, identities, communities, culture, and ways of life as means to “justifiably” seize Indian territories—Native languages are politically significant. Because Native languages help maintain, sustain, and develop Native identity and sense of community, Native language revitalization serves as a direct form of decolonial resistance. However, Native communities are not simply “recovering” from a cultural-linguistic injury caused by a series of colonial incidents from the past. Rather, all Native communities are working to revitalize their languages within a society that is organized around those same colonial values and goals. My dissertation entitled “Lakǰótiyapi kiŋ uŋglúkinipi (We Revitalize our Lakota Language): Native Language Revitalization at Standing Rock” examines efforts to revitalize Native language in one particular reservation community in order to shed light on these processes at the grassroots level. Drawing from two-years of participant observation in the language movement at Standing Rock, my dissertation examines the limits and possibilities of Lakota/Dakota language education within the tribe’s three education-based language projects: Lakota/Dakota language and culture classes within K-12 schools, the Lakota/Dakota immersion programs, and Lakota/Dakota language education at Sitting Bull College. As an “applied” study of the actual implementation of a language revitalization program on an Indian reservation, my dissertation is meant to offer both “best practices” and “likely problems or areas of difficulty” to practitioners working in other Native communities. Second, as a community and tribal history, it tells the larger story of Standing Rock’s struggle to revitalize its language and culture against great odds.

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Tasha R. Hauff  
Berkeley, CA  
Summer 2019

Dedication:

Tuwá Lakhótiyapi glukínipi kiŋ hená wówapi kiŋ le wičháwečičaǵe.  
Taŋyáŋ ečhánuŋpi čha philámayayapi.

## Introduction

In recent decades Native communities have been dedicating scarce time, energy, and resources to maintaining, reclaiming, and revitalizing their languages. Native languages are important to Native communities for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to serving as a key to accessing Native epistemologies and pre-contact perceptions of the world. Preserving and revitalizing Native languages is also a political act in response to settler colonial systems which have been designed to eliminate Native communities and culture in an effort to eliminate Native claims to land. Settler colonial societies first sought to eliminate Native people through massacre, disease, and starvation. Since the late 1800s, more subtle forms of Native genocide and cultural genocide developed. This included assimilation policies that sought to eradicate Native identities, language, culture, and ways of life, as a means to “justifiably” seize Indian territories. Native language revitalization thus serves as direct form of decolonial resistance. However, Native communities are not simply “recovering” from a cultural-linguistic injury caused by historic colonial events or policies. Rather, all Native communities are working to revitalize their languages within a society that is organized around those same colonial values and goals, however in different forms. As historian Patrick Wolfe argues, “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, movements to revitalize Native language and cultures are not just struggles to reverse damage that has already been done to Native communities; they are also efforts to combat settler colonial forces that continue to harm Native senses of community, identity, and the right to exist as Native. The Dakota Access Pipeline passing through contested Lakota territory is a case in point of settler colonial “forgetting” of Native claims to territory. In a time when more Native Studies scholars are calling on the need for language and culture revitalization as part of decolonization in practice, this study provides an in-depth look at what it takes to effectively learn and teach Native languages so that we can access those values our language and cultures are said to contain.

This dissertation entitled “Lakhótiyapi kiŋ unglúkinipi (We revitalize our Lakota Language): Native Language Revitalization at Standing Rock” examines efforts to revitalize Native language in one particular reservation community in order to shed light on language revitalization processes at the grassroots, community level. Drawing on two years of participant observation, my dissertation examines the limits and possibilities of Lakota/Dakota (two distinct dialects spoken in the community) language revitalization within the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s three language projects: Lakota/Dakota language and culture classes in K-12 reservation public schools, the Lakota/Dakota immersion programs, and Lakota/Dakota language education at Sitting Bull College. Based on my ethnographic material, the dissertation documents and analyzes the conditions, attitudes, successes and challenges that shape the tribe’s language movement. It pays particular attention to actual language revitalization within the larger context of the U.S. settler colonial paradigm.

### Language Revitalization and Settler Colonialism

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<sup>1</sup>Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.



Language revitalization, broadly, refers to activities designed to “increase the presence of an endangered or dormant language” in a community.<sup>2</sup> Language revitalization is distinct from language maintenance, which aims to prevent language shift or language loss. Language revitalization, on the other hand, takes place in communities where language shift—that is the replacement of a dominant or majority language over a minority one—has already happened or is happening. Language revitalization refers to the actions that aim to hinder and reverse language loss. This is why, in some scholarly literature, language revitalization is sometimes called reversing the language shift.<sup>3</sup>

Language revitalization movements, which are taking place all over the world, aim to reverse language shift in communities. Across the globe, language shift happens for different reasons. But in most parts of the world language loss is a result of European colonization, which according to language activists and scholars Hinton, Huss, and Roche, “has had disastrous effect on minorities and indigenous peoples, who have been forced out of homelands or experienced the destruction of the ecosystems that supported them, who have suffered wars and genocidal acts against them, or who have been taken from their families and cultures to be put into boarding schools.”<sup>4</sup> Global capitalism, itself inseparable from colonialism, also drives and maintains language loss as it shrinks indigenous land bases and traditional economies, forcing communities to adopt exclusively the dominant language.<sup>5</sup>

In North America, indigenous peoples face a specific kind of colonialism, called *settler colonialism*.<sup>6</sup> Settler colonialism refers to the type of colonial expansion in which Europeans colonize a space and stay, they settle—ultimately claiming ownership, belonging, and even indigeneity to the lands in question. There are three aspects of settler colonialism that I keep in mind, especially when thinking about its relationship to language revitalization. First, settler colonialism seeks to eliminate the Native.<sup>7</sup> Because settler colonizers ultimately want occupancy and ownership of indigenous lands, they create policies, procedures, and attitudes that aim to both remove Native bodies from those lands through forced removal, forced sterilizations, and genocide, as well as any sense of indigenous ownership of those lands. Because such sense of ownership can be found in indigenous histories, customs, and importantly, languages, colonists

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<sup>2</sup>Hinton, Leanne, Huss, Leena, and Roche, Gerald, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalization*. Milton: Routledge, 2018. Accessed April 22, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central. xxvi

<sup>3</sup>Joshua A. Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*, vol. 76 (Multilingual matters, 1991).

Joshua A. Fishman, *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved?: Reversing Language Shift, Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective*, vol. 116 (Multilingual matters, 2001).

<sup>4</sup>Hinton, Leanne, Huss, Leena, and Roche, Gerald, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalization*. Milton: Routledge, 2018. Accessed April 22, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central. Xxi-xxii

<sup>5</sup>Amano, Tatsuya, Brody Sandel, Heidi Eager, Edouard Bulteau, Jens-Christian Svenning, Bo Dalsgaard, Carsten Rahbek, Richard G. Davies, and William J. Sutherland. "Global distribution and drivers of language extinction risk." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 281, no. 1793 (2014): 20141574.

<sup>6</sup>Not just North America. Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Israel could also be considered settler colonial states. For more see Wolfe, 2006.

<sup>7</sup>Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.”

designed policies to rid indigenous peoples of these aspects as a means to eliminate senses of indigenous belonging, to eliminate any sense of Native identity, and to eliminate the very idea that Native peoples have existed in North America since time immemorial.

The second aspect I like to keep in mind about settler colonialism is that it is a structure not an event.<sup>8</sup> By definition settler colonizers aim to settle, to build up and expand out their own societies, permanently, over time. Colonization is not, as some people have described it, in the past. It is not something that indigenous people can just “get over” or “move on from.” Indigenous peoples in the United States and other settler colonial societies are not experiencing a “post-colonial” era. For people who experience settler colonialism, colonialism never ended. The colonizers never left. Settler colonialism is the structure, the society that we live in that continues to eliminate indigenous peoples and establish settler belonging in old and inventive ways. It is this structure that Native peoples are working within, through, and against to revitalize their languages today.

The final, and perhaps most important aspect of settler colonialism that I like to keep in mind, and in my heart, when doing this work is that although settler colonialism exists, it also, simultaneously, fails.<sup>9</sup> Since first contact with settler colonizers, Native peoples have resisted. Whether in battle or in boarding schools, Native peoples fought against the projects, politics, and people that oppressed them. And Native peoples survived. The fact that I sit here as a Lakota woman writing about and for Native peoples is evidence that the settler colonial project has not been completed, it has not succeeded in eliminating Native peoples, Native identities, or Native senses of belonging. Native peoples are still here, still speaking, and still working to better their lives, the lives of their children, and the lives of their grandchildren and great grandchildren. This demonstrates that settler colonialism is not and never will be completed. The movements to revitalize indigenous languages, moreover, are part of this indigenous efforts to resist settler colonialism.

## Why Language?

Native languages are important to Native communities for a variety of reasons. Indigenous languages are understood to be the source or the reflection of particular worldviews that are different from European worldviews.<sup>10</sup> Native American languages, in turn, play an important role in indigenous cultural traditions and political self-determination. For one thing, Native languages help develop or maintain a sense of identity among their speakers. As Cree Playwright Floyd Favel and Haida scholar Frederick White argue, Native languages often convey memories serving as links to the past, which in turn establish a sense of worth and purpose among their speakers.<sup>11</sup> These histories and memories are constitutive of Native

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<sup>8</sup> Wolfe.

<sup>9</sup> Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, 2014): 7.

<sup>10</sup> Scott Richard Lyons, “There’s No Translation for It: The Rhetorical Sovereignty of Indigenous Languages,” in *Cross-Language Relations in Composition*, ed. Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, and Paul Kei Matsuda (SIU Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Floyd Favel, “The Theatre of Orphans,” *Native Languages on Stage.*” *Canadian Theatre Review* 75 (1993): 8–11.

Frederick H. White, “Language Reflection and Lamentation in Native American Literature,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 18, no. 1 (2006): 83–98.

worldviews, which, in turn, determine particular social orders and produce identities that are distinctly non-European. Moreover, Laguna Pueblo Leslie Marmon Silko reminds us, “language *is story*.”<sup>12</sup> Silko tells us that stories within and from Native languages often tell family and community histories that create and strengthen Native American individual and community identity.

Native languages also work to connect Native people and communities to their homelands. As anthropologist Keith Basso’s work attests, relationships between community identity, language, culture, and landscape are intertwined and interdependent. He writes, “one must acknowledge that local understandings of external realities are fashioned from local cultural materials, and that when knowing little or nothing of the latter, one’s ability to make appropriate sense of “what it” and “what occurs” in another’s environment is bound to be deficient.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, for Basso, knowledge of the land is difficult to attain without knowledge of the local language. And the converse, he argues, is also true; knowledge of the language is difficult to attain without knowledge of the land. Embedded in the language, stories about time and space tie indigenous languages and therefore indigenous people to their lands, and simultaneously construct their understandings of reality itself—their worldviews. Since Native languages emerge from land, they serve as claims to those lands, becoming an important way to articulate Native belonging.<sup>14</sup> The stories contained within and produced through Native American languages help hold together Native identities and legitimize Native belonging to what we now call North America.

While, settler colonial societies first sought to eliminate Native people through massacre, disease, and starvation, starting in the 1800s, more subtle forms of Native genocide and cultural genocide developed. As historian David Wallace Adams notes, in the mid-nineteenth century, “The [Indian] matter was an especially delicate one, for although the divesture of Indian land was essential to the extension of American ideals, that divesture must also be ultimately justified by those same ideals.”<sup>15</sup> In other words: while at first settler societies tried to gain control over indigenous territory by forcefully removing Indians, either by pushing them westward or killing them, by the nineteenth century, the practice of removing or killing Indians en masse began to weigh on the European settler conscience. The goal of eliminating Indians subsequently became the goal of eliminating “Indianness.” Thus, U.S. and Canadian governments initiated Indian assimilation policies that sought to eradicate indigenous identities, rather than indigenous bodies, in an effort to eliminate indigenous claims to land and “justifiably” take over Indian territories. The United States divvied up tribal lands into individually owned allotments (which could be sold or simply given to white settlers) so that Indians could learn to work the land and be “productive” members of society. At the same time, assimilation policies in the United States and Canada removed indigenous children from their homes and forced them into boarding schools where they were not only educated according to white standards, but also physically,

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<sup>12</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective,” in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (Simon and Schuster, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (UNM Press, 1996). 72

<sup>14</sup> Heather Macfarlane, “Beyond the Divide: The Use of Native Languages in Anglo-and Franco-Indigenous Theatre,” *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études En Littérature Canadienne* 35, no. 2 (2010).102.

<sup>15</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas, 1995).

emotionally, and sexually abused. By forcing Indians to live, think, and desire like whites, U.S. and Canadian governments hoped to deculturalize Native Americans and eliminate all senses of indigenous identity.

Since settler colonialism seeks to eliminate Native identities as a means to eliminate Native claims to land, and, since Native languages function as a way to maintain both Native identity and Native connection to land, colonizers sought specifically to replace Native languages with English as part of their assimilation tactics. Boarding school educators verbally, emotionally, and physically abused Native children who used their Native languages to the point where these students were made to feel ashamed to speak the language of their parents and grandparents and, even if they returned to the reservation, would often speak only English. As a result, they did not pass on their Native language to their children. As part of this deculturization process, U.S. English policies sought to mentally and emotionally subjugate indigenous peoples so that they would remain “self-colonizing” and “self-subordinating.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Bureau of Indian Affairs commissioner J.D. Adkins reported to the U.S. Congress in 1868, “The first step to be taken toward civilization, toward teaching Indians the mischief and folly of continuing in their barbarous practices, is to teach them the English language.”<sup>17</sup> In Adkins’ understanding, teaching Indians English would simultaneously teach them that that being Indians, that is practicing Native cultures and participating in Native ways of life—is mischievous, folly, and barbarous.

The goal of colonial education in the United States and elsewhere was to translate indigenous experience and identity into colonial language, thereby ensuring that indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous children, saw themselves the way colonists did—as savage and uncivilized. According to post-colonial Kenyan writer and critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, colonial education in Africa sought to “annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.”<sup>18</sup> The same can be said of colonial education in the United States, as is evidenced by the pervasive slogan used in Indian boarding school rhetoric: “Kill the Indian, save the man.”<sup>19</sup> Through English, French, Spanish or Dutch, indigenous people around the world were forced to see themselves as inferior to whites, and in need of salvation from the white newcomers.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Jorge Noriega, “American Indian Education in the United States: Indoctrination for Subordination to Colonialism,” *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, 1992, 374.

<sup>17</sup>Leanne and Ken Hale Hinton, *The Green Book of Language Revitalization* (New York: Academic Press, 2001), 41.

<sup>18</sup>WaThiong’o Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (East African Publishers, 1994), 3.

<sup>19</sup>Adams, *Education for Extinction American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928*, 52.

<sup>20</sup>Not all colonial projects work the same way, however, and these differences have important implications for the health and stability of indigenous languages. Whereas in many parts of Africa, labor colonialism sought to control indigenous peoples in order to exploit human and environmental resources, in the United States and Canada settler colonialism sought to establish and legitimize control over indigenous land by eliminating indigenous people or at the very least sense of indigeneity. This focus on elimination in settler colonialism brings about important stipulations in how we understand the language choices of indigenous writers. In places where colonialism has officially, or theoretically ended, many post-colonial writers like Ngugi are able to write and publish texts in indigenous languages like Gikuyu because there are a significant numbers of Gikuyu speakers who can read and understand that language. In North America, however, where elimination of native languages was coterminous with elimination of native peoples, such options are relatively unavailable for Native writers.

Although assimilation policies in North America formally ended in the mid-twentieth century, their effects still reverberate in Native communities and undergird settler nations' contemporary efforts to weaken indigenous claims to land. Further, the language shift<sup>21</sup> to English did not end, nor was it reversed after official English education policies during the assimilation ended. Indeed, the U.S. government no longer needed formal assimilation policies to eradicate Native language since the totalizing capitalist markets—themselves inextricable from the projects of colonialism—required that Native peoples learn English, or they would be disenfranchised from the only available economy. Native language speaking parents began to speak only English in their homes to give their children better opportunities within the encroaching capitalist economies. These parents knew that learning and speaking English was necessary for survival. Today, most tribal governance and nearly all day-to-day activities necessary for Indian survival (e.g. buying food, seeing the doctor, working a computer) are conducted in English.

While settler colonialism has been understood as ultimately a failed project, that is the eradication of indigenous peoples or indigenous identities was never completed, it took significant toll on Native languages. Settler colonialism has eliminated the use of about one hundred of the estimated three hundred indigenous languages spoken in the United States and Canada before conquest, and continues to threaten the remaining two hundred indigenous languages. Today, eighty percent of Native North American languages that are still in use are moribund, bound for language death.<sup>22</sup>

As language activist Leanne Hinton writes, “Indigenous efforts toward language maintenance or revitalization are generally part of a larger effort to retain or regain their political autonomy, their land base, or at least their own sense of identity.”<sup>23</sup> Language revitalization movements are thus much more than efforts to “bring back” endangered or dormant languages to have more language diversity in the world.<sup>24</sup> Instead, languages revitalization is one way Native communities are resisting settler colonialism and are maintaining and strengthening Native identity, sovereignty, and claim to land. This is why in many facets of Native Studies, scholars routinely highlight the importance of Native language to projects of Native sovereignty, settler colonial resistance, and decolonization. For example, Quechua education scholar Sandy Grande addresses the importance of language in her seminal text *Red Pedagogy*. In describing the need for and a pathway to intellectual and pedagogical sovereignty she writes, “...just as language was central to the colonialist project, it must be central to the project of decolonization.”<sup>25</sup> She then quotes Hawaiian scholar Haunani-Kay Trask who says, “Thinking in one’s own cultural referents leads to conceptualizing in one’s own world view, which, in turn, leads to disagreement with and eventual opposition to the dominant ideology.”<sup>26</sup> Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and K.

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<sup>21</sup>Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*.

<sup>22</sup>Ken Hale et al., “Endangered Languages,” *Language* 68, no. 1 (1992): 1–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/416368>.

<sup>23</sup>Hinton, *The Green Book of Language Revitalization*, 5.

<sup>24</sup>Jane H. Hill, “‘Expert Rhetorics’ in Advocacy for Endangered Languages: Who Is Listening and What Do They Hear?,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2002): 119–33.

<sup>25</sup>Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 73.

<sup>26</sup>Haunani-Kay Trask, “From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii (Monroe,” 1993, 54.

Wayne Yang declare, “Decolonization brings about the repatriation of indigenous land and life.”<sup>27</sup> By connecting Native communities to each other and by bringing about indigenous worldviews, indigenous language are important to this notion of indigenous life. Thus, efforts to bring back or revitalize indigenous languages are an example of decolonization.

Since indigenous languages are seen as part and parcel to concepts of Native identity, resistance to settler colonialism, Native sovereignty, and decolonization, this dissertation contributes to those conversations by showing the work that goes into revitalizing indigenous languages at a grassroots level. While there are an ever-growing number of publications on language revitalization in the field of applied linguistics and socio-linguistics and take up questions about language change and language documentation, there are few publications in the field of Native studies that seek to understand how Native communities are actually bringing about language revitalization for the purposes of decolonization or otherwise. This study is not meant to be exhaustive of all language revitalization movements, rather this study aims to show what it takes to learn, use, and ultimately revitalize indigenous languages in one Native community, Standing Rock.

## Previous Research and Frameworks

Although much has been written about language revitalization since the early 1990s, language revitalization is not a phenomenon that originated in any academic discipline or within the world of scholarly research. According to *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalization*, actions, plans, and activities to revitalize languages first took shape in some communities as early as the 1960s.<sup>28</sup>

As an inherently interdisciplinary phenomenon, scholars in multiple disciplines such as anthropology, linguistics, and education have researched language revitalization. Many, if not most of the scholarly publications on language revitalization are done by practitioner-researchers. These are people who are actually doing the language work, and documenting their progress, their successes, and their lessons learned in line with their commitment to real-world application of their findings. No matter the discipline, the ultimate goal for all of the research on language revitalization is a practical one. We all are asking: How can we do it better?

In the 1990s sociolinguist Joshua Fishman designed a graded classification system for minority language communities. It was called the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale.<sup>29</sup> According to Fishman, one can measure language endangerment based on how well the language is being passed down to new generations. Further, his argument follows, various societal institutions, such as education, commerce, and government help foster intergenerational transmission of the language at home. For example, if the minority language is used and taught in schools, then it is more likely to be used and transferred at home. A language, according to Fishman, is most likely to thrive if it is the language of the official government and higher education. Languages used at the national, regional, and education level, in this system, are considered “safe” and are not at risk of dying out. To increase the vitality of the language, or to

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<sup>27</sup> Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1.

<sup>28</sup> Leanne Hinton, Leena Huss, and Gerald Roche, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalization* (Milton: Routledge, 2018), xxiii.

<sup>29</sup> Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*.

maintain its vitality, language advocates and organizers could design policies and plans to increase the language use in the various domains listed in the GID scale to help facilitate better intergenerational transmission. In other words, Fishman's GIDS provides steps to reverse language shift.

There have been many critiques of Fishman's scale and attempts to modify it.<sup>30</sup> A major critique on behalf of indigenous language revitalization is that many of the world's indigenous languages all fit at the bottom of Fishman's scale; this is particularly true for indigenous language in North America where there are few, or perhaps no, fluent speakers of the language left to help revitalize it. In terms of revitalizing these languages, Fishman's scale does not provide much direction for Native communities. Noting this, Hinton and Hale in their *The Green Book of Language Revitalization* outline nine steps that communities with few or even no speakers can take to reverse the direction of language shift.<sup>31</sup> These steps have more to do with creating more speakers of the language rather than ensuring the language will be the official language of local or national governments. Indeed, it does not quite help to require that government forms be translated into an endangered language if no one could read that language, or, in the case of many Native American languages, if no one could translate them. But creating speakers for a language and ensuring its continued use in the community involves much more than just a series of language lessons. For most Native communities in the United States this means using existing resources, whether those are recordings, transcriptions, archival materials, or speakers of the language still living, to design pathways to language use and language proficiency. Each individual community is unique, however. Each has experienced settler colonialism differently, has suffered different rates of language loss, and has different resources available to it. Therefore, how communities go about language revitalization varies. Nevertheless, indigenous communities continuously share and learn from each other.

Much has been written about the language revitalization movement in Hawaii, for example. In addition to the Maori (indigenous peoples of New Zealand), Native Hawaiians are known to have one of the most successful language revitalization movements so far. Currently Native Hawaiians maintain an infant to Ph.D. level Hawaiian-only education program.<sup>32</sup> One of the official languages of the state of Hawaii is Hawaiian and because of that court proceedings and other governmental activities are done completely in Hawaiian.<sup>33</sup> When you visit certain places in Hawaii –some shops, historical attractions, even the airport –you can easily hear Hawaiian as a language used for both business and everyday speech. While scholars do warn indigenous communities against adopting the Hawaiian language movement's efforts blindly, Hawaiian communities serve as a role model, inspiration, guide and mentor to many indigenous communities in the rest of the United States.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Paul M. Lewis and Gary F. Simons, "Assessing Endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS," *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* 55, no. 2 (2010): 103–20.

<sup>31</sup>Leanne Hinton and Ken Hale, *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice* (ERIC, 2001).

<sup>32</sup>"Starbulletin.Com | News | /2007/01/02/," accessed April 22, 2019, <http://archives.starbulletin.com/2007/01/02/news/story02.html>.

<sup>33</sup>"Hawaiian Language Finds New Prominence in Hawaii's Courts Decades after near Disappearance," accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/hawaiian-language-finds-new-prominence-hawaii-s-courts-decades-after-n851536>.

<sup>34</sup>Andrew Cowell, "The Hawaiian Model of Language Revitalization: Problems of Extension to Mainland Native America," 2012.

Language revitalization, for communities with endangered languages, often involves the complex tasks of figuring out how to write the language, how to teach it, how to expand the language so that it reflects contemporary life, and how to do all of these things so that they reflect the community's values and goals. In other words, language revitalization is a series of complicated actions within the community that are coordinated to increase the use of the target language in that community. The coordination of these actions can be considered language planning. There was an early assumption in the scholarly world that academic, top-down, analysis would be the best way to base language plans.<sup>35</sup> However, as McCarty writes "this top-down, technist approach [to language planning] has been increasingly superseded by more dynamic critical approaches."<sup>36</sup> This dissertation will show that language revitalization often involves learning some from published academic works, more from other indigenous communities doing language work, and most from trial and error in the community. In the United States this involves examining and re-examining a community's traumatic history with colonialism (usually in regard to boarding schools), and as I will argue, an examination of the settler colonial structures that shape language revitalization and other aspects of life today.

## **This Study**

This study examines language revitalization efforts on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, which straddles the U.S. states of North Dakota and South Dakota, and is home to Lakota and Dakota people, who are my relatives. I first visited Standing Rock in 2013 when I participated in an adult summer language program. As an academic dedicated to Lakota/Dakota language revitalization, I wanted to conduct scholarly research that would not only expand thinking about language revitalization in academia, but would also contribute to on-the-ground indigenous language work at Standing Rock and in other communities. With these goals in mind I moved to Standing Rock in 2016. Since very little has been written about language revitalization in Lakota/Dakota country,<sup>37</sup> and since there was no research on language revitalization at Standing Rock, my general ethnographic research question was "what's going on here?"

My main method for learning about language revitalization at Standing Rock was participation and reflection. I moved to Standing Rock in 2016 because I wanted to get a better sense of what the community was doing and what it needed in terms of research. I took a job as Native American Studies faculty at Sitting Bull College where I conducted a feasibility study for and co-designed a NAS bachelor's degree program that was approved by the Higher Learning Commission the following year. While at Sitting Bull College I also took on various other positions, including: Lakota language instruction, substitute in the immersion nest, lead teacher in the immersion nest, grant writer, institutional review board member, baby sitter, and at one point I played the role of "Ignorant girl" in the Lakota Summer Institute production of "Iktomi's

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<sup>35</sup> Teresa L. McCarty, *Language Planning and Policy in Native America: History, Theory, Praxis*, vol. 90 (Multilingual Matters, 2013).

Nancy H. Hornberger, *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas: Language Planning from the Bottom Up*, vol. 75 (Walter de Gruyter, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> McCarty, *Language Planning and Policy in Native America: History, Theory, Praxis*, 90:33.

<sup>37</sup> William H. and Kauano'e Kamana Wilson, "'Mai Loko Mai O Ka 'I'ini: Proceeding from a Dream' The 'Aha Punana Leo Connection in Hawaiian Language Revitalization,'" in *The Green Book of Language Revitalization*, ed. Leanne and Ken Hale Hinton (New York: New York Academic Press, 2001), 147-76.



New Wife,” a trickster tale play in which I got to rehearse with respected elder and Lakota linguist Ben Black Bear. This is all to say that I helped wherever was needed and this allowed me to see different angles of the language revitalization movement in real time. Yet, my experience of the movement was not unlike most other language organizers and activists, as wearing different hats and carrying different sets of responsibilities is typical of those in the movement.

In addition to reflecting on my participation, my method also included taking notes during meetings and conducting open-ended interviews with those involved in language revitalization to some degree or another. Some of these interviews were particularly formal. I sat down with the interviewee at a scheduled time in a particular place, usually a classroom. Most other interviews were conducted informally and took place in the hour-long car rides to Bismarck, or while cleaning up classrooms at the end of the day. Many of my conversations with language advocates, teachers, organizers, and activists took place on weekends or in the evenings when we were actively revising the next language lesson, planning the next language program proposal, or dreaming up what the world will be like when we all speak Lakota.

Most of the people I worked with and learned from at Standing Rock I call “Lakota language organizers.” This is a term I developed to distinguish the work of a language advocate and language teacher. Language organizer is also a term I developed to be more specific than language activist, which is commonly used in linguistics. Florey, Penfield and Tucker broadly define “language activists” as “a person who focuses energetic action towards preserving and promoting linguistic diversity.”<sup>38</sup> Language activists would encompass language advocate, language teacher, language organizer, and even language learner. While language advocate might refer to someone who speaks for the language and language programs in governance or in community settings, a language organizer is one who plans those programs, finds resources for them, and determines where such advocacy is needed. As expected, these positions, as with their terms, overlap: a language advocate maybe a language organizer, or a language teacher, or all three. When quoting and paraphrasing study participants I aim to be as specific as possible and name what role the participant primarily takes on in the language revitalization movement. While there are probably fifty or so adult language activists on Standing Rock, (this means any adult who learns Lakota, teaches Lakota, organizes Lakota programming, or in other ways advocates for the Lakota language), there are about ten language organizers (the numbers shift from season to season). I’ve included formal and informal interviews from 15 people whose work at some point fell in this language organizer category.

I consider myself a language advocate, organizer, teacher, and language learner. Moreover, what is unique about my position in the movement is that I have the privilege to read all the theories and studies about language revitalization and colonialism, and also the time and space to reflect on how these ideas mesh or do not match with what is going on at Standing Rock. I also had the ability to move away from the movement, and still participate. I left North Dakota in 2018 to analyze and write up the results of this study. But I am still involved in grant writing, planning, and some administrative tasks for the language movement.

While language revitalization at its most general refers to activities that aim to increase the presence of a language, language activist and scholar Wesley Leonard used the term more

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<sup>38</sup>Florey, Penfield, and Tucker, “Towards a Framework for Language Activism.” Powerpoint PDF Accessed June 8, 2019.

specifically to refer to the creation of new speakers and domains for an endangered language.<sup>39</sup> Domain here means space or context in which a language is used. Using the term language revitalization this way is the most useful for describing what is happening at Standing Rock, so I adopt Leonard's specific definition. However, in my analysis of what is happening at Standing Rock, I will be paying particular attention to the contexts of the community that shape that community's language movement. I will be considering are the tribal-political factors, the reservation's socio-economic factors, the education resources, as well as the reservation's geography. This kind of analysis is important because language revitalization takes different shapes across different communities. Even though the Oglala and Sičhaŋǵu bands in South Dakota are revitalizing Lakota on their reservations, for examples, the methods they take up and the decisions they make will and should look different from what is happening on Standing Rock. Therefore, for this study my primary focus is what I call *tribal language revitalization*, that is, the creation of new speakers and domains for an endangered tribal language within the specific contexts of that tribal community. In other words, this study asks how is Standing Rock creating new Standing Rock speakers and new domains on the Standing Rock Reservation.

My first chapter introduces Standing Rock, its political, social, and even geographic history. It also gives more background on Lakhótiyapi/Dakhótiyapi, the indigenous language Standing Rock is working to revitalize (there are two varieties on Standing Rock that pronounce the language name differently). Finally, this chapter contextualizes what I call the most recent movement to revitalize indigenous language there by describing previous language preservation and language maintenance efforts that took place over the past two centuries.

Chapter Two then introduces the most recent language revitalization movement by describing and analyzing the tribally-led efforts to revitalize indigenous language instruction in K-12 classrooms. These efforts, while not necessarily producing new speakers of the language, kicked off many of the other projects that comprise the movement. While scholars have noted that language class in existing K-12 education systems is not likely to make significant progress in terms of developing new speakers or new domains for the language, I highlight how these efforts have been critical to Standing Rock's approach to language revitalization which emphasizes improvement in language teaching.

Chapter Three investigates Standing Rock's preschool through fourth grade immersion programs. Inspired by the Hawaiian language nests, Standing Rock opened its Lakota language nest in 2014. In this chapter, I pay particular attention to the labor of the immersion school staff and argue that the difficulty of running and teaching in an immersion program is not adequately understood by some language planners and others in the community who make decisions about the program. We ignore these hardships at our peril, as they tend to burn out our community's most precious resources, our human resources.

Chapter Four continues the discussions of language teaching and of human resources in the language movement by examining adult language-learning programs on the reservation. These efforts include a National Science Foundation-funded project called the Sitting Bull College Lakota Language Capacity Building Initiative, which I directed. Adult programs are essential to language movements because it is the adults who run and make decisions for all other language revitalization projects. However, life on an impoverished rural reservation is fraught with challenges that shape what is possible for adult language projects. This chapter

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<sup>39</sup>Wesley Leonard, "Miami Language Reclamation in the Home: A Case Study" (University of California, Berkeley, 2007), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1c4779gb>. 3

examines how those challenges shape adult programming at Standing Rock and offers a few suggestions in how the tribe can improve and expand their adult language-teaching efforts.

Chapter Five returns to questions of Native self-determination and sovereignty within a settler colonial paradigm when it comes to language revitalization. After describing some findings that pertain to all of Standing Rock's language projects, this chapter puts current notions of Native sovereignty into conversation with what is happening at Standing Rock and concludes that many notions of sovereignty do not thoroughly acknowledge the difficulties of learning and teaching Native language to the point where it can be used in practice. This chapter also argues that language revitalization must also be considered community revitalization, as in many ways one cannot happen without the other.

As an applied study of the actual implementation of language revitalization programs on an Indian reservation, this study offers both best practices and likely problems or areas of difficulty for practitioners working in other Native communities. The participant observation I did put me in the situation of the teacher and the program administrator (often the same person), and thus this research brings to light the challenges language revitalizers face in the actual work they do in this Native community. Therefore, this study is also a community and tribal history that tells the larger story of Standing Rock's struggle to revitalize its language and culture against great odds.

## Chapter 1

### Introducing Standing Rock and Historicizing the Language Movement

This chapter describes the setting for the current language movement at Standing Rock. It provides a brief history of the reservation and the tribe as well as a linguistic overview of Lakhótiyapi/ Dakhótiyapi –the Lakota/Dakota language. The chapter also gives insight to some of the language work –or projects, programs, and policies—that took place before the most recent movement to revitalize Lakota on Standing Rock.

This dissertation is the first attempt at understanding a whole movement or a whole constellation of programs and efforts to revitalize Lakota/ Dakota in a specific community. As the following chapters describe, the success of one language program relies on factors outside that program, including the quality of other language programs. This is why an analysis of one specific effort would not be enough to adequately assess the progress the community has made in terms of language revitalization. Further an analysis of one specific program would not see the various ways different language organizations are and perhaps could be working together to forward language goals. At the same time, an analysis of all Lakota/Dakota language programs and efforts across all of Lakota/Dakota country would be too broad to see the specific ways specific communities work to revitalize their languages. This is not to say that the language revitalization movement at Standing Rock is completely separate from the other Lakota/Dakota work happening in other parts of Lakota Country. It is not. Rather I would like to emphasize that in order to understand tribal language revitalization, that is, creating new speakers and domains for the language in a specific tribal community, we have to understand what daily life is like for that community. In this case, understanding what life is like on a rural impoverished reservation is key to understanding what it's like to revitalize language in that community.

#### Section 1: The Setting

##### The Reservation

Standing Rock is an Indian reservation that lies directly west of the Missouri River and straddles the American states of North Dakota and South Dakota. A reservation is land governed and managed by a federally recognized Native American Tribe.<sup>40</sup> The Standing Rock reservation was once part of the Great Sioux Reservation, as designated by the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1868.<sup>41</sup> Today, the northern boundary of the Standing Rock Reservation lies about 50 miles south of North Dakota's capital city of Bismarck. The southern border of the reservation marks the

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<sup>40</sup>The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is one of over 560 federally recognized Indian tribes in the United States. Not all tribes are federally recognized, however. The fact that Standing Rock *is* federally recognized nevertheless is part of the specific context within this community is working to revitalize its language. For more on federal recognition see: Mark D. Myers, "Federal Recognition of Indian Tribes in the United States," *Stan. L. & Pol'y Rev.* 12 (2001): 271; Rachael Paschal, "The Imprimatur of Recognition: American Indian Tribes and the Federal Acknowledgment Process," *Wash. L. Rev.* 66 (1991): 209.

<sup>41</sup>"History," Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, January 11, 2017, <https://www.standingrock.org/content/history>.

northern border of my tribe’s reservation –Cheyenne River –in South Dakota. Not all of the land within these external boundaries is within Standing Rock’s tribal jurisdiction, however, because of the allotment policies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Allotment broke up tribally controlled land into individual parcels, divvied up those parcels for individual Indians, and sold “surplus” parcels to incoming white settlers. Today, Standing Rock is jurisdictionally “checkerboarded,” meaning some land within the reservation boundaries is not “officially” tribal territory.<sup>42</sup>

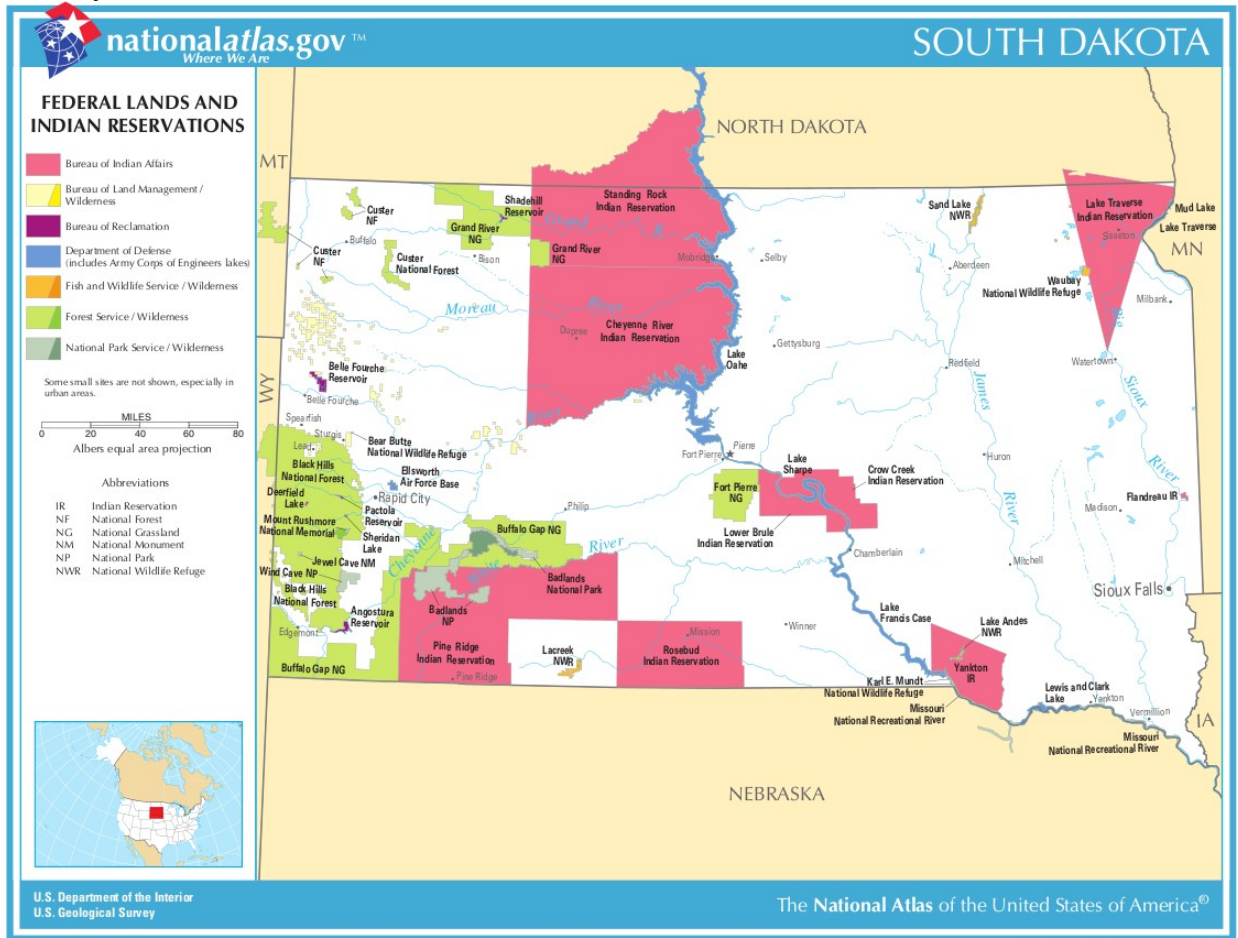


Figure 1: These are the current locations of Očhéthi Šakówiŋ reservation. Standing Rock is the northernmost reservation in red.

Standing Rock is a very rural place. While it is about the size of Puerto Rico, Standing Rock has only about 9,000 residents. Some of these residents live in the reservations two largest towns, Fort Yates, and McLaughlin. Some of these residents live in much smaller, even more rural communities. Many residents live on homesteads away from any communities. They are the small buildings in the middle of ranchlands, corn and sunflower fields, and grassy prairies. The winter snow can begin as early as October and end as late as May. The summers are hot, humid, and windy. A long time ago, the elders tell us, much of Standing Rock was covered in woodland, which provided shade and shelter to the humans, buffalo, and other animals in the

<sup>42</sup>“History.”

area. However, in the 1950s, as part of the Pick-Sloan Plan, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flooded the area, creating a lake, killing the trees, and stripping much of the area of its rich farm-ready top soil.<sup>43</sup> Today most of the reservation is prairie used to run cattle, or in some areas buffalo. Despite the damage caused by the dam and other settler enterprises, Standing Rock is still one of my favorite places to take a drive, as some of the overlooks are breathtaking both in the summer and winter.

## The People

Standing Rock is home to two groups of Očhéthi Šakówiŋ people. The Očhéthi Šakówiŋ (which translates to seven council fires) is the historic confederacy of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota peoples.<sup>44</sup> Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota all mean “allies” in the different language varieties. The Očhéthi Šakówiŋ is comprised of seven peoples who each speak a mutually intelligible variety of Lakhótiyapi (the Lakota language, which if pronounced in a different dialect would be Dakhotiyapi or Dakhótiyapi.) The seven peoples are the Waḥpéthunŋwaŋ, the Sisíthunŋwaŋ, the Iháŋkthunŋwaŋ, the Iháŋkthunŋwaŋna, the Waḥpékute, the Mdewakháŋthunŋwaŋ and the Thíthunŋwaŋ.

Two of these seven, the Thíthunŋwaŋ and Iháŋkthunŋwaŋna, are represented on Standing Rock. Those from the Thíthunŋwaŋ are from two specific Thíthunŋwaŋ subgroups: the Húnkpapha and Sihásapa. For clarity, I am also Thíthunŋwaŋ from the Mnikhówožu and Oglála divisions who reside on the Cheyenne River and Pine Ridge reservations, respectively. In centuries past, the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ made their home on the woodland and prairies from west of the Great Lakes to east of the Rockies, sharing, trading, and warring with other tribes in the area.

Today most Očhéthi Šakówiŋ live on one of the Lakota, Dakota, or Nakota reservations in South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, or Nebraska. Some live in nearby towns or small cities, and many others live in the large urban metropolises they or their parents were

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<sup>43</sup>The flooding in Standing Rock was part of the Garrison Dam. For more on the Pick-Sloan Plan and the devastation caused by such water engineering see: Michael L. Lawson, *Dammed Indians: The Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux, 1944-1980* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (Verso, 2019).

<sup>44</sup>Some written sources and even some Očhéthi Šakówiŋ members claim that the term “Nakota” was erroneously applied to some subgroups. However, some Očhéthi Šakówiŋ members identify as Nakota. It is not my place to say that these members are wrong in identifying as Nakota. However, I will acknowledge that Nakota in this context should not be confused with the Assinaboine Nakota, who speak a related, but different Siouan language to the language of the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ.

relocated to in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>45</sup> The Standing Rock Tribe has about 9,000 members though not all live on the reservation, and not all who live on the reservation are tribal members.<sup>46</sup>

## The Language

Lakhótiyapi belongs to the Siouan language family. (There are 29 language families in North America alone.) Some other languages in the Siouan language family are Crow, Hidatsa, and Winnebago (or Ho Chunk).<sup>47</sup> While these languages are related, they are not mutually intelligible. While some members of the Iǰáŋkthųŋwaŋ and Iǰáŋkthųŋwaŋna identify as Nakota (who speak Nakota), this language variety should not be confused with the Assiniboine Nakota, which is surely a language relative, but is not a mutually intelligible language variety in the way the dialects of the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ are.

There are two dialects (or varieties) of the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ language spoken on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. The Thítųŋwaŋ in the area speak Lakhótiyapi or Northern Lakota, whereas the Iǰáŋkthųŋwaŋna speak Dakhótiyapi or Western Dakota. Even though the names of the language varieties begin with different sounds –a “L” and a “D”, the varieties are still very similar. North Lakota and Western Dakota are more similar to each other than Eastern Dakota and Western Dakota in many respects, even though those two varieties have the same name. As Jan Ulrich points out in the introduction to the *New Lakota Dictionary*, the differences between the varieties are much more than just swapping an “L” sound for a “D” sound in the word.<sup>48</sup> However, the two varieties on Standing Rock are similar enough that –at least at the beginning language levels –both varieties can be taught simultaneously in a class.

Because Western Dakota and Northern Lakota are so similar, I use the term *variety* instead of dialect. This, I hope, helps ease the tension between the Northern Lakota speaking community and the Western Dakota community on Standing Rock. Because there are fewer Iǰáŋkthųŋwaŋna (Dakota) people on the reservation they often express fear that not enough is being done to support the revitalization of their language variety, and that so much more is being done for Lakota than Dakota on the reservation. In some senses, this is true: many of the programs and materials being developed –in name anyway –focus on Lakota. However, the more Dakota people get involved in language revitalization there, the more language organizers develop programs and materials for that language variety. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that a Dakota language learner will get a lot out of a Lakota language class and vice-versa because the varieties are so similar. Coursework can easily be adapted to the other variety

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<sup>45</sup> As part of another plan to terminate Indian tribes, the U.S. government enacted relocation procedures, wherein thousands of Native American youths were relocated to urban areas such as Denver, Oakland, and Los Angeles, and Seattle. This was yet another plan to assimilate Native peoples away from their tribal communities and into mainstream, albeit very poor, American society. Like many plans to terminate Native identities and communities, relocation did not work. Many Native people returned to their tribal communities, and those that did not built up intertribal communities in those urban locations they were relocated to. For more on relocation: Larry W. Burt, “Roots of the Native American Urban Experience: Relocation Policy in the 1950s,” *American Indian Quarterly*, 1986, 85–99.

<sup>46</sup> “Statistics,” Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, January 10, 2017, <https://www.standingrock.org/content/statistics>.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas R. Parks and Robert L. Rankin, “Siouan Languages,” *Handbook of North American Indians* 13, no. Part 1 (2001).

<sup>48</sup> Jan F. Ullrich, *New Lakota Dictionary: Lakhótiyapi-English, English-Lakhótiyapi & Incorporating the Dakota Dialects of Yankton-Yanktonai & Santee-Sisseton* (Lakota Language Consortium Inc, 2008).2-5.

and pronunciation can easily be modified in the classroom. This is especially true in the beginning stages of language learning, before complex grammatical structures that differ according to varieties are introduced. So, in my opinion, and in the opinion of other language organizers on Standing Rock (including Dakota ones) not participating in a language activity because it is focused on Northern Lakota and not Western Dakota or the other way around is not an acceptable reason not to participate. A language learner can get enough exposure and enough practice in the other language variety that will easily transfer to the student's preferred language variety. There is a small sense among language organizers at Standing Rock that too much focus has been placed upon the differences between the two varieties and not on the similarities. After all, fluent Dakota speaking elders and fluent Lakota speaking elders can talk, joke, sing, and pray with each other at any time in their language. This is what it means when linguists say language varieties are mutually intelligible.

Besides controversy over language variety, sometimes the gendered speech in Lakota/Dakota comes up as a significant issue. In the language there are sounds that end a sentence, giving the whole sentence a particular meaning (such as making that sentence a question or a command). These parts of speech are called enclitics. Sometimes these are spoken differently depending on the gender of the speaker. For example the question "what is your name" is often said as "Táku eníčiyapi he" if you identify as a woman, and "Táku eníčiyapi hwo" if you identify as a man. This is not a hard rule and different communities have different ideas about when it is acceptable for a person identifying as a man to say "he" instead of "hwo" to signify a question.

The gendered speech variations cause a few specific issues in language revitalization, particularly in language teaching. First, there are some people (some fluent speakers, some not) who believe only men should teach men and only women should teach women how to speak the language. This is to ensure that the new learner is taught the correct gendered language. While language organizers at Standing Rock understand this point of view, and some might argue that this is the ideal way of teaching, language organizers also recognize that the community does not simply have enough resources (including number of teachers) to have gender-specific language courses.

Another issue that emerges from the prominence of Lakota/Dakota gendered speech is that not all communities agree on the patterns. In other words, the patterns different genders follow are slightly different across families, towns, or reservations. Many fluent speakers, especially those involved with language work at Standing Rock have a more fluid understanding of how these patterns work, namely, fluent speaking men sometimes use "he" to indicate a question, instead of "hwo". However, community members, including some elders, have argued that Standing Rock is teaching gendered patterns wrong and what they are actually doing is teaching men women's speech.

Language teachers often have to navigate this issue in class and often conclude that too much time is spent explaining the differences between men's and women's speech and how different speakers employ those patterns differently, rather than on the aspects of the language that are the same across genders. In other words, language organizers feel that there is a hyper-awareness of gendered speech and that learners are so determined to get it right and speak according to the pattern of their gender that they focus too much of their time and energy on the gendered aspects of the language and not other aspects of the language, like conjugating verbs or saying words in the correct order. This is especially an issue because there is so much you can say in Lakota/Dakota that does not involve any gender endings.



A final issue that this hyper-awareness of gender endings brings to bear in classrooms is the difficulty of teaching specifically binary gender endings to students who do not necessarily identify with either man or woman identities. Lakota/Dakota does not have gendered pronouns, like English, yet the particular expectations of speech in Lakota/Dakota add another yet unique layer to gender norms non-binary students and teachers need to navigate. However, this issue has led and will continue to lead to important discussions of how Lakota/Dakota speakers (new and elderly) understand gender in the Lakota/Dakota language. There is much to discuss regarding gender identities historically and today in Native communities. And there is much to be learned or unlearned. Perhaps some new words or patterns of speech in Lakota/Dakota will be made or new meanings attached to old ones. Time will tell. The important thing to note here, however, is that because gendered speech is such a loud and visible aspect of Lakota/Dakota, it creates issues for teaching and learning that may not exist in other languages.

### **The Tribal Government**

Unlike other movements to revitalize indigenous language, (like in Hawai'i for example) the current movement at Standing Rock is driven in many ways by tribal government, or at the very least by programs and departments that the tribal government supports directly. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is governed by a tribal council, which operates under a constitution approved by that council in 1959.<sup>49</sup> The council consists of a Chairman, Vice Chairman, a Secretary, and fourteen additional councilmen or women who are elected by the members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe who are also residents of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Tribal council elections happen every four years. Since 2006, when, I argue, the most recent movement to revitalize Lakota/Dakota language began, there have been three chairmen of the tribe: Ron His Horse Is Thunder, Dave Archambault II, and the current chairman, Mike Faith. Many, if not most, of the language programs and initiatives described in the following chapters have had to be approved by the tribal council, and the tribe supports some of those programs financially.

### **Life on Standing Rock**

Across the whole reservation there are two grocery stores, which are very expensive and often under stocked. There are no banks. There is no longer a movie theater. In the whole reservation there are about ten places to eat out. I hate to say ten *restaurants* because some of this number includes the delis that are part of gas stations. There is a hotel and casino, owned and operated by the tribe. There are a handful of churches as well. Most activities (outside of work or school and family events) involve rural life: horseback riding, hunting, foraging and gathering and processing plant life. There is also high school basketball in the winter, powwows in the summer, and traditional arts throughout the year. Of course, residents of the reservation enjoy inside activities year-round such as television, video games, social media (mainly on phones), and working out (there is a small tribally-run gym in Fort Yates that is open during business hours). For anything else such as going to the movies, seeing a play, shopping, , or swimming (other than in the summertime river), Standing Rock residents have to drive the 70 miles to

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\*“History.”

Bismarck or, if they live on the southern part of the reservation 50 or so miles to Mobridge, South Dakota.

Many people who work on the reservation actually live in Bismarck. Every weekday at 4:30 pm when most tribal offices and schools close for the day there is always line of cars heading north. A common complaint from Standing Rock residents is that very few of people who work on the reservation stay to hang out or participate in the community outside of work. For many, such a daily commute is not necessarily a choice. For most commuters, this is the only way to live comfortably. Quality housing is very difficult to come by on the reservation, so many have no choice but to commute the 50 or 60 minute drive each way, which is even longer and more dangerous in the wintertime.

It is easy when discussing life on Standing Rock, to focus solely on the negative aspects of the reservation. Like most Indian reservations, Standing Rock faces a high poverty rate, low life expectancy, and housing shortages.<sup>50</sup> Driving around the reservation you are likely to see many beat-up automobiles, dilapidated buildings, unkempt yards, and plenty of stray dogs. I will not deny that these aspects are part of life on the reservation. Rather, I will remind us that these socio-economic barriers on this reservation were built “by design,” as my friend Petra One Hawk described it when I first came to visit Standing Rock. All of the struggles people face on the reservation are systematic results of settler colonialism.<sup>51</sup> What I would like to pay more attention to, however, is the way or ways Standing Rock is seeking to dismantle this settler paradigm, the ways Standing Rock is “redesigning” the reservation so that people who live on it can live happier, healthier lives. The language revitalization efforts at Standing Rock, I argue, are one part of this redesign process.

## Language on Standing Rock

One of the questions often asked about language loss or language revitalization is “how many?” How many people are speaking the language? How many *should* be speaking the language? Answers to these questions are complex and political and may not be as helpful in language revitalization projects as one might think.<sup>52</sup> In these larger questions are questions about what counts as “fluent” in the language. Compared to many other North American indigenous languages, Lakhótiyapi has a sizable population of fluent speakers. The Lakota Language

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<sup>50</sup>The 2018-2022 Comprehensive Economic Strategies lists a number of health issues that impact life on the reservation from low birth weight, high smoking average, obesity, high teen pregnancy, addiction, and a car crash rate that is 5.7 times higher than the North Dakota average. The Comprehensive Economic Strategies links health issues with the cycle of poverty on the reservation stating, “These health issues impact the reservation economy, as poor health contributes to unemployment and underemployment, excessive spending on illness, and overall lack of community wellness.” “2018-2022 Comprehensive Economic Strategy” (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, 2018). 37.

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<sup>52</sup>In her important article “‘Expert Rhetorics’ in Advocacy for Endangered Languages: Who Is Listening and What Do They Hear?” Jane Hill describes the issues with enumeration stating “Thus there is a genuine conflict between the desire of linguists and anthropologists to invoke [...] “trust in numbers” in support of the cause of combating language endangerment and our on-the-ground knowledge of the problematic nature of our analytic units, to say nothing of our understanding of the dangers of enumeration as a gesture of power that contradicts our goals” Jane H. Hill, “‘Expert Rhetorics’ in Advocacy for Endangered Languages: Who Is Listening and What Do They Hear?,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2002): 33.

Consortium, a non-tribal non-profit dedicated to producing Lakota language learning materials (discussed further in the next chapter) says there are about 5,000 fluent Lakota speakers.<sup>53</sup> However, their methods in determining this number have not been disclosed. In 2008, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal department of education conducted its own enumeration study wherein they passed out surveys and had community members self-report Lakota language use in the home. This study estimated about 300 fluent speakers on the Standing Rock at that time.<sup>54</sup> Now, over 10 years later, the tribal language and culture institute (which developed from the original language work starting in 2006) estimates there are just 150 fluent speakers on Standing Rock.<sup>55</sup> Yet, none of these numbers represent or include passive speakers, people who understand the language when spoken, but who have difficulty speaking, what the literature calls “passive speakers.”<sup>56</sup> Growing up with parents or grandparents who spoke the language, but who themselves were forced to speak English most of their lives will create passive speakers. On Standing Rock there may be a whole generation or two of people who would be helpful to the movement with just their memories of the language. But it is difficult to figure out who these people are, let alone encourage them to join the movement.

As discussed in my introduction, Lakota/Dakota language loss, as with other indigenous language in North America, was an intended result of American assimilation policies such as boarding schools and other education projects. It was also a result of economic disenfranchisement. To get a job, and live a better life, many Native peoples had to learn English and taught their children English to help facilitate success in the next generations. The exact point in time wherein Lakhótiyapi/Dakhótiyapi was considered to be declining, dying, or in danger of going extinct is difficult to figure out. Indigenous language loss, as part and parcel of settler colonialism, intensifies over each generation and takes time to settle in. In other words, language shift (or the replacement of one language with another) was not an event that can be marked on a calendar.<sup>57</sup>

When I traveled to Standing Rock in the summer of 2015 to conduct pilot research for this project, I encountered an underlying sense of anxiety among the language organizers, teachers, and advocates I met with. The tribal election season was starting up, and that was the first year no fluent-speaking candidate was elected into tribal council. In fact, no fluent-speaking tribal member even ran for a spot on the council. Among those who cared for the language and knew how important knowing the Lakota/Dakota language was in shaping a speaker’s worldview, there was simultaneously a concern for the language (there are not enough people learning and speaking it), as well as a concern for the Standing Rock nation. In the back of their minds was the question: How can we lead and make decisions for Standing Rock if our council does not know our language?

But not everyone shares the same concerns, or at least, not everyone at Standing Rock recognizes language revitalization as a real need or necessity, in the same way as, say, protecting

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<sup>53</sup>Lakota Language Consortium, “Understanding the Issue,” 2014.

<sup>54</sup>These figures told to me by the Standing Rock Tribal Department of Education

<sup>55</sup>These figures also told to me by the Standing Rock Tribal Department of Education

<sup>56</sup>Charlotte Basham and Ann K. Fathman, “The Latent Speaker: Attaining Adult Fluency in an Endangered Language,” *Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 11, no. 5 (2008).

<sup>57</sup>If we understand forced assimilation to be part and parcel of settler invasion as described by Wolfe, then it would make sense that language shift is not one singular event, but a set of policies, attitudes, and conditions that have been built overtime. As Patrick Wolfe argues, “invasion is a structure not and event” (Wolfe, 388).

the environment, or ensuring reservation schools get the funding they need to stay open. Even though none of the seventeen current tribal council members are fluent speakers, only a couple are avid language learners who participate in various language activities on the reservation. This is not to say that the other tribal council members are neglecting some kind of perceived duty or are in some way not doing their job as council members. Rather, it is to say that there is a lot that a tribal council member needs to do and so many areas of tribal life that need council members' time, energy, and attention, that when most if not all tribal council members agree language revitalization is important, few have the extra time, energy, or resources to allocate to actual language learning. What's more, as the rest of my chapters will describe, Standing Rock is still figuring out the best ways to teach its tribal citizens the language effectively.

The feeling that language revitalization should be, but cannot be, a priority, is ubiquitous across the reservation. During my time living and working on Standing Rock, I would say nearly everyone agreed that the Lakota/Dakota language was important and that Lakota/Dakota language revitalization was necessary. The naysaying in the community came from those individuals who believed language revitalization was impossible, or believed the language was being revitalized in the wrong way, and not that it shouldn't be revitalized at all. However, just like on council, there are relatively few people who are truly dedicated to learning and revitalizing language on their reservation, even though most believe the language is generally important and needs revitalizing.

Indeed, the major obstacle of the new Lakota/Dakota language movement on Standing Rock is recruiting more people to join, more people to learn and use Lakota/Dakota. But getting to the point where enough people have enough competency in the language to have meaningful conversations in it, is difficult. How do we convince regular people on the reservation to participate in language programming? How do we convince regular people on the reservation to put in the time and effort to ever-so-slowly gain proficiency in the language? How do we ensure that our programs are worthwhile? How do we design programs that work? These are the questions Standing Rock and other indigenous communities are facing. While this dissertation may not provide complete answer to these questions, it aims to contribute to that conversation by describing what actions Standing Rock has taken toward language revitalization and to what degree those programs have or are continuing to work out.

## Section 2: Language Work Before 2006

It would, however, be a mistake to think Lakota/Dakota language revitalization began for the first time rather recently. I argue that the current movement to revitalize Lakota/Dakota on Standing Rock began in the mid-2000s. Yet, historically there have been other efforts to secure, or at least maintain the possibility for, intergenerational transfer of the language from both Native and non-Native actors. What is going on today at Standing Rock would look a lot different without the hard work, innovation, and direction of certain individuals and groups who worked directly with the language in the past. This section, therefore, provides an overview of the important historical language work that has shaped the contemporary Lakota/Dakota language revitalization movement in great ways.

### **Missionaries**

Even though missionaries served as another assimilating force in Indian territory, they play an important role in the history of Lakota/Dakota language preservation since they were the first people to set Lakota/Dakota language to an alphabetic script. Because of this Lakota/Dakota

communities can rely on a great deal of language documentation. We have letters, newspapers, transcribed stories, as well as translated bibles and hymnals in Lakota/Dakota. The missionaries, in particular Stephen Riggs and Eugene Buchel, created the first Lakota/Dakota- English dictionaries and even the first grammar books.<sup>58</sup> While linguists and fluent speakers admit the missionaries were not perfect in their translations, their efforts in writing Lakota/Dakota language have preserved it, meaning we have a great amount of material which we can learn from (the same cannot be said for other indigenous languages). If something terrible were to happen, and there were no more fluent speakers of Lakota/Dakota left to help the language movement, I believe, there is still enough documentation of Lakota/Dakota that we could still revive it. This is thanks, in part, to the missionaries who first put our language into alphabetic writing.<sup>59</sup>

## **Ella Cara Deloria**

Probably the most impactful person in regards to Lakota/Dakota language revitalization has been Ella Cara Deloria. Ella Deloria was a Dakota woman who grew up in Wakpala South Dakota on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.<sup>60</sup> She spent decades recording and transcribing Lakota/Dakota elders in collaboration with Fraz Boas.<sup>61</sup> Her books *Dakota Texts* and *Dakota Grammar* are foundational to the Lakota language movement as it continues today.<sup>62</sup> According to Ray Demallie, in his introduction to Deloria's *Dakota Texts*, Deloria "single-handedly created one of the largest and most thorough archives of linguistic and cultural information for any American Indian group."<sup>63</sup> From orthography to commitment to community, language organizers, advocates, and activists have learned a lot from Deloria. She is certainly a community hero in this regard.

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century Linguists**

Building off the work of Ella Deloria and other ethnographers are some influential Siouan linguists. Some of these scholars, moreover, recognized the need for effective teaching materials. In the 1970s David Rood and Allan Taylor published their sequence on Lakota

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<sup>58</sup>Stephen Return Riggs, *Grammar and Dictionary of the Dakota Language: Collected by the Members of the Dakota Mission* (Smithsonian Institution, 1852).

Eugene Buechel, "Lakota Dictionary: Lakota-English/English-Lakota: Comprehensive" (U of Nebraska Press, 2002).

<sup>59</sup>Specifying *alphabetic* writing is important here, as the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, just as many other Native tribes had various forms of writing that are not alphabetic. The Očhéthi Šakówiŋ had winter counts, for example, which recorded historical events over time, albeit, not in alphabetic writing. Saying the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ or other Native peoples "did not have writing" is a notion curated by colonizers seeking to dehumanize Native peoples in order to justify taking their lands. For more on this see: Birgit Brander Rasmussen, *Queequeg's Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature* (Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>60</sup>For clarity, Ella Cara Deloria is the aunt of Vine Deloria, Jr.

<sup>61</sup>Franz Boas and Ella Cara Deloria, *Dakota Grammar*, vol. 23 (Dakota Press, 1941).

<sup>62</sup>Demallie, "Introduction" in *Dakota Texts vii*

language learning through the University of Colorado.<sup>64</sup> Their orthography was based on Ella Deloria's orthography and the books contained grammatical information as well as practice sentences. These books were what I first used to study Lakota at Indiana University under the instruction of Doug Parks, another Siouan linguist.

### **Albert White Hat Sr.**

Albert White Hat Sr. is also an important figure when it comes to Lakota/Dakota language learning and teaching. White Hat published a widely-read book called *Reading and Writing the Lakota Language* in 1999 and was a Lakota language teacher at Sinte Gleska University on the Rosebud Indian Reservation.<sup>65</sup> He was a very prominent language advocate and the writing system he helped develop has been declared the official orthography of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe.<sup>66</sup> One of White Hat's main concerns was that Lakota philosophy be returned to Lakota language. Because of this, much of his book describes philosophical meanings of Lakota speech albeit in English. While the book offers some explanations of Lakota grammar and practice exercises in each section, its main focus is not so much on developing any sort of proficiency in Lakota, rather its purpose is to instill an understanding of Lakota worldview through some examples in the language. White Hat's style of teaching language—where the focus is on teaching Lakota philosophy through examples in Lakota—was probably the most common style of teaching the language until the recent movements, which refocused language teaching on developing proficiency in Lakota language communication.

### **Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities**

Standing Rock also has a tribal college, Sitting Bull College (SBC), which currently enrolls about three hundred students.<sup>67</sup> Importantly, indigenous language preservation (and now revitalization) has always been a mission of the tribal college movement and remains part of SBC's vision.<sup>68</sup> This means that Lakota/Dakota language courses have been taught at the college for decades. The role these courses played and continue to play in the indigenous language movement at Standing Rock today will be discussed in Chapter 4. SBC is a strong force on Standing Rock and in the language revitalization movement and this is due to decades of hard work and progressive leadership.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Alan Taylor and David S Rood, "University of Colorado Lakota Project," *Boulder, Colorado*, 1972.

<sup>65</sup>Albert White Hat and Jael Kampfe, *Reading and Writing the Lakota Language* (University of Utah Press, 1999).

<sup>66</sup>Rosebud Sioux Tribe, "Resolution," 2012–343 § (n.d.).

<sup>67</sup>"Statistics," *Sitting Bull College* (blog), September 23, 2014, <https://sittingbull.edu/statistics/>.

<sup>68</sup>Sitting Bull College's mission states: "Guided by Lakota/Dakota culture, values, and language, Sitting Bull College is committed to building intellectual capital through academic, career and technical education, and promoting economic and social development." "Vision & Mission," *Sitting Bull College* (blog), September 23, 2014, <https://sittingbull.edu/vision-mission/>.

<sup>69</sup>For more on tribally controlled colleges and universities see: "Tribal Colleges: An Introduction" (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1999).; and "Sitting Bull College | Build Your Brighter Future," accessed April 23, 2019, <https://sittingbull.edu/>.

What a community can do in regards to language revitalization depends on what resources are available to that community and what challenges that community faces. Standing Rock faces the challenges of economic disenfranchisement as well as low population and geographic isolation. On the other hand, Standing Rock, as a federally recognized tribe, has a tribal government and an accredited college that have been central to the recent language movement. In the chapters that follow, I tell the stories of three interrelated language projects that demonstrate the limits and possibilities of tribal language revitalization on a rural reservation.

## Chapter 2

### **Improving Lakota/Dakota Language Education in K-12 Institutions**

This chapter examines the ways in which the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe sought to improve Lakota/Dakota language education within the existing K-12 educational institutions within the exterior boundaries of the reservation. While Lakota/Dakota language had been taught, minimally, in these institutions for decades, major efforts to reform language education in this capacity started in 2006. After a description of my methodology for writing this chapter, section 1 describes what K-12 language education was like before the recent efforts to improve it. Section 2 examines the programs and partnerships the tribe developed in order to achieve its goal of developing Lakota/Dakota proficiency in Standing Rock youth and section 3 of this chapter highlights some of the overarching hurdles to these goals. Before concluding, I use section 4 to comment on what it means for a tribe to develop a partnership with a non-tribal organization in order to revitalize its language. While the results of these efforts to improve K-12 language education have not been as great as anticipated, the projects, partners, and programs developed to reach these goals have become the cornerstone of the larger language revitalization movement at Standing Rock that extends beyond the K-12 institutions and out in to the community more widely.

There has been a lot of effort to improve Lakota/Dakota language education at Standing Rock under the assumption that better language classes will increase the number of speakers there. However, success in terms of developing language proficiency has not been as great as expected. Efforts to improve language education started ten years ago, and there are still very few (if any) children in Standing Rock schools who have learned to converse in Lakota/Dakota. The steps taken to improve language education within K-12 schools have, nevertheless, propelled the contemporary language movement forward in significant ways. This chapter will describe the actions language organizers have taken to improve language education within schools, the results of these actions, as well as the obstacles language organizers have faced or continue to face in growing Lakota/Dakota proficiency among Standing Rock youth.

Efforts to improve language education in K-12 grades have included partnerships created among the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Department of Education and the various schools and school districts within the exterior boundaries of the reservation as well as the collaborations among the tribe, Sitting Bull College, and the Lakota Language Consortium, a language non-profit based in Bloomington, Indiana. These efforts have also involved the adoption and use of a new Lakota/Dakota writing system, and the targeted effort to recruit and train Lakota/Dakota language and culture teachers. The work the tribal department of education has undertaken in order to improve language education in schools has been so extensive they have now organized the Standing Rock Language and Culture Institute that makes language and culture education an official aspect of tribal policy and support. Key obstacles and limitations to these efforts have been and continue to be restrictions to tribal sovereignty when it comes to education and a lack of resources, including human resources, both within the institutions or projects implemented as well as across the reservation community itself.



As mentioned in my introduction, I began working with Standing Rock in the summer of 2013. By that time, most of the actions I describe in this chapter, had already taken place. Therefore this chapter, unlike the other chapters in this dissertation, depicts language work that I was not at all involved in. Further, this chapter, more than any other chapter, provides a view of not-so-recent actions and reflections (in hindsight) on those efforts as the passing of time has allowed us to see more clearly the limits and possibilities of language revitalization in a rural reservation community. Indeed, when I met to interview one of my main informants for this chapter in 2018, it had already been eleven years since she first took up her role in the tribal department of education and, as other language organizers on Standing Rock describe, “got the ball rolling” in terms of the contemporary language movement. She has since moved on from that position, first to direct the immersion program (described in chapter 3) and then to work in tribal legal resources. Nevertheless, my interview with her offered not only an opportunity for me to learn about the beginning stages of the language movement, but also an opportunity for her to reflect on all that had been done, and the changes that have taken place in terms of language education over the last decade.

As the previous chapter described, pin pointing exactly when the Lakota/Dakota language revitalization movement began can be difficult. It certainly depends on how you define Lakota language revitalization. If we understand language revitalization at Standing Rock to be those efforts that aim to restore the language to the community, we are able to highlight a key point in time that kick started the current movement at Standing Rock. That point is in October 2006 when Sacheen White Tail Cross started working at the tribal department of education on Standing Rock.

In her role as tribal education manager, Sacheen was able to facilitate a relationship between the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and a non-profit called the Lakota Language Consortium (LLC), which proved to be very beneficial (to both entities). This is an example of a tribal government reaching out to a linguistic organization for help in reversing the language shift. It is also an example of the tribe collaborating closely with school districts to make reservation-wide change in Lakota/Dakota language education. Much of this work, however, focused on Lakota/Dakota language as it involved language and culture classes within the school day. These efforts in the K-12 system thus far, after 10 years, have made great change. Yet this change is not as great or as effective as originally anticipated. It has not generated, for example, a cohort of proficient, or even, intermediate Lakota/Dakota language children at the elementary or high school levels. I argue that this is due to many factors that stem from outside the language and culture classroom, outside the schools themselves, and outside the control of the tribal government. These include limited understanding at the administrative level of what is necessary to effectively teach language, lack of out of classroom support for language, and economic factors that impact childrens’ learning in all subjects. Nevertheless, at the end of the chapter I point out that these efforts taken up at the K-12 school systems have produced much needed change in other areas of language revitalization that have become the center of a growing language revitalization movement across the Standing Rock community at large.

I had the chance to interview Sacheen in January 2018. Sacheen was gracious enough to fill me in on how everything started.

Before Sacheen first came on the scene, Lakota/Dakota language education was not developing much language competency in students.<sup>70</sup> If a person were lucky enough to have

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<sup>70</sup>While the 1980s saw a rise of bilingual education programs in some Native communities, the language organizers I worked with were not aware of any such program at Standing Rock. For more on indigenous

some sort of language education in every grade, they could consider themselves “fluent”- but only when it came to identifying numbers, colors, animals, and what some call the “Powwow Princess Speech.” The Powwow Princess Speech is the very formal introduction many language teachers have their students memorize. In English, it goes something like this: “My name is Tasha. It’s nice to meet you all. I’m from Cheyenne River, and I live in California. Thank you.” We call it the Powwow Princess Speech because young girls, when competing for titles at local powwows, are required to introduce themselves and they seem to always use this same formula or some version of it. They also memorize the speech and recite it so fast that it’s clear they don’t know where certain sentences end and others begin. The speech also never alters, signaling that contestants don’t know enough of what they are saying in order to change it to better fit their mood, situation, or what they really want to say. Further, students who recite a Powwow Princess introduction often do not recognize the questions that correspond to their statements. For example, a student might recite “My name is Tasha, I live in California” but they won’t recognize the questions “What is your name?” or “Where do you live?”

Teaching students how to properly introduce themselves in a formal setting is important in helping to cultivate a sense of personal and tribal identity as well as developing in students awareness of Lakota/Dakota values and protocol. Among the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, people often identify others not only by their name, but where they come from. In formal settings, it’s important to identify yourself with your common name as well as your Lakota/Dakota name (if you have one). Students are encouraged to learn their Lakota/Dakota names and use them in their introductions. Teaching these formal introductions thus helps connect students to Lakota/Dakota society in a way other class subjects cannot and offers a way for teachers to make Lakota/Dakota language and culture a personal aspect of the students’ lives. Nevertheless, the ubiquity of the “Powwow Princess Speech” (wherein young people smash sentences together and seem to not understand what they are saying) demonstrates that the focus has been on the ability for students to “perform” language (and culture) rather than on demonstrating students’ abilities to understand and *use* language. (This is a common issue in much of language assessment, as I will describe later in this chapter in relation to the language competitions.) If a student could recite their introduction and correctly identify Lakota/Dakota animals, numbers, and colors, they were considered successful language students. But such skills are not helpful in carrying a conversation with a fluent speaker or in using the language throughout the day –activities that are necessary to restore a language in a community. It seems that by the time Sacheen began meeting with schools about Lakota/Dakota language and culture education, most teachers recognized this, and were looking for ways to improve their classes.

So, when Sacheen took the position as tribal education manager, she set up meetings with school administrators across campus the reservation. This included state and BIA schools in two states (North Dakota and South Dakota) as well as the private catholic school located in Fort Yates. Despite neither party knowing how to proceed on the “how do we improve language education in our schools” front, Sacheen and the school leaders were able to identify two critical issues language programs were facing. The first was that none of the language and culture teachers had any training in teaching Lakota/Dakota language teaching. The second was that no school had any kind of curriculum or scope and sequence or a pool of language-teaching materials to work from.

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bilingual programs during this period see: Stephen May, *Indigenous Community-Based Education* (Multilingual Matters, 1999).

The fact that there are few, if any Lakota/Dakota language textbooks and none geared towards teaching children is relatively easy to understand. There are many things we teach children in schools that don't necessarily have textbooks. Music, Art, Physical Education are three subjects I remember learning in school with no textbooks. Textbooks are not necessary to teach language, although, as I describe below, they can be extremely helpful. What might be more difficult to understand, however, was that the concept of teaching Lakota/Dakota in the classroom was entirely new to everyone involved –the teachers, the administrators, the students, and of course, to Sacheen.

Until this point, to be a Lakota/Dakota language and culture teacher required only being a fluent speaker and passing the necessary background checks. Since most of the people who had any proficiency in the language were first-language speakers of the language, they were often elders and did not have any teaching degrees or certifications. In order to recruit more Lakota/Dakota language and culture teachers to fill the open positions in the schools, the Eminent Scholar Certification program was developed. The eminent scholar certification is a credential endorsed by the departments of instruction in both North Dakota and South Dakota. Earning the certificate allowed you to teach Lakota/Dakota language and culture in the school systems legally under North Dakota, South Dakota, and tribal law. To get the certification you just had to demonstrate fluency (determined by the tribe or an entity entrusted by the tribe to determine fluency), and take one course in teaching methods. However, knowing how to speak a language doesn't ensure that you can teach it. And one course in general teaching methods won't necessarily help you learn to teach your native language.

Most of the people who had taken up jobs as language and culture teachers, therefore, were fluent speakers and had learned to speak Lakota/Dakota as a first language or as a second language at a very early age. They had learned in immersive environments where context, non-verbal cues, and everyday repetition helped them gain understanding and use of the language. These fluent speakers, while being our Lakota/Dakota language experts, did not have any experience learning the language the way they were expected to teach it –in a classroom, with 20 or so students, teaching only a bit over time, and at the most only one hour a day, over just nine months in a year. Further, few if any fluent speakers had any training in the components of the Lakota/Dakota language itself. They had no Lakota/Dakota grammar course, so describing how the language works is also something they had not been trained in or, most likely, even been given the opportunity to think about. Imagine trying to teach English to someone without relying on the grammar classes you took as a kid. How do you describe a pronoun without using the term “pronoun” or “noun” even? How do you describe why we say “I play” and not “I plays?” The importance of understanding and being able to explain Lakota/Dakota grammatical structure is doubly important because Lakota/Dakota is so unlike other languages commonly taught in American schools (German, French, Spanish). Lakota/Dakota does not even use pronouns, for example. Rather, it has particular ways to conjugate every verb to create specific meanings (similar to aspects of Spanish). Fluent speakers are aware that “I play” in Lakota/Dakota is “waškáte” but they may not be able to explain that adding “wa” is just one way to conjugate verbs and that different groups of verbs conjugate according to different sets of rules. English grammar and Lakota/Dakota grammar are similar when it comes to nouns, numbers, and (in some respects) colors. But Lakota/Dakota verbs, conjugation, sentence structure, how you formulate a question, how you tell time and so many other things differ greatly. In order to teach Lakota/Dakota the way mainstream institutions teach French or German, teachers would have to have a good grammatical knowledge of the language. Before the recent movement in improving

Lakota/Dakota language education, few fluent speakers were able to describe Lakota/Dakota grammar effectively. Identifying the grammar of the language was what linguists were able to do for our language. (Ella Deloria is one of those linguists who helped with this process.)

It's important to recognize that you can certainly teach or pass on language without knowing how a language breaks down in particular grammar terms. This happens every day in all languages. However, this kind of knowledge of a language is incredibly important when trying to teach the language in a non-“natural” setting, like a school classroom. Being aware and being able to use these patterns are how we'd expect a middle school or high school student learning the language to start forming their own statements and questions and glean meaning from spoken Lakota/Dakota. So it's no wonder that teachers were simply teaching numbers, colors, and animals, since teaching aspects of Lakota/Dakota language like grammar, are difficult to explain (or even be aware of if you're a fluent speaker), let alone teach.

Fluent speakers might also not be aware of the different stages of language learning and the different ways students learn. For example, some teachers might put great emphasis on ensuring students are so accurate in pronunciation and gender endings that they encourage students to simply memorize speech (as we saw with the Powwow Princess Speech). I believe, since the language has been such a target for colonial assimilation practices, there is a lot of pressure for Lakota/Dakota language learners to speak correctly at all times. However, what fluent speakers sometimes do not recognize is that making mistakes is necessary for increasing language proficiency and that different students will struggle with different aspects of the language at different times.

Other languages taught in schools today have decades if not centuries of language curriculum writing and rewriting that teachers can rely on. There are whole departments at universities dedicated to developing effective K-12 language teachers in some languages. This is not the case for indigenous languages. The most elementary designing of curriculum for Lakota began in no earlier than the 1970s, and curriculum designing for children began in the late 1990s. This is all to say that comparing Lakota/Dakota language education to French or Spanish education is not a very useful comparison because they are not on the same level in terms of instructional development. But in terms of rapidity of progress, compared to French or Spanish education, what's going on for Lakota/Dakota language education is most impressive. Because of the hard work of language organizers, teachers, linguists, and fluent speakers on Standing Rock and in other areas of Lakota/Dakota Makóčhe, Lakota/Dakota language courses clearly have the potential to be just as effective as the best French and Spanish courses in US K-12 institutions.

School administrators and the tribal department of education believe in this potential. At first they contemplated gathering resources to create their own Lakota/Dakota language curriculum and trainings. The issue was that nobody knew how to do that or where to begin. As Sacheen told me “this is where the LLC (Lakota Language Consortium) comes in.” Despite some important tension, Sacheen and others at the tribe were able to facilitate a very productive working relationship with the LLC that proved to make a central catalyst for the Lakota/Dakota language movement at Standing Rock.

## Section 2: Actions to improve K-12 Language Education at Standing Rock

### **Working with the Lakota Language Consortium**

When Sacheen and the LLC first made contact, the LLC had already created two levels of Lakota language curriculum designed specifically for the K-12 schools (described below). Sacheen and Jay Taken Alive, a fluent speaking elder who was serving as chair of the Housing, Education, and Welfare committee within the tribal council, were able to convince tribal council to support an official relationship with LLC wherein LLC would provide training and support for the K-12 schools on the reservation, the LLC would further develop their curriculum and other language learning materials, and the tribe would support them financially and purchase those materials- specifically the *Speak Lakota* books for students in schools on the reservation.

Council wasn't giving overwhelming support to the idea at first. There was some contention with working with and thus endorsing the LLC because they were a non-Lakota organization, and further, the Oglala community in South Dakota had said they had a bad experience working with them. Ever since the Arizona State-Havasupai DNA fiasco tribes have understandably been very activist about intellectual property.<sup>71</sup> The details of the contention between the LLC and organizations with the Oglala are murky at best and will not be described in this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council was not in overwhelming support for working with the LLC. Sacheen credits Jay Taken Alive for getting council to agree to the relationship. Jay was the chair of the Housing, Education, and Welfare committee, whom Sacheen had to go through to get to council. She says that Jay thought about the situation in a way similar to hers. Jay and Sacheen both wanted language to be taught in schools and knew schools needed curriculum. "We had to go with whatever we had," Sacheen told me, "and that was the LLC."

## Orthography

One of the biggest changes that language organizers at Standing Rock had to take up was adopting a new writing system. Or, better, adopting *the* new writing system that the Lakota Language Consortium was using. They had been developing it and making materials with it for nearly a decade. As I described in Chapter One, Lakota/Dakota has been written for nearly 200 years. Language and culture teachers had been using whichever writing system they had been taught (if they were even taught to write Lakota/Dakota at all). But the writing systems used were not consistent from teacher to teacher, so a student might learn to read some Lakota/Dakota in middle school using one system, but need to learn a completely new system when they get to high school. This was disrupting any chance of actual language development in many students. Further, every teacher on Standing Rock was in need of language teaching materials, curriculum, and an idea of what should be taught when. The Lakota Language Consortium was one of the only organizations developing such resources, and they were doing it with a new orthography.

Thus, language organizers at Standing Rock helped adopt the new orthography, but not without pushback. There were, and there still are, many fluent speakers who don't accept the new writing system. And there are some who continue to work in language education and who use the LLC materials, but don't write in the orthography. (These are usually fluent speaker/elders who are very much in the habit of writing the way they learned way back when.) Yet one of the greatest pushbacks against the orthography has had more to do with an understanding of power within the language movement. The Lakota Language Consortium has named the writing system it uses the Standard Lakota Orthography. This orthography originates

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<sup>71</sup>Nanibba' A Garrison, "Genomic Justice for Native Americans: Impact of the Havasupai Case on Genetic Research," *Sci Technol Human Values* 38, no. 2 (2013): 201–23.

in the work of Dakota linguist Ella Deloria, and has been worked and reworked by various linguists since.<sup>72</sup> While the LLC has argued (rightly so) that this writing system is the most effective in teaching new learners the pronunciation of Lakota sounds, the LLC's ambition to standardize a writing system across Lakota/Dakota country by simply calling it the "Standard Lakota Orthography" has backfired a little. Many people new to the language movement at Standing Rock have been put off by the notion of a standard way of writing Lakota/Dakota, especially one that is unlike any of the systems the elders use. They are particularly wary of one that appears to be developed by white outsiders and would require a fair amount of study for even a fluent speaker to use. Importantly, language organizers at Standing Rock rarely refer to this writing system as the "standard Lakota orthography" but simply call it "SLO." This is not simply to save time. Many organizers do not approve of a top-down approach to language revitalization, as calling one writing system the "standard" seems to suggest. One of my colleagues Courtney Yellowfat refuses to see the orthography as standard, but also recognizes the implications of having a "standard" orthography at all. He is highly aware of how political Lakota/Dakota language learning is and so when asked "What does SLO stand for?" he simply cracks a smile and says "suggested Lakota orthography." By renaming the SLO in this way, Yellowfat and others simultaneously resist a top down approach to language revitalization while also keeping the focus on language learning. The orthography is not perfect, however. And we've run into some difficulties with it in developing college level reading/writing courses. I will discuss those issues in Chapter Four on Adult Language Development.

## Dictionaries

The relationship between LLC and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and others helped produce the New Lakota Dictionary, written by Czech linguist Jan Ulrich in consultation with Ben Black Bear Jr. and other fluent speaking Lakota elders.<sup>73</sup> The second edition of the New Lakota Dictionary includes 23,000 words; the 1,000 and 2,000 most common words are demarcated to help guide self-learners, and nearly every entry has a series of example sentences from audio or written recorded data. It also includes a grammar section to help learners formulate more complex sentences. The entries include various possible verb forms, as well as identifications of dialect differences where applicable.

Probably the most useful product the LLC has created has been the mobile version of the dictionary. In fact, it is my most used application on my iPhone. Besides the grammar section, the mobile application has everything the written form of the dictionary has. In addition, it has a search function wherein you can type a word in English or Lakota. This is so useful when you need a specific term or when you need a different verb form or need to know how a specific verb conjugates. Making the dictionary mobile has helped me and other language learners carry the language with us every day. My colleagues and I use the app while teaching, when texting each other, when doing our own language studying, or when we are simply curious about how to say something in Lakota in our everyday lives. It is not a mobile translator, so it still has the limitations of a dictionary. For complicated sentences/phrases we still need to check with more advanced learners/ fluent speakers. But I would still argue that the mobile dictionary application

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<sup>72</sup>Ullrich, *New Lakota Dictionary: Lakhótiyapi-English, English-Lakhótiyapi & Incorporating the Dakota Dialects of Yankton-Yanktonai & Santee-Sisseton*, 18–19.

<sup>73</sup>Ullrich, *New Lakota Dictionary: Lakhótiyapi-English, English-Lakhótiyapi & Incorporating the Dakota Dialects of Yankton-Yanktonai & Santee-Sisseton*.

has been one of the most helpful materials in making Lakota language learning an everyday activity for me and many others, which is what you need when you are trying to not simply learn a language, but make that language part of your life and part of your community.

### **Speak Lakota! Workbooks**

The main project the LLC undertook to help Lakota language revitalization was the development of Lakota language textbooks/workbooks to be used in language classrooms. This series of books is called “Lakhótiya Wóglaka Po!” or “Speak Lakota!”<sup>74</sup> Eventually this series will contain sixteen workbooks designed to help teach Lakota/Dakota language in a classroom setting to children. Each workbook contains not only useful images and diagrams to represent the language, but also small amounts of text designed for each level of learner. Designed to foster communicative-based language development, these workbooks not only provide materials for teachers to work from, they also organize language learning into different stages throughout the book and throughout the series. In other words, students are guaranteed to gain more and more proficiency in the Lakota/Dakota language as they progress through each workbook and as they progress through the series. So far the LLC has produced six of these textbooks. This series is important because it organized Lakota language learning into the easiest steps. It has developed a scope and sequence for language learning/teaching at the elementary, middle, and high school level. The books are also useful for adults, too. Along with these books the LLC has developed supplementary materials including flashcards, worksheets, and other things that can be used to teach language in the classroom.

### **Teacher Trainings**

While many teachers accepted the way of teaching Lakota/Dakota that Sacheen was promoting, there were still considerable hurdles. Just as the tribal office of education was offering trainings in Lakota/Dakota language teaching, schools were recognizing that their teachers, many of whom only had eminent scholar certificates and therefore little or no training in pedagogy in general, needed basic training in classroom management, lesson organization, special education and other not-language-specific skills. In Sacheen’s words, she and her team had “opened a can of worms” by offering to train teachers. So the tribal education office also started offering some workshops in classroom management and other needed areas, but often a single workshop cannot compare to the series of courses and guided practice that one gets in a college-level-education program. There are some teachers, however, who just have the knack for teaching, and the workshops proved really helpful for them. However, not all Language and Cultures teachers, particularly those who were already fluent Lakota speakers, bought into what Sacheen and her team were providing. As Sacheen puts it “Some teachers were like, ‘Yay, we have curriculum,’ while others were like ‘I know it all; don’t tell me how to teach my language.’” This demonstrates an unexpected, if unfortunate form of micropolitics, or dynamics between individuals that impact the community. The Lakota/Dakota language has never been taught this way before, and it would be unrealistic to expect all speakers and teachers to adopt these new methods without pushback.

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<sup>74</sup>Lakota Language Consortium, *Level 1 Lakota Language Textbook*, Lakhótiya Wóglaka Po! Speak Lakota! (Bloomington Indiana: Lakota Language Consortium, 2004).

## **Lakota Summer Institute**

One of the most influential institutions to come out of the LLC and SRST relationship was the Lakota Summer Institute (LSI). To create LSI the LLC and SRST came together with Sitting Bull College. I will discuss Sitting Bull College and its role in the language movement in depth in Chapter Four. In terms of improving language education in K-12 institutions, SBC became one of the primary locations for language and culture teacher trainings. In its beginning, the Lakota Summer Institute had only 20 or so participants. The courses it covered were mainly Lakota Teaching Methods. The partnership with SBC opened up the possibility for teachers who participated in LSI to earn continuing education credits and eventually college credits which would count for the teachers' certifications or re-certifications. Chapter Four will describe how LSI grew into one of the driving forces in the language movement today. For K-12 language and culture teachers, LSI served as a place to get training in best techniques to use the "Speak Lakota" classroom materials. It also served as a place for all language and culture teachers to come together and share ideas, opinions, and experiences. In some senses, LSI was and continues to be Standing Rock's language teaching convention.

## **Lakota Language Education Action Program**

In 2010 the SRST, the U.S. Department of Education, Sitting Bull College, The University of South Dakota and the LLC collaborated to develop the Lakota language education action program or LLEAP. This program, not only developed important Lakota language teaching courses (from those developed for LSI), it also funded tribal members to participate through scholarships and opened up a pathway for people to become Language and culture teachers at K-12 schools on the reservations. LLEAP was a one- to two-year program designed to train people from Lakota communities in effective Lakota language teaching techniques. The U.S. Department of Education would then pay for students' tuition and other expenses that would help them stay in the program. Students were then required to teach Lakota in reservation schools/programs for the same amount of time they received funding or they would need to pay that money back.

In terms of developing language and culture teachers at K-12 schools, the program helped some. About fifteen students participated in the program and got jobs or continued their jobs at schools on or around the Lakota/Dakota country. These included Courtney Yellowfat, mentioned earlier who is a middle school teacher, and Tipiziwin Tolman, who was one of the first Lakota immersion teachers on Standing Rock.

In retrospect the program focused on teaching how to teach the Lakota/Dakota language and not necessarily on teaching the Lakota language itself (although many learned more Lakota/Dakota through learning how to teach it). Few of the participants were proficient speakers to begin with, and the classes didn't necessarily focus on developing proficiency in students. It also didn't include instruction on classroom management, lesson planning, and/or pedagogical theory that teachers generally understand before they take teaching jobs. Participants in LLEAP have thus had to look outside the program (either in other programs at SBC or USD, or from mentors at their schools themselves) for resources and training in these seemingly basic areas of teacher training.

## **Cooperation with Schools**



The tribal department of education worked to ensure that all schools on the reservation (or within the exterior boundaries of the reservation) would continue to invest in language and culture classes. Toward that end, the tribe executed agreements with every school wherein the tribe would purchase “Speak Lakota” textbooks and other materials for the students in the school if the schools sent their teachers to the Lakota Summer Institute and other trainings and meetings throughout the year. An example of this agreement can be found in my appendix.

These agreements not only ensured that each school had the materials and trainings needed to improve their education programs; it also ensured that language was taught more consistently across the reservation. Before these efforts, it was not guaranteed that every school had a language and culture teacher or class. The director of the tribal education department informed me that not all schools even had a language and culture teacher, or that one teacher might have been responsible for teaching all grades in three or four schools instead of teaching just three or four grades in one school. Today, generally speaking, every school has a language and culture teacher. Some have two teachers. And in theory every student gets some language education every year. The amount and in what time frames vary from school to school. Whether the time students are usually given is even enough to develop language effectively is a major question that I will take up later in this chapter. What’s important to recognize now, however, is that Sacheen and the tribal department of education’s leadership in organizing the language teachers has been key in making language education a concern for the tribe, the individual schools, and for many of the students and their families.

### **Wóksape and Language Assessment**

Since 2012 the Standing Rock Tribal Education department has facilitated the Lakota/Dakota language and culture “bowls” or competitions called Wóksape. These competitions seek to involve all students in Elementary, Middle and High School. However, normally, Language and culture teachers put together a team or two, and those teams compete against others in their age group. As the director of the Standing Rock Language and Culture Institute (which developed out of Sacheen’s position within the tribal education department) Sunshine Carlow, who currently runs the program, argues that it is important to have a place to honor those who are succeeding or at the very least a place so that students can have fun with the language. The language bowls get parents and community members involved, as the competition judges are often community members who do language work outside of schools. There’s an official competition packet. Having the bowl, Sunshine argues, encourages and incites children to learn and gives the Language and culture teachers an endpoint to reach.

The language packets, for the most part, are single word based, vocab identification. There isn’t a grammar component, or even sentence completion component at any level of the competition. Further the point system is so exact that much time is used to deliberate points over single-word answers. (In my observation, some students, parents, and teachers appeared to care more about points than how much students are learning the language, which is understandable enough.) The bowl format corresponds with a larger network of Lakota/Dakota language learners, as winners of the Standing Rock competition are invited to compete at Lakota Nation Invitational in Rapid City. Because it is part of this larger competition network, it is harder to change the format. Also making it more difficult is that it has been going on for many years and students, teachers, and parents have become used to how the competition works now.

## Section 3: Overarching Hurdles

### Assessment

The question of how to reformat the language bowl highlights an even larger issue with Lakota/Dakota language learning. How can we evaluate student progress? How can we measure student proficiency in language at any given time? What things, what aspects of language use, should we look for? And how does what we look for change over grade level, over supposed language course level, or method of teaching used? For example, do we design language assessments for language and culture classes that are different than those designed for students in immersion schools? Currently, there is one evaluation tool that exists. It was designed by the Lakota Language Consortium to assess student learning that coincides with the “Speak Lakota!” series. The language and culture institute collects the data and says the data shows improvement to a point. Not much is done with this data. It is online, and it cannot capture students’ oral input. It is also the same test every year.

The lack of quality assessment *is a clearly an issue of lack of resources*, but also speaks to the complexity of building a practical system to evaluate student progress in teaching the language in a school-classroom model. In other words, resources, the actual current teaching methods and outcomes, and the assessment system are all sides of a single complex challenge. If teaching and learning are about vocabulary lists, the assessment system is not likely to measure how well a program enhances the ability to form sentences; thus practice and assessment reinforce each other. Given the resources problem, the jump to really-effective classroom language education, like that of French or German in the United States, is difficult to conceive, let alone implement on a reservation-wide scale.

### Time in Class

Another key struggle Sacheen and her team sought to overcome was the amount of time language and culture teachers have to spend with their students on learning Lakota. Schools didn’t and still do not give teachers enough time to effectively teach the language. A big part of this has to do with restrictions on student learning time due to Common Core education policies. School systems on the reservation need to do well on common core test scores in order to receive the funding that they need to stay open. This means more and more time is allocated the content on the test: Math and English, and less and less time can be allocated to the other subjects, including Lakota language. When Sacheen started in 2006, students in some schools were getting less than an hour a week. I’m not sure if this has changed significantly. Some students got maybe 30 minutes a day, but it was only for a half of a semester. In some schools, students are asked to choose between taking Lakota or other “special” subjects like music, as is the case in one school. Because in most cases either the federal government, the states’ governments, or the church control the schools by incentivizing or requiring particular curricula, the tribe or the school boards do not have much say in how much time gets allocated to Lakota/Dakota language learning and therefore do not have much control over the efficacy of their language programming in schools.

### Language versus Culture in Classroom

Issues with time, however, are not restricted to the number of minutes a student can spend in a Lakota/Dakota language and culture class. Often times, actual Lakota/Dakota language instruction, such as grammar lessons and conversation practice, competes with the other components the teachers are expected (or feel like they should) be teaching. At every school the space for teaching language is also the space for teaching Lakota/Dakota culture. One could, and many have, argued that teachers should teach language and culture at the same time. However it is important to recognize that Lakota/Dakota culture, history, protocol tradition (and all the other things Language and Cultures teachers feel like they should be describing) cannot be effectively explained in the Lakota language to a K-12 audience. It's all explained in English because the teachers (even the fluent ones) feel that it's more important that students understand the particular aspects of their culture and identity, rather than be able to say those things.

Learning about Lakota/Dakota kinship systems provides a good example of this. We have a different word for every single type of way you can relate to someone in our language. This is important because in traditional Lakota/Dakota society everybody had a particular way of relating to everybody else. This meant that they were expected to treat certain relatives in particular ways. These kinship behaviors governed traditional Lakota/Dakota society; it was the kinship institution around which our governments and ceremonies revolved. It helped keep everyone safe and accountable. Using proper kinship terms to address someone or to refer to someone let the community know if you were behaving in an appropriate way or not.

Now if a fluent speaker or even a highly proficient speaker wanted to, they could explain all of that in Lakota in better and more detail. But only another fluent or proficient speaker would understand that, not a beginning learner (which is most of our community). Because the *content* is considered what's important, fluent speaker teachers often share these concepts and supporting stories, sayings or songs in English since they do not have the time to both teach the students the language and the content. The Lakota/Dakota language is not the only way to access Lakota/Dakota culture; English seems to work just fine for a lot of Lakota/Dakota culture. Learning Lakota/Dakota is, however, a key to a deeper understanding of the culture. For example, many people on Standing Rock know the general meanings of Lakota/Dakota ceremony songs. However, they are not sure what the particular words mean, or how those words are being used to describe the specific actions of the ceremonies. Knowing the language brings to light these things, and thus helps people connect on a different level to the songs and to the ceremonies. Knowing the language is also a key to the giant archive of written texts and audio recordings available in the archives; and importantly, it's also a way to get to know fluent speakers who are still living in our communities in the language that they grew up learning and speaking with their elders. Nevertheless, because there is so much *cultural* content language and culture teachers need teach in the little time they have, there is not enough time for effective language teaching.

## **Graduation Rates**

Finally, the high school graduation rate on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation is as low as fourteen percent in some schools.<sup>75</sup> It is important to recognize that issues such as chronic underfunding of schools, limited transportation, the traumatic history of Native education, difficult family and home life, and poverty in general make it difficult for anyone to succeed in

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<sup>75</sup>Hall, Ronald; Brian Wilkerson. 2013. 2013-2017 Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Comprehensive Economic Strategy. p37.

K-12 education institutes as they function today. Thus, when it comes to language restoration, we must recognize Language and Culture courses will face the same limitations that all the other areas of K-12 education face in a rural reservation community.

#### Section 4: Relationship with Lakota Language Consortium

Before making any concluding remarks on Standing Rock's efforts to improve Lakota/Dakota language education in K-12 schools, I'd like to return to the working relationship between the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Lakota Language Consortium. People have made an argument against the LLC saying things like: "They are making money off our language" or "They are trying to sell our language back to us." While this is true in some senses (the directors of the program do make their livings selling their services to tribes and tribal institutions), they are not "selling Lakota language." Instead they are simply selling instruction in how to teach Lakota/Dakota, how to develop Lakota/Dakota language proficiency, in a time and place where language immersion can't be found. There are tons of linguistic work that has been done and still needs to be done to help second-language learners pick up and use Lakota/Dakota and this has inspired folks at Standing Rock to learn more about this linguistic process, as I'll show in Chapter Four. Because of this, I believe it is more useful to understand the relationship between Standing Rock and the LLC not as a partnership, where both entities carry equal weight and decision-making power, but as a contractor and client exchange. The LLC provides services to the tribe that the tribe pays for, not because no one else will ever be capable of providing those services, but because the LLC already had a useful thing going and it would not have been in the best interest of the tribe to spend eight, ten, or 20 years trying to create what the LLC already had. In other words, it would have been a serious waste of time to "reinvent the wheel" so to speak. Tribal governments, indeed, all governments contract outside businesses and organizations to help run their programs all the time. Therefore, I think it is important to reiterate that the SRST *chose* to work with the LLC despite all of the (perhaps valid) arguments against them, because it was what the tribe and what the language needed at the time.

Although the official working relationship between LLC and SRST has ended, such a relationship has made significant positive change in regards to language revitalization in multiple aspects. Although I describe the LLC mostly in this chapter on work in K-12 schools, it's important to acknowledge their role in all recent aspects of language revitalization. What is key is not that the LLC brought Lakota language to the people; rather, they showed Lakota people how the language works--from the perspective of teaching and learning it--and some good ways to teach it.

The LLC has produced invaluable materials for our language movement. This is not to say that without them we wouldn't have a language movement. It is to recognize that these allies have dedicated their lives and their careers to helping Lakota/Dakota people. Nevertheless, non-Lakota/Dakota people or non-Lakota/Dakota organizations, especially those based outside of Lakota/Dakota country can only *support* a language movement. They cannot start one up or direct it. Only Lakota/Dakota people can revitalize and restore the language to our communities. Language revitalization is an embodied practice, where our bodies hear and speak the language every day. It is our bodies that are key in this process. Our bodies are what is key in Lakota/Dakota tribal language revitalization. A non-Lakota/Dakota or a non-Native person/ body may learn and use Lakota/Dakota but in doing so they do not do the same political work that a Lakota/Dakota person does when they speak Lakota/Dakota. The non-Lakota/Dakota body has not been subject to all the things that have defined the Lakota/Dakota experience since 1492. In this sense we cannot see the LLC or other non-Lakota/Dakota allies who have significantly

helped our language movement as some sort of language heroes. In the last century, there have been dozens and dozens of mostly white (mostly male) people who have learned Lakota/Dakota. This is not a miracle; rather, it is *part of settler colonialism itself* as most of these people were missionaries, government officials, or linguists/anthropologists who have come to collect and analyze our stories, culture, and language away from us. The real miracle now, where the real hard work is, is having Lakota/Dakota people learn and use our language.

The LLC argues on their website that effective language teaching in the classroom over the course of a child's schooling can develop high levels of proficiency in the target language. I do not argue with this notion, and I believe it could one-day be possible for our Lakota language. The LLC has expanded their model of creating curriculum for K-12 classrooms to organize The Language Conservancy (TLC). TLC is also based in Bloomington, Indiana and develops dictionaries and textbooks for many other indigenous languages in the United States, including Hidatsa, Crow, Arikara, and Osage, just to name a few.<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusion

It seems Standing Rock community members were under the impression that "fixing" language and culture instruction in schools through better materials and teacher training would develop a critical mass of fluent speaking young adults. This does not seem to be the case. I am not suggesting any kind of trickery from the LLC. Rather, I believe at the time they started few people were aware of the other obstacles language and culture teachers faces that could not be alleviated by teaching courses and textbooks. Native communities looking to restore their language through improving K-12 language education (either through TLC or some other program) should take Standing Rock's experience into account. Communities looking to improve language education must be realistic when calculating the skills of their teachers, the quality of the schools, their control over the schools, and the experiences of the students when they are outside of school. It seems until Standing Rock and other Native communities can have better access to resources all around, the full potential of quality K-12 language education cannot be realized.

I do not see the efforts to improve K-12 language education to be without value. Rather, they simply did not, and perhaps cannot, produce the kind of language proficiency in children that we had originally hoped. Nevertheless, these actions have made significant impact on the growth of the Lakota/Dakota language movement as a whole. As my next two chapters will explain, the efforts to improve language instruction for children in schools have ignited at least two other areas of language programming central to the language movement at Standing Rock. First, these efforts brought critical language acquisition knowledge and technologies to Standing Rock that were intended to be used in K-12 language and culture classrooms but have become the driving force in the development of Lakota language proficiency in adults. I examine these initiatives and their importance for language restoration in Chapter 4.

Second, as I described, language organizers have encountered major hurdles in the form of state and federal education regulations, particularly in terms of the number of minutes that a school can provide language instruction. In response to these restrictions language organizers on Standing Rock began looking for ways to increase language proficiency outside of the K-12 schools, in a space where the tribe and the advocates for the language could have more control. The tribe thus began researching and grant writing for the Lakhól'iyapi Wahohpi –the Lakota

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<sup>76</sup>“Home,” The Language Conservancy, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.languageconservancy.org/>.

Language Nest –as a means to assert tribal and community sovereignty over their language revitalization movement as well as over their children’s education. My next chapter explores this program, its expansion, and its role in the restoration of language to the Standing Rock community.

## Chapter 3

### Standing Rock's Immersion Programming

This chapter examines the Lakhól'iyapi Wahóŋpi and Wičhákini Owáyawa, two projects that make up Standing Rock's Lakota/Dakota immersion program. The tribe adopted the goal of immersion because of wide recognition that this method of language teaching was the best way for children to learn the language, based on the successes the Maori and Hawaiian communities have seen. The program however has been struggling since its opening, and the immersion program has not seen the kind of success the Hawaiian immersion programs saw in their first years. While linguistic anthropologist Andrew Cowell argues that the Hawaiian model of language revitalization, or immersion, has been difficult to implement in the continental United States for a variety of reasons including history of writing and community language ideology,<sup>77</sup> my chapter demonstrates that a dearth of resources, particularly human resources, is the major hurdle for the immersion program at Standing Rock. I demonstrate this by detailing the labor of immersion school staff and others involved in keeping the program going.

I gathered data for this chapter through interviews and participant observation, including teaching in the immersion program itself. The first section of this chapter will give an overview of the program and how and why it started, how it grew, and the major staff changes. The second section will discuss how the work of indigenous-language immersion teachers differs from mainstream teachers, and even immersion educators who work in more-dominant languages. This will provide better insight as to why Standing Rock immersion staff often experience burn out. The third section of this chapter will discuss some of the intellectual, philosophical, and linguistic issues the immersion leadership team and staff face when designing curriculum. The fourth and fifth sections discuss how this workload is recognized (or not recognized) in the salaries of immersion staff and how the intense workload has then been compounded due, in some part, to the struggles of program evaluation. Standing Rock's immersion program is the most ambitious aspect of Lakota/Dakota language revitalization on the reservation and while it continues to face great struggles, it has also played a central role in garnering support of the Lakota/Dakota language in the reservation community and elsewhere.

#### Section 1: The Story (so far) of Standing Rock's Immersion Program

In 2007 when the tribal department of education realized that their efforts to change language education at the K-12 level would not make the difference they thought it would, Chairman Ron His Horse is Thunder suggested Sacheen Whitetail Cross, the tribal education manager at the time, to look into immersion schools. In regards to K-12 language work, the tribe was realizing they did not have the control over K-12 education to require the necessary time in language learning. But by opening up a new school, particularly a language school, the tribe could be in control of how much Lakota/Dakota language instruction was offered each student every day. At this time, the tribe believed an immersion school would be the best method to achieve their goals of intergenerational transfer of language. Many indigenous language organizations advocate for indigenous language immersion education, or indigenous language medium education, wherein all aspects of a child's formal education are taught in the endangered language. Immersion education helps revitalize threatened languages because it keeps the

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<sup>77</sup>Andrew Cowell, "The Hawaiian Model of Language Revitalization: Problems of Extension to Mainland Native America," 2012.

language in use all day, as opposed to just a half-hour or an hour a day (or week) as in the K-12 institutions.

The immersion school phenomenon in regards to indigenous language revitalization started outside the United States. In 1981, the Maori language revitalization movement in what is now called New Zealand began their first language immersion program for pre-school aged children. They called this program the Kohanga Reo, or Maori language nest.<sup>78</sup> Inspired by the Maori, then, Hawaiian language activists in 1983 opened up its own immersion preschool and eventually more preschools known as Pūnana Leo, Hawaiian language nests.<sup>79</sup> The Hawaiian language revitalization movement, including its immersion systems, has been very successful, producing cohorts of fluent speakers of the Hawaiian language each year. As Leanne Hinton notes, “Of all languages indigenous to what is now the United States, Hawaiian represents the flagship of language recovery, and serves as a model and a symbol of hope to other endangered languages.”<sup>80</sup> Standing Rock and other communities in the continental United States have also been inspired by the success of the Hawaiian language and are attempting to follow in the footsteps of the Hawaiian and Maori language movements by opening their own immersion programs. Standing Rock therefore opened its Lakhóliyapi Wahoŋpi (Lakota language nest) in 2012 and expanded to include a Kindergarten-and-up immersion school called Wičhákini Owáyawa (New Life for the People School) in 2014. The two programs together began the 2018-2019 school year with about twenty students spanning pre-school to 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

While the Lakota/Dakota language program has been in operation since 2012, it does not seem to be “taking off” like the immersion nests and programs in Hawaii. Indeed, the program in North Dakota has been struggling quite a bit. This chapter will describe the every-day success and challenges of the Lakota/Dakota language immersion program at Standing Rock as a means to identify the limits and possibilities of immersion for indigenous communities, especially those on rural reservations.

To ease administrative labor of the proposed school, planners of the immersion program designed it as a project of Sitting Bull College. This means that the program’s director and all other staff working in immersion are considered employees of SBC and must follow guidelines and expectations of the college. Every other month or so, the director of the program holds a meeting with the immersion program leadership team. The leadership team consists of immersion program staff, parents of children in the school, the directors and managers from the department of tribal education, and the president and vice president of Sitting Bull College.

When I taught, in the Fall of 2017, the school was set up like this: there were two school-rooms –one for preschool and the other for kindergarten through third grade. The preschool room had about fourteen students and the other room had about nine students. Each room had at least one fluent speaker and another teacher (usually an L2 or second language learner, someone who had learned the language or is learning the language in their adolescence or adulthood). While I had been a substitute and a teacher’s aide in the immersion school before, I had no intention of becoming an immersion school-teacher permanently. Instead, I took a part-time position in the immersion program because the adult language program I was directing (discussed in chapter 4) had recruited three of those people scheduled to teach in the immersion program. We worked things out between the immersion school and the adult program so that while the L2s were in

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<sup>78</sup>6/13/19 9:56 AM

<sup>79</sup>“Aha Punana Leo | Aha Punana Leo,” accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.ahapunanaleo.org/>.

<sup>80</sup>Leanne Hinton, “An Introduction to the Hawaiian Language,” in *The Green Book of Language Revitalization*, ed. Leanne and Ken Hale Hinton (New York: New York Academic Press, 2001), 129–31.



their language courses, I would take over teaching Wičhákini Owáyawa. Then after lunch, the other teachers would take up their positions since their language classes were finished for the day.

I worked in the older students' classroom with a fluent speaking elder whose name is Mike. Lalá Mike, as we called him, is a wonderful elder who has spent his entire adult life in education as a teacher, principal, and administrator (all in English of course). He often expressed his excitement to be able to teach in Lakota/Dakota, although, as I will describe later in this chapter, he did not always stick to the no English rule. In the preschool were Lalá Tom Redbird and Uŋčǐ Grace Drascovich, both fluent speaking elders. Uŋčǐ Grace had just joined the team in Fall 2017. She has experience working with children and is good at creating fun, educational activities for the youngest students. Lalá Tom had been in the immersion program since its first day. He has been one of the most supportive elders and attends nearly all the language events in the community.

In the afternoons, three L2s from the adult language-learning program joined the Immersion classrooms, and I was relieved to take on my other duties at Sitting Bull College. The three L2s were Betty Archambault, Ray Taken Alive, and Althea Fox. Ray and Betty were new to the program, but Althea had been assisting the previous Wičhákini Owáyawa teacher since the Spring. By January 2018, the program found another L2 teacher to take my place. His name is Blaze Starkey and had been doing language work in the community since 2013. With Blaze's help, I was able to return to Berkeley to write up the results of my dissertation research.

The unconventional immersion school schedule, where the teachers change after lunch, was a challenge for the school, but an even greater challenge was the fact that besides Lalá Tom and Lalá Mike, everyone mentioned above was new to the school or new to their positions. This was because in Summer 2017 the main teacher in the preschool and the main teacher in Wičhákini Owáyawa (who were a married couple) left their positions because they were moving to a different state. Ti Tolman (the Wičhákini Owáyawa teacher) had joined the school two years earlier as the program opened its second classroom. While Ti had learned the language at an early age, he would not consider himself fluent, but an L2 in that he was still learning how to express complex ideas in the language. Tipiziwin Tolman had been with the immersion program since its planning stages. Back then, she says, she did not know very much Lakota/Dakota at all. It is through teaching in the preschool, courses at LLEAP and at LSI (discussed further in chapter 4), and practicing with Ti (whom she met at LSI) that she developed the proficiency that she builds on today.

The main reason the Tolmans left the program (and the reservation) is so that Tipi (and later Ti) could go to graduate school. However, in their interviews with me they also discussed a few other things that influenced their decision to move. One was childcare: the couple had two small children and finding safe, local, and affordable childcare while they were teaching at the immersion school was difficult, and at times impossible. Indeed, the times that I took up my role as a substitute in the preschool were when Tipi had to stay home with her children because they couldn't find a babysitter. Childcare, I have learned, is a great issue when it comes to adult language education (discussed further in chapters 4 and 5).

Another reason the Tolmans gave for leaving was the lack of positive opportunity for their older children. The reservation, as a rural, impoverished area, does not have the same opportunities for adolescents as a big city or town does. Tipi cited music lessons and athletics as two things her children could be more involved in, if they moved elsewhere.

Finally, although both Ti and Tipi expressed great love and admiration for the immersion program, they also revealed that they were both seriously burnt-out with the physical, mental, and emotional labor the program required of them. The rest of this chapter will discuss that labor, but it is important to say that had Ti and Tipi never left, and new people, including myself come to take their place, or had Ti and Tipi chosen to just “suffer in silence,” and not discuss the difficult tasks they had to take on, I and others who care about this program may not have known the specifics, the kinds of hard work, and the challenges of what keeps an immersion program running. No one had ever run a Lakota/Dakota immersion program on Standing Rock before. The team at the immersion program is truly grateful for all the hard work Ti and Tipi have put into the immersion program so far, and we wish them good luck in their next endeavors. We are also very grateful to them for expressing what it has been like for them as immersion teachers. There is a great tendency in the immersion program circuit to discuss immersion as a constantly positive experience, one with a few ups and downs but something that a little hard work can pull off.<sup>81</sup> However, speaking with Ti and Tipi and then trying to fill their shoes (or at least one shoe) as a part-time immersion teacher has helped me to see that not just running an immersion program, but simply teaching in an immersion program is extremely challenging. Many people in the community and in the academy, even those who fully support language revitalization and immersion education, do not recognize these challenges. It is my goal, therefore, in this chapter to illustrate these hurdles to quality immersion education, not as a means to dissuade anyone from pursuing an immersion goal, but to acknowledge the particularly difficult areas so that communities may be better prepared for them and so that other scholars, researchers, planners, and leaders may join the current immersion team at Standing Rock in overcoming them.

## Section 2: The Labor of Indigenous Immersion Educators

Before getting into an analysis of the day-to-day tasks that make up Standing Rock’s immersion program, I would like to describe more fully what an immersion school is, how such a program differs from a “regular” school, and how an indigenous language immersion school differs from a heritage language immersion school. The basic purpose of an immersion school is to provide an environment steeped in a non-dominant language of that particular society, so that its students will learn that non-dominant language (or target language). Immersion schools tend to use the target language as a medium to teach particular lessons (such as math, science, art, history) in congruency with “regular” schools (mainstream public or private schools) as well as target language grammar lessons and other things that help students understand and use the target language better. Key to most immersion schools is that the dominant language (that is, English in the U.S.) may never be used in front of the students.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>See, for example, National Headquarters First Nations Development Institute 2432 Main Street, 2nd Floor Longmont, and Suite I.-230 Albuquerque, “Native Language Immersion Initiative | First Nations Development Institute,” accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.firstnations.org/projects/native-language-immersion-initiative/>.

<sup>82</sup>For more on immersion schools in general, see J Cummins, “Immersion Education for Hte Millennium: What Have We Learned from 30 Years of Research on Second Language Immersion?,” in *Learning through Two Languages: Research and Practice*, Second Katoh Gkauen International Symposium on Immersion and Bilingual Education (Japan: Katoh Gakuen, 1998), 34–47.

One point I would like to clarify is that an immersion classroom does not only, or not simply, use the target language as the medium of education. In other words, if you were to record an expert immersion teacher giving a math lesson, it would look vastly different than a “regular” school teacher giving the same lesson. The difference is not simply that one teacher uses the target language and the other uses English. The difference is that the immersion teacher uses the subject of the lesson to also teach the *language of that lesson*. An immersion teacher, therefore, uses much more language than the regular teacher. In one sense, the immersion teacher will use more phrases per minute than the “regular” teacher. The immersion teacher will also use many more methods of communication, such as gesturing, picture drawing, and acting to ensure the students understand both the concept of the math lesson as well as the language of it. In this way immersion school teachers are relying on two sets of skills to teach and are in some ways doing double the work: they are both math *and* language teachers. In an interview Tipiziwin repeated what her first immersion instructor told her: you must *drown* the students in the language; meaning, you need to totally *immerse* them in the target language.

Because immersion teachers need to adequately address teaching the non-language content and the language of the particular lesson, an immersion teacher needs to gather props, pre-think gestures, and maybe even practice acting out particular scenes or concepts just to deliver a lesson. Further, in designing the sequence of lessons over a year, or even over a day, a teacher must ensure that students are acquainted with all the language necessary to learn a new concept or term. In an immersion methods training, we were told that a student needs to understand eighty percent of what is being said to be able to follow.<sup>83</sup> Therefore a teacher must plan out and scaffold lessons that ensure students know at least eighty percent of the vocabulary being used when adding new terms or concepts.

Because immersion schools are working in non-dominant languages, teachers cannot rely on student language acquisition outside of class. In other words, where a teacher at a regular school can assume their students have a certain amount of English proficiency and that proficiency grows over time, even when the student is out of the classroom, an immersion teacher must deal with the fact that their students only develop proficiency when in the classroom. The teacher cannot count on an outside environment to teach students new vocabulary or even to reinforce vocabulary already learned. Whereas regular school-teachers cite that the summer break might hinder a student’s progress in school subjects (like math or reading), immersion teachers cite that the summer break hinders a student’s ability to understand the very language used to teach those subjects.<sup>84</sup> If the dominant language in a student’s environment is English, then summer break can only increase a student’s ability to express themselves in English. As students get older and experience new things, they learn new ways of communicating in English. When the target language is not continuously used over summer break, students will lose some of that language ability, and immersion school teachers will need to quickly build that language back up first, in order to then re-teach the subject lessons that were lost over the summer.

These are just a few of the ways immersion education work differs from “regular” education work. What I’ve said above applies to most immersion schools in general. In other words, the difficulties above represent the challenges of an immersion school whether that school

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<sup>83</sup>This was shared with us in an immersion school training with staff from the Ojibwe immersion school, Waadookodaading. For more on this school visit their website: “Waadookodaading |,” accessed April 23, 2019, <http://www.waadookodaading.org/>.

<sup>84</sup>interview with Ti tolman

aims to develop student proficiency in Ojibwe, Lakota, Spanish, or Mandarin –all are non-dominant, minority languages in the United States. But indigenous immersion programs face different challenges, making a comparison among immersion schools in general (across minority language programs) difficult and rather useless, because the challenges that most indigenous immersion schools face are so great. These challenges are then compounded on a rural reservation, like Standing Rock, where the poverty rate is so high, and the number of people willing and able to teach or help in the school is so low. Below I outline some specific challenges of indigenous-language immersion schools that I suspect are common among all indigenous immersion programs currently in the United States, excluding those in Hawaii.<sup>85</sup>

The first challenge has to do with resources in a classroom. Teachers at commonly-taught minority language immersion programs (like Spanish, Mandarin, or French) can rely on a wealth of classroom materials and plans to engage students. For example, somewhere out there in the world (i.e. China) there exists a school that teaches in Mandarin. A Mandarin immersion program in the U.S. can rely on existing plans and classroom resources to design curriculum for the class and create classroom activities. In addition, there exists a wealth of materials made precisely for Mandarin language acquisition (for all ages) that a Mandarin immersion program can rely on in designing the best ways to teach language. So, in theory, the task of a Mandarin immersion school teacher is to put together curriculum and lesson plans using existing education materials as well as existing age-appropriate cultural materials that might engage students in exciting ways (such as Mandarin language cartoons, games, children’s books, toys). For some languages there is also a growing body of research on the acquisition of that language, which can help teachers best design curricula and classroom activities.<sup>86</sup> For some languages there exists multiple useful trainings, just for teaching that particular language.<sup>87</sup> These trainings can help teachers prepare for the work described above.

For many indigenous language programs, including the one at Standing Rock, the situation is quite different. No school subject (with the exception of reading) has ever been taught in Lakota/Dakota.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, there is not a wealth of Lakota/Dakota math or science or reading materials teachers can use in their classrooms. There is not a whole history of effective Lakota/Dakota language teaching, nor research on Lakota/Dakota language acquisition the programs can look to for guidance. Nor, until recently, has there been age-appropriate cultural materials teachers can work with. The “Speak Lakota” books (discussed in chapter 2) also cannot be used directly in the immersion classroom, since they use English to teach Lakota. Importantly, there is not another country where Lakota/Dakota is flourishing. This means that teachers cannot pull contemporary materials and materials in new mediums (like TV, toys, etc.) for use in their classroom.

Because of language loss, and the fact that Lakota/Dakota was never used as a medium of school education, there simply isn’t a body of teaching materials teachers and program designers

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<sup>85</sup>Hawaiian immersion schools, however, probably faced similar issues when they were first starting out. {Citation}

<sup>86</sup>In the case of Mandarin see: Tara Williams Fortune, “What the Research Says about Immersion,” in *Chinese Language Learning in the Early Grades: A Handbook of Resources for Best Practices for Mandarin Immersion*, 2012, 9–13.

<sup>87</sup>See for instance the American Council for Teaching Foreign Languages website: [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org).

<sup>88</sup>Mission schools used L/Dakota to teach students first how to read (in general) and then how to read in English. This was done in order to teach them how to read/learn English. Reading Lakota/Dakota in this sense was only a step in the assimilation process.

can draw from. So what do immersion teachers do? They make stuff. Nearly all the materials used in the classroom, and used to design class plans are made by immersion school staff. This is a particularly time-consuming and sometimes difficult process. Any book that uses English must be translated, and the Lakota/Dakota translation must be pasted on top of the English text. Worksheets are often painstakingly translated or created from scratch. As I will explain later when discussing school standards, the process of translating existing material is often very difficult. When it comes to finding activities for the classroom, the immersion school teachers often create their own. The point, for now, however, is that compared to more commonly taught languages, indigenous languages are at a major disadvantage when it comes to having materials to use in the immersion classroom.

Another area of difficulty is the capacity of the immersion teachers themselves. The reason for the existence of indigenous immersion schools in the United States is to build a critical mass of young indigenous language speakers that can restart the intergenerational transfer of those languages. The intergenerational transfer of our languages has been disrupted, meaning there is a generation or two of indigenous people who do not necessarily know how to use (and therefore how to pass on) their languages. I would say there are at least two generations between those who grew up speaking Lakota/Dakota on Standing Rock, and the children at the school, since most of our fluent speakers are over the age of 60. This means that the working-age generations, those whom you'd expect to hire as teachers, don't have the language and must be taught the language. In Chapter 4 I will discuss more about the tribe's efforts to grow the working-age population of proficient speakers. For now, I'd like to elaborate on what this kind of disruption means for immersion school-teachers and the immersion programs in general.

Ideally, whoever is leading the activities in the immersion classroom will be pretty proficient in the language. For many communities opening or wanting to open immersion programs there are few who could fill these kinds of positions. At Standing Rock, original planners figured, if the L2 main teacher continued to learn and if the fluent speaker were present in the classroom, there should be enough correct Lakota/Dakota used to effectively teach the preschool. This is not what happened. I know this because I, too, was recruited to teach in the immersion program, and I am not that proficient of a speaker. When the instructors do not know the language, the classroom simultaneously becomes a learning environment for the students and a practice environment for the teacher. The work a still-learning L2 has to do to prep for class then increases. They have to not only prepare the lessons (as described above) they have to teach themselves the language needed for that activity. This can take a great deal of time and energy and can only really be done outside of class time as most L2s take a translanguage approach (using English to help explain the Lakota/Dakota) to language learning.<sup>89</sup> L2s might take classes as part of their paid hours, but most of the language-for-the-day preparation happens outside of the work-day and is thus, unpaid.

All the new language that a L2 learns must be checked by a fluent speaker. And sometimes, especially when describing more modern terms, the L2 must meet with at least one, but preferably two fluent speakers so that they can come up with a new term together, if the existing learning materials do not have one. For example, someone who speaks Lakota from down south would use a different word to describe motorcycle than someone who speaks Lakota from up north. At other times, the existing materials, like the dictionary, have one term that the fluent speakers do not agree with. This has caused some L2s to re-learn new terms (and to re-

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<sup>89</sup>Patricia L Jonietz, "Trans-Language Learners: A New Terminology for International Schools," *The International Schools Journal*, 1994, 41.

make materials used in the classrooms) when one of the fluent speaking elders does not agree with the term. This process still happens in programs where the teaching staff is more or less proficient in the target language. At Standing Rock, where the teachers have varying levels of proficiency (but most of them not that high), this process of learning is the norm and takes a great deal of time and energy.

So in comparison to “regular” school-teachers, immersion school teachers seem to do double the work. In addition, to be effective, indigenous immersion school teachers (who are often not fluent speakers themselves) have to learn the language needed for the class, and build materials for the class, which is sometimes triple or quadruple the work of “regular” school-teachers. At a program like the Lakhól’iyapi Wahóhpi and Wičhákini Owáyawa, the teachers, staff, and program director also have to deal with the pressures and challenges of running a small program. Factors like the constant stress of trying to find funding, working out disagreements between staff and parents, and dealing with student behavioral issues and student special needs are all pressures larger education institutions are able to distribute across a larger team of educators and administrators. At the immersion program at Standing Rock, however, everyone must take on multiple roles, as the school is so small. Finally, all of this workload is compounded on a rural reservation, where everyday life can be a struggle.

### Section 3: Deciding What to Teach

The vision for the immersion school was to help transfer language to the youngest population as young as two years old. (The organizers of the school requested that all students be potty-trained to lessen the burden on the school’s staff during the day.) The idea is that you can use the structure of school to teach children through the language. You use the target language, in this case, Lakota, as the medium through which various age-appropriate lessons are taught. As I described above, it takes a lot of work to prepare a lesson and teach it in an indigenous immersion program. As this section will explain, it takes a great deal of time, energy, and collaboration to simply decide what these lessons are. A great issue for the program is deciding and designing what those lessons would (could or should) be, and from that the kind of Lakota/Dakota-medium education the students would receive on the whole. The program learned from experience that these decisions carry more weight as the immersion school expanded into the older grades.

An important discussion or debate among parents and teachers was the extent to which the program should follow existing state and federal standards for K-12 education. On one hand, some of the leadership team thought the program should mimic the existing K-12 institutions and follow state standards while also including some cultural lessons (all in Lakota/Dakota, of course). Others argued for a more radical approach to education, saying a more place- and project-based style of education, one centered on Lakota/Dakota culture, would be better for the students (again all in Lakota/Dakota language, of course). The benefits of following state standards are twofold: first, students who transition out of the immersion program and into the English schools would be at a comparable level of academic development to their new classmates. Next, following existing standards would make it easier to eventually merge with an existing school, or (once the student assessment piece was figured out) the immersion program could become accredited and get state funding. (Currently, parents list their children as home-schooled and write-in the immersion program as their child’s proxy home-school teacher). Following state standards also eased parents’ concerns that their child would not get into college

or would not be as prepared for the real world compared to the English speaking schools. It is worth mentioning that in my experience at parent meetings and in working with parents that there was never a worry about their child not knowing how to speak English, only that their child not receive the lessons that other children receive in the surrounding schools.

Those arguing for a more cultural-centered approach to immersion education argued that in the already existing educational institutions on the reservation, students were not getting prepared for college or the real world that well anyway. Therefore, a cultural-centered school was definitely going to be superior because it would create a loving, child-focused atmosphere that the other institutions did not necessarily provide. Further, this side more or less argued, that what counts as a standard in English schools is determined by white society and the whole goal of the immersion program was to raise Lakota/Dakota kids. In later years, different immersion program staff came up with examples of a compromise –a way in which different cultural lessons could address a specific state standard and vice-versa. However, what all of these arguments failed to recognize is how much time and resources it takes to design and prepare any type of lesson, especially for a staff so limited in their skills in education and in the Lakota/Dakota language. What the parents and staff can do for the students is ultimately limited by what the school can do. Sometimes this refers to what the language itself can do and sometimes this refers to the limitations of the resources at the school. These parameters fall into three categories: the state-standards themselves, cultural expectations for each grade, and uncertainty around reading and writing.

### **Using Existing Standards**

In regards to some state standards, the immersion team has found that it is not as easy as just translating curriculum to meet that standard from English to Lakota/Dakota. In fact, trying to do just that has highlighted some important differences in the way English works differently than Lakota/Dakota. For example, one of the state standards for second grade is understanding the concept of cause and effect. This state standard is difficult to translate into Lakota/Dakota for a few reasons.<sup>90</sup> First, there is no Lakota/Dakota word for “cause” or one for “effect.” In such a verb-based language, the practice of identifying the cause of something else, or the effect of a particular event is difficult because just asking that question is difficult. Instead of asking “what caused the chokecherries to dry,” you would ask “what (or more specifically, *who*, as I’ll explain later) dried the chokecherries.” In this case the various materials available to teachers teaching this lesson would be difficult because the language works differently. Our community could make up a neologism for “cause” and “effect,” but doing so would be inconsistent with how our language works.

Another reason simply translating this particular state standard is difficult, is because Lakota/Dakota worldview understands agency differently. Lakota/Dakota uses a causative affix (the general term for prefixes, suffixes, and infixes) on its verbs to indicate if the subject allowed or caused a certain state to an object, but that causative affix can only be used when there is an animate agent (a person, spirit, or animal), and only on certain verbs. For example, “Bob dried the chokecherries” could have an easy translation into Lakota/Dakota: “Bob čhaŋphá kiŋ pusyé.” Here, the cause of the drying is Bob and the verb meaning “to dry them” is “pusyé.” However, in English you could say, “The sun dried the chokecherries,” but you could not express quite the same thing in Lakota/Dakota. In Lakota/Dakota you could say: “Čhaŋphá kiŋ amášte

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<sup>90</sup>This was explained to us in a grammar lesson taught by linguist Jan Ullrich.

čha puspúze,” which literally means “The sun was shining on the chokecherries so they dried.” But you would never use the causative affix to try to say that the sun did the action of drying the chokecherries. In the Lakota/Dakota worldview the sun does not have that kind of agency. Now, if Bob put the cherries in the sun, you could say that Bob dried the cherries: “Bob čhaŋpá kiŋ tħaŋkál égnakiŋ na pusyé,” meaning “Bob set the chokecherries outside and dried them.” Because of these differences in the languages themselves, and the worldview they represent, translating already existing standards, and already existing worksheets (like ones used in mainstream schools to teach cause and effect) is not really that useful in an immersion program.

In some cases, the Lakota/Dakota language highlights a different understanding of responsibility for one’s actions. For example, in English you can say “the medicine made my stomach hurt.” This literal translation in Lakota/Dakota would not sound right to a fluent speaker. Rather, “Pħežúta waŋ wáta čha thezí mayázaŋ,” meaning: “I took a pill, and now my stomach hurts” would sound better. The pill cannot be the cause of the stomach ache, *I* am the cause of my stomach ache, I took the pill. In the case of Lakota/Dakota cause and effect must also involve a discussion of agency, which is not necessary to a discussion of cause and effect in English. How and at what age you have an explicit discussion of Lakota/Dakota agency is not yet determined. It has never been determined. But this is now an important question for folks designing immersion school objectives/standards. While some aspects of Lakota/Dakota worldview line up with the English one (for example, rocks, trees, and water in other languages might be considered animate, they are inanimate in Lakota/Dakota), the concept of causality is very different and makes teaching “standards” difficult across languages. Also important to note, is that we would not have even realized this, until teachers tried to follow state standards in an immersion setting.

## **Cultural Lessons**

Immersion program leaders are also concerned that the immersion school does not just become a white/ American school taught in the Lakota/Dakota language. Central to the program’s mission is to teach cultural lessons including songs, stories, and protocol, as well as the indigenous worldview embedded in the language. But what to teach the students is an important question the immersion team is trying to figure out. In summer 2017, the program director met with fluent speaking elders in the community and with the immersion teachers/ curriculum designers every day, for one week. The purpose of the meetings was to determine what cultural things should be taught and when in the school. To answer this question the group was asked what cultural lessons they were expected to know by the time they were the different ages served in the school. Through these discussions the team was able to develop a list of objectives for each grade level and from that they developed different units for the year’s curriculum. But, as this chapter continues to demonstrate, what you can accomplish in the classroom is limited by what the teacher can communicate to the students.

This became most apparent when the new teachers (myself and three other L2s) tried to develop and deliver lessons based on the year’s first unit: horses. The team had a second-grade level book (in English) that had been translated. It was a beautiful book about horses. The idea was that this book would be the introduction to the first unit of the school year. In the book, the Lakota text was printed out and taped over the original English text. The hope was that the L2 teacher could read it out loud for story time. But we soon learned that students didn’t have enough language to understand the text. In fact students understood so little of it, that they had a



hard time paying attention. This is an example of a L2 having correct and complex speech (because it was typed out in front of them) and even a set of visual aids (because it was also a picture book), yet the students did not understand the story. Further, we had very little ability to assess what and how much the students understood because those assessments had not been developed for that activity yet.

The team discussed a few reasons why reading the horse book was so difficult for the class. The first was summer language attrition. If the students did not keep up with their language over the summer (and there was very little opportunity to do so) they will lose some of their language ability. Hopefully it will be regained in the first weeks of the school year, but teachers must consciously create lessons and activities to do so. The second reason is that a few immersion students –ones who were particularly apt at the language –were no longer in the classroom. It turns out that these particular students would often translate for the other students (from Lakota/Dakota to English) so that the other students could keep up. It is not good if this happens in an immersion program because the less apt students rely on the more apt students for their English interpretations so much so that they stop listening (and therefore learning) the Lakota/Dakota. Without the more skilled students in the classroom, there was no one translating for the less skilled students. The third reason was that the students may not have been taught enough of the words, phrases, or grammatical concepts used in the story. While the story was meant to be a kick-off into a whole unit on horses, the unit on horses was changed dramatically to be a method of teaching the various aspects of Lakota/Dakota language used in that horse story. Being able to fully understand the horse story turned into the main goal for that unit, and the other goals, some about cultural aspects of horses even, were not explicitly taught because students would not understand them if we tried to teach them anyway. In this way, some of our cultural lessons were compromised for language lessons.

The fluent speaker I worked closely with in the classroom, Lalá Mike, sometimes made different choices and would compromise language to pass on a cultural lesson. For example, Lalá Mike chose to switch to English one day when telling the class about Sitting Bull's death. After beginning to tell the story in Lakota, and realizing the students were not understanding his speech and beginning to lose focus, he switched to English. Here, we had a fluent speaking teacher using correct language (obviously), who was also struggling to communicate with the class. This was happening for a combination of two reasons: 1) the students did not know the vocabulary or the grammatical structures the fluent speaker was using, and 2) the fluent speaker did not want, or did not know how, to break the language down into understandable bites. I had been able to follow the speaker, but my skills as an immersion teacher were not capable of breaking down what he said for the class fast enough. Even though he was a great supporter of our language revitalization movement, Lalá Mike felt it better to break the cardinal rule of immersion (No English!) in order to tell the story of Sitting Bull. In this moment for Lalá Mike, it was more important to share this story of the tribe's political past, than to practice the language. It is true that that story, because of our language's particular worldview, would be slightly different if told in Lakota/Dakota. However Lalá Mike, realizing the students were not understanding him, chose to communicate in the most effective way –in English. This moment corresponds with the tension between the language and culture that I described in Chapter 2. The community often wants its young people to learn the language *and* learn valuable cultural/historical/traditional lessons. However, in an immersion school setting, where English is not allowed and students do not understand enough of the language to hear the lesson in the native language, both cultural *and* language lessons cannot be taught at the same time. It was

December 15<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of Sitting Bull's death, and our fluent speaking elder thought that learning about the life and death of one of our great leaders was too important to say in Lakota/Dakota when it could not be understood.

Someone who knows immersion methods may argue that the story of Sitting Bull's death could have been told in Lakota/Dakota –with the students following along –if the fluent speaker or the L2 teacher used a series of mimes, props, or pictures to tell the story. From my experience, I would say this could happen, but it would take a great deal of time and effort to plan and prepare *before* the school day started. We had spent our week's preparation time planning and preparing other lessons we taught in the classroom. If I had known Lalá Mike wanted to tell that story, I would have tried to prepare for it, but there is no guarantee that Lalá Mike and I could have made his points intelligible to the students.

With both of these stories--the horse story, and Sitting Bull's death--the planning might span years. Without a set of specific ideas of what you want your students to be able to do, you cannot plan your lessons building up to that point. So the summer before the school opened its third grade, the team established its own third grade standards. However, those entering third grade received an education in previous years that did not prepare them for what was expected of them in third grade. This is because the expectations of third grade were decided *after* second grade had been taught. If the team knew understanding the horse story and understanding the story of Sitting Bull were two of the expectations of the first semester of third grade, the team would make sure that the students had the language to understand about 80 percent of those stories so that the students could focus on the content of the stories, and not just trying to understand the individual words and structures. This kind of planning has been quite difficult for a program that has been expanding up a grade every year.

## **Reading English**

Another area of concern in regards to what was taught in the classroom had to do with reading. Parents were concerned that their students would not learn to read in English, because the school was only teaching them how to read in Lakota/Dakota. While the concept of reading – that symbols stand for sounds that, when put together, make words –is transferable from one language to another, the English writing system is not phonetic, like the Lakota/Dakota system we use. This means immersion school children do not get the English rules in school, but would need to get them someplace else.

While the immersion program leadership team had decided it would begin teaching English as a formal school subject in the fifth grade (as other immersion schools do), parents are still concerned that their children need to be able to start reading in English earlier. One way for this issue to be remedied is that parents teach reading in English at home. However, parents of the immersion school children need to be willing and able to put that time in with their children (and have the patience and skill to do so), and the children need to be okay with that extra schooling. Parents are already expected to attend bi-weekly Lakota/Dakota language classes and to participate in different fund raising or community events involving the school. Some parents have revealed that participation in the immersion school program is already too much of a commitment on their family's time and resource. Teaching reading at home certainly adds to this already great commitment.

## Section 4: Staff Qualification and Salary

Since its opening in 2012 the program has had many significant staff changes. The program has had four directors and over the years hired about a dozen people for a set of about five positions. The immersion program has had a very difficult time finding people to take on open positions at the school. During my time at Standing Rock there were periods of three months or more where a position necessary for running the school smoothly was not filled. During these times, the program had the funding to operate the school, but did not have the resources –in this case, human resources –needed to carry out an effective program.

Part of the reason for the lack of human resources is that there is almost no one in the area who has the skills necessary to pull off immersion education in Lakota/Dakota.<sup>91</sup> When a teacher is still learning the language, they are unable to deliver the kind of speech necessary for quality immersion education. During my time in the classroom, I used very simple sentences in Lakota/Dakota. I spoke what I knew and was comfortable with, but always tried to learn one or two new constructions, or phrases, or words a day. But even if I had *known* more complicated language, what I was able to produce in real time with students to facilitate learning was more simplistic. Instead of drowning the students in good complicated language, I think I more or less sprayed them with sometimes correct, sometimes not, but, almost always, simple language. So when I was in the classroom teaching, the students may have learned some things from me, but because they did not hear very complicated language when I was teaching, or even a lot of the language itself (in terms of phrases per minute), they did not learn the amount of language you would expect students to learn at an effective immersion school, or even an adequate one.<sup>92</sup>

As a scholar and a researcher, I have knowledge about language acquisition and immersions schools. I know, generally, what is needed to develop language proficiency in an immersion setting. I also have skills in teaching (albeit for adults, but the general pedagogical concepts can still be applied). I'm energetic and generally like to work with children. I certainly know the material –first grade math is definitely within my realm of possible teaching subjects. I'm not saying I'm the best elementary school teacher, or even saying that knowing about a subject automatically means that I can teach something. I am saying that I feel like I could get the job done, if the job were in English. However, when it comes to teaching elementary age students in Lakota/Dakota immersion, none of my expertise or skills helped in the classroom because I did not have the language needed to apply those skills. It doesn't matter that you can teach subtraction to first graders successfully, or know what it takes to create an immersion environment while doing so. If you do not have the language to do so correctly and in a way that engages the students, then you will not have much impact on your students' abilities to use the target language.

The program's salary schedules, because it is part of Sitting Bull College, does not acknowledge the skills needed to teach or run an effective immersion school, or the fact that there is no place (besides in the immersion classroom itself) where a person could gain these

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<sup>91</sup>The other reason is that there are few in the community who are willing and able to work. Entry level positions as well as higher-level positions at Sitting Bull College remain open for months or years at a time.

<sup>92</sup>It is important to recognize that teachers get better over time. I taught for half of the day for one semester, and I'd say that my ability in the language increased tremendously. If I had to gauge, at that rate, I would be where I needed to be in the language after 7 or 8 years. That is, after 7 years of teaching in the immersion school, half a day, I believe I would have what it takes to be an effective immersion school-teacher at that level. (keeping all other factors: resources, fluent speaker assistance, stamina the same).

skills. Sitting Bull College's salary schedule is one that rewards degrees: a person with a master's degree will earn more than someone with a bachelor's degree and so on. An incredible issue, however, is that there is currently no BA or MA degree geared toward prepping immersion school teachers. There is no degree yet that will even ensure that an applicant has the Lakota/Dakota language skills to be an effective teacher (more on this in chapter 4). Therefore, the only way to move up in the salary scale is to work toward a degree that could only tangentially improve your skills as an immersion teacher. Further, such a salary system leaves open the possibility that someone with an advanced degree but much lower skill in the Lakota/Dakota language, would potentially be paid more than a proficiency teacher with multiple years of immersion teaching experience. While my master's degree in Ethnic Studies has certainly helped me understand the context of the immersion program, I can say from experience that it was not that helpful in getting me through the immersion school day. When I realized that if I took over the full-time teaching position from Ti, that I would be paid more than him, I asked if I could say something at the next immersion program leadership meeting. Armed with a PowerPoint, I argued that teachers, especially L2s, should be paid at a different scale because no school or degree program could prepare a student for Lakota immersion work. To my surprise the president of the college asked me for my PowerPoint and presented the argument to the college's board of trustees and effectively raised teacher salaries (not a lot, and not enough, I might add, but some). This demonstrates that leaders in the community just like teachers themselves are just now coming to terms with how hard immersion work is. It also demonstrates a way researchers and scholars can help contribute to the communities they study. Because I was investigating Lakota language revitalization at Standing Rock, I had the time to think and write about the issue, and, importantly, because I had the access to scholarship that helped convince college leadership I was able to educate and sway the college administration that was in charge of determining teacher salaries. I understand these kinds of interventions to be integral to participant observation, and is why this story remains in this chapter.

I have heard many people in the community say that they would like to work in the immersion program, or that they would want to spend more time in the immersion classroom, but they don't think they have the skills to do so. They are probably right in one sense. Without the language and skill in immersion methods a teacher will not accomplish much. However, since no one in the community already has those skills, and since the immersion school is the only place to gain those skills (when coupled with rigorous language education), almost everyone could be considered qualified to come teach in the immersion school. Many, however, do not see things this way, and remain reluctant to even visit the immersion school. A no English, all Lakota environment is quite intimidating. The immersion program will only have enough human resources when there is a critical mass of working-age adults who are highly proficient in the language and willing to learn immersion techniques, or, at the very least, when there is a critical mass of adults in the community willing to jump into immersion with little preparation, not just as a job, but as a life-style wherein they teach during the work day and study, practice, and prepare in their time off.

## Section 5: Expansion of the School/ Determining Success

So far in this chapter I've discussed the everyday changes to running an immersion program at Standing Rock, especially when it comes to teacher and staff workload. One thing to notice is that the workload grew significantly as the school opened up new and higher grades. In

line with its plan written for Administration for Native Americans and other funding agencies, the immersion program expanded by a grade level every year. At the time, the school could not justify adding more teachers for each grade level, because, in some cases, there were only one or two students moving up a grade. Not moving up a grade would be seen as a failure or slowing down of the original plan. So teachers were expected to teach multiple grades at a time (a method called differentiated learning). Teaching multiple grades at a time may be doable in an English school setting, but because of all the labor it takes to pull off an immersion lesson for just one level of learners, adding another grade, or even two grades doubled or tripled the already difficult work for the language teachers.

One question we might ask is: why did the school choose to expand when it was struggling so much in the first place? To understand this question, we need to get a better understanding of the existing achievements of the school, its evaluation plans, and what the school meant to the families involved.

### **Achievements of Program**

The immersion program, more than any other project in the language revitalization movement at Standing Rock, has given new hope to those who care about our language and want to see it passed down to future generations. Since the average age of our remaining L1s (people who learned Lakota/Dakota before they learned English) is above 60 years, it is quite an impressive sight to see children as young as two understanding and responding in our language. Different programs and organizations often ask the school to come and perform songs or give prayers at different events in the community. The children are treated with great respect when they do this, and I'm sure it helps the students develop a great sense of pride in their identities as Lakota/Dakota boys and girls. Teachers and parents often comment on how the loving atmosphere and Lakota cultural center of the school helps foster a calmer and more respectful attitude among the students. And parents and others in the community are excited and grateful that the school teaches important prayer songs and other aspects of Lakota/Dakota culture that many adults and certainly many other children in the community do not get to learn.

It is important to recognize that the immersion classrooms are the only spaces on the reservation (and, currently, in North Dakota) where only Lakota/Dakota is spoken. While some elders use Lakota/Dakota at home, in ceremony, or in community events, most elders switch to English at some point because most of Standing Rock's population does not understand or speak Lakota/Dakota. Additionally, the practice of having elders in the classroom is a restorative practice, wherein the program, by design, is instituting respect for our elders, and teaching this protocol to some of the younger members of our community. The immersion classrooms are two of the few spaces on the reservation where there is direct intergenerational transfer of language and culture knowledge from our community's oldest generation to our youngest. (Some families have fluent speaking grandparents who can provide this, but many do not). The school is also one of the few spaces where working-age adults go directly to our elders for guidance and leadership as part of their jobs. All in all, the immersion program represents a great change in the way Standing Rock sees education as it strives to incorporate Lakota/Dakota values, not just in class content, but in the structure of the school itself. It is no wonder, that despite its struggles, many indigenous communities in the area look up to Standing Rock's immersion program and often come to visit it.

Because the school has generated so many positives for the community, it is easier to see why the program believed itself to be ready to expand. The proposals explicitly described that the immersion school would expand up a grade every year so that those children in the first year of the school could continue in the school, the idea was, until they graduated twelfth grade. Because this was the original plan, there was some fear among program leadership that not expanding would be seen as a failure to the funding agency and to the parents and community who supported the school. Nevertheless, starting up any school, let alone an indigenous immersion school, is incredibly difficult and it would be naïve to expect the program to run perfectly smooth in the first year or two. Unfortunately, there was, and still is, no good system of evaluation to tell how well the program is doing and if the school would be ready to expand or not.

## **Evaluation**

Standing Rock's immersion program has learned the necessity of good program assessment and evaluation the hard way. The immersion program, as part of its ANA grant received in 2015, hired an outside evaluation firm to come and evaluate the program. Further, the evaluation firm came and performed a series of observations and interviews and concluded that the immersion school was making positive contributions to the community, that the program had decent communication between staff and parents, that the teachers were not using English, and that the students would often respond to teachers in Lakota, indicating that the students were "learning the language."<sup>93</sup> While many of the evaluations marked that the teachers felt overworked, they never explained how not knowing the language and not having curriculum or even the language for specific topics hindered teachers greatly. Further the evaluations did not gauge the *extent* to which the students of the immersion school were learning the language. After reading the previous year's evaluation, and participating in the focus groups for the 2016 and 2017 evaluation, it became clear that the evaluators did not know much about language acquisition, immersion, or the Lakota language.

Because of these factors, reports were not that helpful in guiding the leadership team in making decisions for the immersion program. While the reports were great for demonstrating that the immersion program had a positive impact in the community, they did not provide useful data or recommendations in regards to the immersion programs primary goal: transferring language to students.

The reason behind this ineffective evaluation is simple: there did not exist (and still does not exist) an evaluation company, tools, or plan that is accessible and useful to the immersion program leadership team. It seems like only recently have advocates and researchers, myself included, begun to develop plans and tools useful for emerging immersion programs. Because indigenous immersion education (outside of Hawaii and New Zealand) is such a new phenomenon, ideas about how to best evaluate such programs are just emerging. From my experience, such assessment and evaluations plans must be researched and developed by people who know about immersion and language acquisition, not by those who are trying it out for the first time. Such plans take time, resources, and expertise that an immersion school team during the regular school year does not necessarily have in their day-to-day and month-to-month agenda. However, I would argue that expertise in the language itself is not necessary for this kind of planning. To get a better sense of the aspects of Lakota a student is using or misusing or

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<sup>93</sup>RMC Evaluation 2016

understanding or not understanding, knowledge of Lakota is a must. However, to evaluate whether an entire program is meeting its language goals, a plan designer needs to know about language acquisition and the immersion and the right tools and metrics to get at this information.

A helpful assessment at this stage would only need to capture how often students were using unprompted Lakota/Dakota and how well the teachers (who know the language) are able to test the student's abilities in the language. An evaluation would be able to explain what sorts of language goals/ standards each age group in the program might have and the teachers would be able to identify specifics in the language. For example, a knowledgeable evaluation based on research in immersion might say a student in the first year may not be able to produce full sentences in response to question in Lakota. But they should be able to understand full questions. A teacher may place a toothbrush, a hairbrush, and a bar of soap in front of the student and ask which one do you need to brush your hair? Or which one do you need to wash your hands? The student could then indicate she understood the question and point to the object.<sup>94</sup> Understanding comes first in language acquisition, so it would make more sense to first assess whether students are understanding before asking them to produce language. As the students get older you could ask questions like "What do you do with this?" (holding up a toothbrush) or "tell me the steps to brush your teeth?"

Developing the plans, methods and tools to evaluate student language acquisition would take a great deal of time, effort, and expertise—all things, as I've described, are difficult to come by in an immersion program like Standing Rock's. Nevertheless, I believe more connection and collaboration between university researchers and tribal programs could create mutually valuable research on issues like these.

## Conclusion

### "Doing it all backwards:" Lessons from Standing Rock's Immersion Program

Talking with Sacheen about the early years of the program, she admitted bluntly that the team "did it all backwards." In opening the immersion school when they did, they inadvertently took time, energy, and resources from any possible programming that would develop proficiency in adults. The team learned quickly that more proficient adults were needed to operate the school, but in operating the school, there was little time for teachers to learn more complicated language. While the immersion school provides a great opportunity for teachers to develop fluency--the ability to produce language in real time in real situations--it does not necessarily improve a teacher's complexity in the language.<sup>95</sup> A teacher can only practice (develop fluency) in what they already know. This results in teachers using the same not-so-complex language (and sounding really good at it, especially if a fluent speaker has been in the classroom helping them with accuracy), but not using varying levels of complexity to communicate, which is part of the "drown them in language" aspect of immersion discussed earlier. Current teachers at the immersion school only get one-day a week (Fridays) to take a couple of hours of language class or study on their own or with fluent speakers in order to improve complexity. This is in addition

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<sup>94</sup>The Immersion program project director cited a presentation by a Cherokee immersion expert on this subject when talking with me about this possible evaluation method.

<sup>95</sup>For more on fluency in language acquisition see: Alex Housen and Folkert Kuiken, "Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency in Second Language Acquisition," *Applied Linguistics* 30, no. 4 (2009): 461–73.

to the three weeks of morning grammar classes teachers can take over the Summer Institute (mentioned in Chapter 2 and discussed more thoroughly in chapter 4). These times have proven really helpful in improving teacher complexity, but it has not been enough to develop teacher complexity (and proficiency overall) to the point needed to get students learning and using the language during all (or even most) of the school day. My next chapter will describe Standing Rock's efforts to improve adult proficiency in the language but it's important to note that the team at Standing Rock has learned that opening an immersion school without a critical mass of working-age proficient speakers was a misstep that is difficult to recover from. The language team at Standing Rock warns anyone hoping to open an immersion school to first develop high levels of adult proficiency in the community (not just the teachers) *before* opening the school to children. However, developing proficiency in adults is, in itself, no easy task. The following chapter will describe Standing Rock's efforts to increase the number of proficient adult speakers.



## Chapter 4

### Adult Language Learning Programs

Shortly after the implementation of their immersion nest, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe realized that it did not have the human resources to carry out its mission of developing a fully-Lakota Pk-12 institution. “We did it backwards,” says Sacheen Whitetail Cross, who was the first Lakota language nest director. “We started these programs for kids, but we should have developed programs for adults, first.” As my previous chapter highlighted, good immersion language education requires a team of adult proficient speakers who can design and plan classroom lessons, create materials, and deliver these lessons. Without a whole team skilled in language, teachers get burnt-out and the program threatens to shut down. Finding people to staff the immersion nest and other language programs on the reservation has been one of the most difficult challenges language organizers at Standing Rock face. This is because there exist few working-age adults who have the language capacity to work on the projects.

Standing Rock has an issue what language activists and scholars call “lost generations” or “missing generation.”<sup>96</sup> A lost generation refers to the generation of community member who are neither fluent, nor are they effectively learning the language because all existing programming is geared towards children. Therefore, in terms of age, the lost generation resides between the fluent speaking generations and the children who are learning from programs like the immersion nest. Since the average age of a Lakota/Dakota speaking elder is so high (over seventy years, we estimate), Standing Rock has at least two generations that could be considered “lost” –that is without speaking ability.<sup>97</sup> Having lost generations is particularly cumbersome on language revitalization movements because programs that teach language rely on working-age adults to perform the basic functions of the program. They are the ones needed to teach the language.

In Native communities where they have focused on transferring language straight to the youngest generation, the middle generations are left out and therefore cannot contribute in the maintenance or expansion of the language programming like the immersion nest in ways that are needed. The fluent speaking elders get older and retire, and new, younger teachers are needed to take their place. Yet, those who have participated in the language programming as children are still too young to be teachers. In Standing Rock’s case, there were not enough adults who knew the language to effectively expand the immersion school every year, or even to run an effective immersion program at the beginning levels. So this problem of the lost generation was realized before fluent speaking elders thought of retiring. To address this issue, in Fall 2016 organizers at Standing Rock began to develop programs to build Lakota language skill in its lost generations. These efforts included: improving the Lakota Summer Institute, which began as a teacher-training program; expanding LSI classes to Sitting Bull College Fall and Spring semesters; designing a one-year capacity building experiment funded by the National Science Foundation; and implementing a master-apprentice style program.

As with nearly all proposed projects in language revitalization, no one can predict exactly how they will turn out. Some of the programs above ran better than others and the implementation of each one teaches us something new about language revitalization. This

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<sup>96</sup> Marja-Liisa Olthuis, Suvi Kivelä, and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, *Revitalising Indigenous Languages: How to Recreate a Lost Generation*, vol. 10 (Multilingual matters, 2013).

<sup>97</sup> Also included in this category are passive speakers, those who have knowledge of the language and can understand it, but cannot produce it in speech or writing.

chapter tells the stories of these adult programs with an eye to defining the limits and possibilities of each language-learning model for a rural reservation community and to answering why some of the programs seem more successful than others. After describing how these programs originated and how they were shaped over time, and after discussing some of the current results of the programs, I will offer some suggestions for the growing language movement in Standing Rock in an effort to maintain and build on those programs without burning out the tribe's human resources.

My method for answering these questions, as with other chapters in my dissertation, is participant observation. I have been participating in the adult aspects of language revitalization on Standing Rock since 2013 when I first attended the three-week Lakota Summer Institute (LSI). My role grew, then, as I taught my first LSI class in the summer of 2016, and as I became a full-time faculty member in the Native American Studies Division at Sitting Bull College where I continued to teach Lakota/Dakota language classes. I also co-designed the Native American Studies Bachelor's program, which was approved by the Higher Learning Commission in Fall 2016. I also assisted in designing and redesigning the curriculum for the Lakota Summer Institute courses and co-wrote the National Endowment for the Humanities Grant for the tribe's Mentor-Apprentice Program. In the summer of 2017, the National Science Foundation awarded Sitting Bull College a Documenting Endangered Languages Grant to implement a one-year adult language-learning program, of which I was Principal and then Co-Principal investigator alongside Nacole Walker—one of the tribes' language consultants and language teachers. My point in this paragraph is not to brag about my accomplishments, but to specify that when I say I participated and observed in the language revitalization movement at Standing Rock, I mean I did more than just take language classes and participate in meetings. Rather, and this is especially true when it comes to adult programming, I helped design, secure funding for, and implement these programs by applying my skills as a scholar and writer, as well as my passion as a Native woman who cares for her communities. In other words, I not only participated in the movement, I helped shape it, and my knowledge as a researcher gave me the skills and knowledge to participate in particular ways. To me, this is what research is all about, and it is a central aspect of my method as an ethnographer, a language organizer, and a member of this lost generation of Lakota speakers.

To give a better sense of why there is such a large lost generation on Standing Rock, the first section of this chapter will describe more of what adult language education was like before the recent efforts to revitalize language began. The next section will describe and give background to the recent projects Standing Rock has undertaken to improve adult language education on the reservation as well as the current struggles and successes of those programs. Before concluding, section three will draw out lessons that Standing Rock and other Native communities can learn from the recent projects and it will also humbly offer suggestions for Standing Rock or any other groups looking to implement similar adult programs. Finally, in my conclusion, I will return to a discussion of the importance of adult language education in tribal communities and give reasons (other than running children's programs) as to why adults must learn their language if language restoration movements are to be successful.

Each of Standing Rock's adult programs has its strengths and weaknesses, and the team at Standing Rock is continually evaluating their programs and working to make changes to better fit their goals. Nevertheless, there are specific challenges to adult language programming at Standing Rock that come to light only when we engage in language restoration in particular. In other words, a language revitalization lens that simply examines the increase in number of

Lakota/Dakota speakers in general miss the specific challenges Standing Rock faces when trying to restore their language to their community. A key question the language team tries to address is “How do you get Standing Rock community members to develop language proficiency?” By focusing on the particular community, Standing Rock language advocates need to overcome challenges that are specific to rural reservation life.

### Section 1: Previous Adult Language Programming

Before the most recent movements to restore Lakota/Dakota language to Standing Rock, there were just a few ways community members could develop any level of proficiency if they didn't have a fluent speaker who was willing and able to teach Lakota/Dakota in the home. Those were 1) learn from a different fluent speaker; 2) learn from guided written material; 3) learn from courses at Sitting Bull College. Unfortunately, as we've discussed, learning with a fluent speaker can only get you so far, especially if the fluent speaker doesn't have the skills to break the language down into learnable bites. If able, a prospective learner could use existing writing materials like White Hat's *Reading and Writing the Lakota language* (1999) or Taylor and Rood's college curriculum out of the University of Colorado (1976).<sup>98</sup> But White Hat's book only addresses mainly beginning learner material, and spends many pages teaching *about* the language, instead of teaching it. On the other hand, Taylor and Rood's materials are written for an audience with some basic understanding of linguistics or upper-level grammar. Because of this, neither written method could help in pronouncing or speaking the language or developing Lakota/Dakota language competency in people who didn't know much about languages in general. Some written materials have audio accompaniments. However, on their own, none of these materials are very effective in developing a complex understanding of the language that is needed to build proficiency. Additionally, Sitting Bull College classes of the past, unfortunately, suffered from the same issues as the language and culture classes in the K-12 system. Even in college, students were merely expected to learn their numbers, colors, animals, and introductions. I was told that at one point SBC students were merely expected to translate 100 individual words for their final exam. This demonstrates that sentence construction, or learning useful phrases, or grammatical aspects of the language were not taught or even made an expectation of students, even at the college level. It is understandable that this would be the entry point for teaching Lakota/Dakota to interested students in an underfunded institution in a poor community, and this kind of teaching has indeed been widespread throughout Lakota/Dakota Country. But for reasons I will outline below, this kind of language course cannot develop the proficiency needed to grow a critical mass of adults who understand and use the language to the extent needed for language restoration.

A person at Standing Rock who wanted to learn the language, at least until recently, had an uphill battle to confront. Further, a community member who wanted to learn, more often than not, would not have experience learning any language as a second language, let alone Lakota/Dakota. Not every adult growing up on Standing Rock was required to take a foreign language in high school. It might be safe to say that even English grammar classes, which can be useful in learning a new non-English language, are not that effective in the K-12 system for the same reasons other subjects struggle (outlined in Chapter 2). As I discussed in chapter two and will elaborate on in this chapter, little or no access to certain resources might hinder learning (not

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<sup>98</sup> White Hat and Kampfe, *Reading and Writing the Lakota Language*; Taylor and Rood, “University of Colorado Lakota Project.”

just language learning) in K-12 students and this may have impacted how adults today relate to education and language learning.

While working closely with Standing Rock, the Lakota Language Consortium developed the Lakota Language Forum (LLF) in 2008 to help adults at Standing Rock and around the world learn Lakota online. The LLF is a website that contains various language learning tools, resources, and spaces where learners can work together. Even as an online forum, LLF has had some direct impact on language restoration at Standing Rock. It has been helpful in teaching a few adults on the reservation who are involved in language revitalization. Nacole Walker, mentioned above, got her start learning Lakota while at Dartmouth. Nacole is a Standing Rock Sioux tribal member and had moved back home to the reservation after taking a few graduate-level linguistics courses at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Another person currently on Standing Rock that the LLF has helped is Elliot Bannister, who is from England. Elliot started learning Lakota online while an undergraduate. They moved to the reservation in 2017. Elliot and Nacole now work as language specialists for the tribe and both were teachers for the NSF-funded program, which I will discuss later. Indeed, while I know no single adult learner who would say they got their start learning Lakota/Dakota in a school course (until recently), I know many who would say they really got their start learning Lakota/Dakota on the online forum. Nevertheless, we must recognize that most of the people successful on the forum were not from tribal communities (many were non-Natives).<sup>99</sup> In fact, the LLF could not have been developed with reservation residents in mind, since most homes on the reservation did not even have internet in 2008. Even today most homes do not have a working computer that would support the LLF. I would say that the LLF is a Lakota language-learning tool, but that does not necessarily mean it facilitates language revitalization. If people in the community do not have access to the forum, it certainly cannot support language restoration that well.

There are perhaps two Standing Rock residents that language organizers recognize as working-age adults who learned the language through a combination of the above existing methods. Today, they are both under 50 currently and are highly proficient. Yet, it is important to recognize that they both have advanced degrees from off-reservation schools. One has a pharmaceutical degree, and the other has at least a Master's degree in science. Here, I am not arguing that their degrees help them learn Lakota/Dakota (you never need a degree to learn anything). Rather, I am drawing attention to the fact that both are people who succeeded academically, and this ability to study and learn in general, probably played a large role in their language journey. Nacole, Elliot, Yuliya (the current director of the immersion nest), myself, and some others who are growing in our language certainly fall in this category. We all have had quality education experiences. Some of us even have advanced degrees, and therefore experience in self-learning and self-study. Some of us even have experience gaining proficiency in other languages. Nacole and I both studied German in college. Nacole also studied Maori. Elliot studied Arabic, Farsi, Spanish, along with other languages. Yuliya, whose first languages are Russian and Ukrainian, also learned German and studied Spanish in school. In other words, before the recent programming that I describe below, Lakota/Dakota language learning depended on having strong self-learning and study skills, or experience learning another language. Therefore, those who have developed these skills have found a way to make progress in language learning. However, these skills are not necessarily developed among graduates of reservation school systems, which constitutes the majority of the Standing Rock community. In this way,

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<sup>99</sup>I examined the profiles of the top 100 people on the forum (which has about 9,000 members). Only a handful of forum members from the top 100 lived and worked in tribal communities.

effective Lakota/Dakota language learning could be seen as more accessible to those who have a particular style of learning, to those who have particular study and self-learning skills that allow them to succeed academically. Because of this, for decades, existing effective Lakota/Dakota language learning methods were not accessible to most Lakota/Dakota people.

This inaccessibility has to do with access to resources, as well as having the time, stamina, and physical and mental health to learn. The kinds of obstacles Standing Rock community members face, as being residents of an impoverished and rural reservation, may also explain why there are quite a number of non-Native people who have become highly proficient in Lakota/Dakota. Nevertheless, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe –with the help of various individuals and institutions –have begun significant work on developing better programs for adults in the community to acquire and use Lakota/Dakota language. I review and analyze these programs in the remainder of this chapter.

## Section 2: New Language Programs for Adults

### **Growth of the Lakota Summer Institute**

One of the major steps language organizers at Standing Rock took to make Lakota/Dakota language learning more accessible to adults in the community was switching some of the focus of the Lakota Summer Institute from “how to teach Lakota” to “how to learn Lakota.” As described in Chapter 2, the Lakota Summer Institute is a collaboration among the tribe, Sitting Bull College (SBC), and the Lakota Language Consortium. LSI began in 2007 as a means to address the specific needs of the K-12 schools needing training for their Language and culture teachers. In 2013, when I was first looking into language classes for myself, LSI was the only Lakota/Dakota language program for adults offered in the summertime, and was therefore the only program I could take part in while taking graduate courses at UC Berkeley during the Fall and Spring semesters. While LSI started with ten to fifteen participants in 2007, I was one of eighty or so participants in my first summer (2013) and was one of one-hundred-and-twenty participants in 2017. In other words, the summer institute has been growing in significant numbers every year.

Part of this growth can be attributed to the kinds of courses that were expanded. While at first, courses offered were meant to develop Lakota/Dakota language K-12 teachers, leaders at LSI began realizing that most participants were coming to LSI for the language content itself. Jan Ulrich from the LLC, who is a scholar of Lakota/Dakota grammar as well as language acquisition, was the first teacher of the LSI courses directed at just language *learning*. Through this he brought communicative language learning strategies to adults at Standing Rock. Communicative language learning strategies are approaches to language teaching that focus on building skills in conversation instead of memorization of grammatical patterns or vocabulary. Soon his classes began to get too big. At this point, Nacole shadowed Jan and then taught using his lessons to the next group. This was the beginning of the train-the-trainer model that I argue is key to the growing success of LSI, and in some senses of the language movement at Standing Rock more broadly.

Nacole worked with Sunshine (introduced in Chapter 2) to organize the notes that Nacole kept into working lesson plans. This creation of effective college curriculum ensures that LSI instructors can teach language (at least at the beginning level, for now) to a large group of people every year. It also opens up an opportunity to build important language capacity among adult

teachers. After creating the curriculum, Sunshine and Nacole instilled a practice wherein they used the same shadow-then-teach model to train about a dozen teachers at the beginning level through LSI alone. This is how I got my start teaching the Lakota language. The model has also been used to develop teachers at the next level of language, as I experienced during the summer of 2017 when I taught Lakota/Dakota Inflectional Morphology after shadowing Nacole the previous week.

LSI's lesson plan creation for these core courses, especially Nacole's intricate note taking, and this train-the-trainer approach does multiple good things for the language movement. First, it ensures that different students are getting the same content across classes so that students can move from teacher to teacher, or from level to level and there's a general idea of where students are with the language. Second, it democratizes language. No one person can be considered the only knowledgeable teacher. With some training and the specially curated LSI lesson plans, any learner who also has a passion for teaching can become a language teacher. Third, it boosts self-esteem of the learner who becomes teacher. It feels really good to have learned something to the point where you can teach it. Learners who become teachers also feel like they have a place, a critical role, in the language movement. Finally, and perhaps most pertinently, teaching helps the teacher remember content. I, and my colleagues on Standing Rock can attest to this. Thus, the train-the-trainer approach ensures that the trainee knows the particular aspects of the language that are included in that course.

If we had to wait for potential teachers to undergo the extensive pedagogy training that is understood to be necessary for adult language teachers, and if we had to wait for our potential teachers to become proficient in the language before teaching, we would have a slow, slow language movement. Dozens of learners would still be stuck in the very beginning levels of Lakota/Dakota because the expert teachers would not have the time or energy to teach beginners and intermediate classes. Programs like LSI would not entice larger and larger groups of people every year because there wouldn't be enough teachers to accommodate new learners. Much like in the immersion school, LSI uses learners from the community to fill positions of teachers. Because of this, nearly everyone is "learning on the job" so to speak. This makes for a dynamic language movement but also highlights the movement's ability to create jobs and train people for those jobs, which is profound in a rural reservation economy. Because of its ability to adapt to community needs and to expand, LSI remains one of the strongest forward-moving Lakota/Dakota language programs in all of Lakota/Dakota country. Nevertheless, LSI is not the "miracle" program that will fix our language issues. From the point of view of language revitalization, LSI will not be sufficient to reach the goal for a few reasons outlined below.

First, as a three-week summer program, LSI is not exactly ideal for language development. The best way to learn language is to learn and review every single day. LSI participants learn four or eight hours every day (depending on how many courses they take), but only for the month of June. Participants must then rely on their own motivations and study skills to help them keep up their language until the next year, which, as I have discussed, can be tricky for people who are not used to such rigorous self-studying. Second, LSI is also held in June. While the summertime is ideal for people who teach in the school year (as it was originally meant) it cannot easily serve those folks who work during the day in June. For those who work during the day and then have found a way to manage their basic family obligations after work, there are evening classes. However, these evening sessions don't have the same momentum the daytime LSI classes have. (My guess is that by 5pm everybody is exhausted from long and hot summer days.) The fact that LSI is held in June also conflicts with peoples' Sundances, so many

cannot attend any or all of the three weeks of the institute because they have ceremonial duties to attend to. Sundance is a very involved aspect of Lakota/Dakota life. Depending on what role within the ceremony a person is taking up, they may be preparing weeks or months before the ceremony takes place. Further, families of Sundancers need to prepare and be present for their relatives who are taking part in the ceremony. This involves preparing food for large groups and securing sleeping arrangements for at least a week. Sundance dates vary depending on prayer communities, so there is no three consecutive weeks in the summer that wouldn't conflict with at least one Sundance it seems. In other words, changing the dates of LSI will not solve this issue.

Finally, and this is key, organizers of LSI have recognized that LSI has certainly developed the language and teaching abilities of its participants. Yet, they have also realized that the majority of LSI participants are not from Standing Rock. Most LSI participants come from other Lakota/Dakota reservations or towns in North Dakota or South Dakota. In addition, there's a large number of non-Indians from all over the U.S. who attend, and a handful of folks from outside the U.S. who participate every year as well. Here we see an important distinction between "saving an indigenous language," or increasing the number of speakers, versus restoring the language to a particular community. LSI seems to be doing great things with the former, but not with the latter when it comes to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Nevertheless, language organizers at Standing Rock are looking for ways to apply the techniques and skills they have learned and developed at LSI in ways that would more directly serve Standing Rock community members. The expansion of LSI course content to the Sitting Bull College language courses is one way they are trying to do this.

### **Expansion of LSI material to SBC**

Since organizers had been able to develop working curriculum for adult classes at LSI, they were able to bring those ideas to the language courses at SBC that run throughout the Fall and Spring semesters. As mentioned, because of its compact structure (eight hours a day/ five days a week for just three weeks) LSI is not the ideal way to learn language. It is effective as a starting point, but if students want to increase in proficiency (or just move up in LSI classes) they need to practice and review throughout the year so that they are ready to continue learning every summer without needing to backtrack and review. Indeed those who do not keep up with their practices find it difficult in the higher-level classes and end up repeating the beginning course two or three times before moving up. This is fine if that is the pace individuals prefer. However it is imperative that we increase language proficiency as quickly as possible to staff our other projects. Time is not on our side when it comes to this, as our fluent speakers, or folks with language knowledge are quickly growing older and there is a growing demand from parents to teach their children the language.

Language organizers had originally thought bringing curriculum and methods used at LSI to the regular Sitting Bull College courses would help develop proficiency two, or possibly three, times quicker. That is, students, if they wish, could take an LSI's worth of classes each semester in addition to the summer institute. Theoretically, this would allow students to take three levels of Lakota/Dakota language over the course of a year, instead of just one level in the summer time. In addition, the courses during the school year would be spread out over fifteen weeks. This is, theoretically, much better for language learning, as the brain can only handle so much a day, and the fifteen-week semester allows instructors the time to ensure students are mastering skills before they move on with the use of homework assignments and quizzes, etc –something

instructors do not necessarily have the time to do effectively during the quick-paced and intense summer courses. The idea was that four summer courses (Phonology, Beginner I, Beginner II, and Beginner III) together would equal Native American Studies 101, or the first level of the Fall/Spring language courses at Sitting Bull College. Both this summer set and NAS 101 were intended to deliver an introduction to Lakota/Dakota. The four summer courses counted as one college credit each, and NAS 101 counted as four credits, so even on paper they were equivalents. Further, to ensure the same quality of teaching, we assigned some of the same instructors who were leading LSI classes to teach in the Fall and Spring.

We found out, however, that creating equivalency between the summer program and the year-round program was more difficult than originally thought. Even though teachers had the same amount of student contact hours in the Fall and Spring courses as with the summer courses, Fall and Spring courses were only able to get through about half of the material covered in the three weeks of LSI. With the exact same material and in many cases, the exact same teachers, SBC courses were not equal to LSI courses.

Combinations of factors count for the difference in LSI courses and NAS 101. The first reason is frequency of course meetings. Most SBC courses, including NAS 101 (required for graduation from SBC by all students; see below) meet twice a week, or only once a week for some courses. Very few SBC courses at all meet three or four times a week, and since SBC holds no classes on Fridays, no class meets five times a week. In other universities, language courses, particularly beginning language courses meet at least four or five times a week. At some colleges this time is broken up into conversation time and lecture time. The point here is to ensure that there is a little bit of guided language learning each day. Because SBC is the only institution of higher education for nearly eighty miles going north, and over a hundred miles in all other directions, they have realized how taxing it can be to hold classes every day of the week. Having no class on Friday and restricting the number of times a class meets, makes it easier for Sitting Bull College students to attend and earn credits. However, this also makes it extremely difficult for language learning, since guided practice every day is ideal for gaining proficiency. But this is perhaps just one reason why LSI courses could not successfully be brought to the Fall and Spring semesters at SBC.

The next issue is attendance. Attendance is an issue SBC already faces. Much of this has to do with the geographic location of the school and the communities it serves. It is so rural that many students are unable to attend to life's other obligations (like doctors' appointments in Bismarck) and attend class that day. The distance is just too far. Access to reliable transportation is another factor that impacts course attendance in many ways. Students often miss class simply because they do not own their own vehicle and rely on rides from others, they cannot afford needed repairs for their cars, or they do not have the cash it takes to fuel up a vehicle to drive the long distances to class. Another factor is family obligations. Most SBC students are parents; many are single moms. As chapter three outlined, quality childcare is a scarcity on the reservation at this time. A sick child, or even a sick parent or grandparent, can prevent an SBC student from making it to class. Other kinds of courses, such as a history or writing course, can be more easily converted into an independent-study-type course wherein students who have difficulty physically getting to class can learn and finish their coursework at home. Many instructors at SBC do this to allow students to learn in a manner that works for them. Currently, this approach will not work for language, however. Teaching language involves so much teacher-student interaction as well as peer practice in class time that, unless they can physically come to class, students will miss out on quite a bit of language instruction every session. Since



class sizes are often small (average 8 students), three missing from class means that nearly half of the class isn't caught up and it's quite easy to Fall behind.

Further, the Fall and Spring SBC course NAS 101 is a required course. The motivations of participants of LSI therefore also differ from the motivations of those in NAS 101. Since NAS 101 is required for any degree at SBC, students in those sessions are not necessarily choosing to be in them. This, of course, is universally a challenge for required courses at all institutions, and any teacher can predict the struggles that arise when students do not necessarily want to learn what is being taught. Even if half the class is enthusiastic about learning, language games, partner work, and class discussions are most effective when everyone is engaged and motivated. LSI is only required of those Language and culture teachers whose employers require it of them. In other words, mostly all LSI participants are highly motivated learners. After all, they are learners who have dedicated an entire summer month to learning the language. Many of them are leaving their homes and staying in hotels, dorms, campgrounds, or relatives' houses to participate in the unique language "boot camp."

Finally, LSI students often focus solely on language learning during the whole time they are in the summer school. In other words, they have set that time aside specifically for language learning and are usually not taking any other non-language classes during that time. By the end of the first week of LSI, students are able to ask each other simple questions and practice answering them. At the pace of the Fall and Spring courses, it is perhaps in week four or five when a student can start putting together phrases and carrying on these small conversations. In other words, students taking the Fall and Spring courses have to wait weeks or perhaps months to start practicing the language effectively and to start feeling the pride and encouragement that comes from being able to communicate with the teachers, other students, or even fluent speakers in the language. Getting over that first "hump" in the language –that is the moment when students can start having small, yet meaningful conversations in the language –is critical in motivating students to continue learning. For some students taking Fall or Spring courses, which are spread out over sixteen weeks, that moment comes too late or doesn't come at all.

In comparing LSI classes to the SBC Fall and Spring courses, and wanting to provide the same learning experience from the summer to the Fall and Spring, the team of language organizers have unearthed some important factors about indigenous language restoration. Most importantly, they've recognized the need to provide language programming for Standing Rock community members specifically, but in programs that are entirely new for the movement and overcome the challenges presented by the previously established Fall and Spring SBC courses. The Mentor- Apprentice program and the Sitting Bull College Lakota Language Capacity Building Initiative are two recent programs designed to address this need.

### **SBC Lakota Language Capacity Building Initiative and the *Ĥpečášni Uŋspé'ič'ičiyapi***

In July 2017 Sitting Bull College began the Lakota Language Capacity Building Initiative (LLCBI), which is co-funded by the National Science Foundation Documenting Endangered Languages Program and the NSC Tribal Colleges and Universities Program.<sup>100</sup> The initiative also receives special support from the SRST Language and Culture Institute. This initiative seeks to turn the corner in Lakota/Dakota language revitalization by ramping up existing adult language programming at SBC in four interrelated ways. First, it provides quality language instruction to a

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<sup>100</sup>“NSF Award Search: Award#1664416 - Sitting Bull College's Lakota Language Capacity Building Initiative,” accessed April 23, 2019, [https://nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=1664416](https://nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1664416).

small group of adult learners four hours a day/ five days a week, for one academic year and compensates these individuals for their time with a weekly stipend. This group of learners has chosen to call themselves *Ĥpečašni Uŋspe'ič'ičiyapi* (discussed below). Second, LLCBI provides extensive language acquisition training to the instructors of this program and others who teach Lakota/Dakota language at Sitting Bull College. Third, it investigates much needed language proficiency standards and exams to be used within Sitting Bull College's language programming and at other institutions that focus on developing proficient Lakota/Dakota language users. Finally, it evaluates the results of this program by documenting student Lakota/Dakota language progress through video recordings before, during, and after the program for further modification of Lakota/Dakota language programming.

Importantly, the NSF's funding of the LLCBI is a wonderful example of how scientific needs (here linguistic needs) and community needs can be met by the same program. The intent behind the award was to fund projects that would simultaneously benefit tribal colleges as well as the field of linguistics through language documentation. Originally a proposal was developed wherein a linguist and a group of students from a non-tribal college would come to Standing Rock and run a series of language recording and transcriptions courses with and for students at Sitting Bull College. This, the idea was, would get more people interested in the documentation of Lakota/Dakota, develop language documentation skills among Standing Rock community members, and, of course, contribute to the corpus of Lakota/Dakota language documentation. This first proposal, however, was rejected by the NSF because too much of the funding was going to non-tribal entities. This was a particular issue since the intent of the funding was to help tribal colleges specifically.

In lieu of a complete rejection, however, we were given the opportunity to rewrite our proposal and come up with a project that would more directly impact Sitting Bull College and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. Since I was named Principal Investigator in the original proposal, I took on the responsibility of coordinating and drafting our new proposal. I will describe the process of how we came up with the funded plan to demonstrate an example of language organizing that begins with the needs of the tribal language community and effectively collaborates with various entities seeking to help in language revitalization.

Instead of starting to design a new project with the question "what kinds of projects get NSF funding?" we took up the question, "What does our language community need the most right now?" To seek answers to this, I held individual meetings with different entities who play a role in language revitalization at Standing Rock: The Native American Studies Division at Sitting Bull College, The Standing Rock Language and Culture Institute, the Immersion Programs, and the Lakota Language Consortium, as well as various teachers and language advocates that participate in Lakota/Dakota language revitalization in different ways. We all generally had the same idea: we needed a program that builds language proficiency as quickly as possible. What we came up with was the Lakota Language Capacity Building Initiative or LLCBI.

The exact results from this language acquisition study will be described in a forthcoming co-authored publication. In this article, the LLCBI team investigates not only what it takes to get people on the reservation proficient in Lakota/Dakota, but also what aspects of the language itself are particularly difficult to teach and learn in a college setting. Nevertheless, after just six months, the impact of such a program has been tremendous. We now have more advanced-beginner or intermediate learners than ever. These individuals are taking on positions at the nest and the Lakota Culture Institute (or had already been doing such work and are able to reach their

goals much better). These learners are also opening up new community classes, which not only brings language teaching to the communities, it also takes pressure off of the few who were doing language work already.

The way the group *Ĥpečasni Uŋspe'ič'ičiyapi* determined their name highlights how this program and what it aims to achieve represent a new turn in Lakota/Dakota language revitalization. The name for the group of students taking the courses for a year was designed with some telling motivations. While the name translates into something like *learners who are full of vigor*, that word was specifically picked because it was different from other words commonly used in program naming such as *thąŋka* (big), *waŋblí* (eagle), or *wašté* (good). Further, the group chose “*Ĥpečasni*” precisely because it begins with the guttural H sound that is important to the Lakota/Dakota language, but is hard for first language English speakers to pronounce. With these decisions, the group not only named themselves well, they also began addressing some of the issues they saw in the community, namely: community members (having taken the K-12 language classes) only knew a select number of words and would use them repeatedly without thinking of a different, perhaps better word that fit their program; and community members would often avoid trying to say the relatively difficult sounds that are necessary to speak Lakota/Dakota. The discussions about naming not only reveal the dedication the group has for the language, it also reveals that these individuals recognize that the whole community needs to start thinking about Lakota/Dakota language learning differently.

Another issue *Ĥpečasni Uŋspe'ič'ičiyapi* confronted has to do with the writing systems. When planning for the program in general, it was taken for granted that the Standard Lakota Orthography (discussed in Chapter 2) would be taught. However, when we were looking to design coursework for the reading aspects of the program, we realized that there was not enough complex material in the SLO that would make for an intensive year-long Lakota/Dakota reading course. This was an interesting obstacle, as language organizers at Standing Rock had been working for years to convince all language teachers to adopt the SLO. Now, when we were planning for courses to teach Lakota/Dakota as it has never been done before, we realized the limits of SLO: so many of our important texts are written in different orthographies. To say that knowing SLO is enough to get proficient in Lakota/Dakota would be a mistake. There's just way too much valuable material in our tribal courts, tribal college libraries, and even our own homes written in other ways, that teaching *just* SLO is not enough. Therefore, part of the objective of the Lakota/Dakota readings courses that *Ĥpečasni* takes part in, includes learning how to read at least one other orthography using the SLO as the base orthography. This not only helped expose the participants to many more authentic texts that they could then read and learn from, it also gave the participants, and by extension the Standing Rock community at large, more autonomy in their language learning and any further language projects. By teaching these adults how to work with multiple orthographies the LLCBI courses gave *Ĥpečasni* participants the ability to engage with the rather large corpus of Lakota/Dakota language materials directly, without having to go through a linguist trained in translating multiple orthographies.

Designing and teaching courses for LLCBI has also significantly helped the instructors of the courses in increasing their own proficiency in using Lakota/Dakota. Nacole Walker and Elliot Bannister are the main instructors and have each reported growing in the speaking, writing, reading, understanding, and, of course, teaching abilities. Language organizers are keeping this in mind as they design similar programs to increase Lakota/Dakota language proficiency in the future, as they hope to incorporate aspects of the train-the-trainer model into year-long programs like *Ĥpečasni Uŋspe'ič'ičiyapi*.

## The Mentor-Apprentice Program

In the Fall of 2017 Sitting Bull College was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities award to carry out the first ever Mentor-Apprentice Lakota/Dakota Language Learning Program on Standing Rock. It had been clear for at least a couple of years, if not shortly after its opening, that the immersion nest could not grow or be sustainable without a pool of adult Lakota/Dakota language speakers to pull from. These adults needed to fill the roles of lead-teachers in the classroom, and they needed to be energetic and comfortable working with children. Finally, they needed to be able to break the language down into “small bites,” so that they could be “fed” to children. In short, the nest needed proficient, albeit, younger adults. Fluent speakers, if there were any available, would not be suitable for the position because nearly all fluent speakers of the language were beyond working-age, and would have trouble keeping up with the children. We simply cannot leave a seventy-year-old woman to teach fifteen four-year-olds by herself.

Thus in late January 2017, the immersion program director Yuliya and I began working on a grant application to fund adult language learners in a Master-Apprentice style program. Standing Rock was inspired by the Master Apprentice Program, which was developed by the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival and described in Hinton, Vera, and Steele’s *How to Keep Your Language Alive*.<sup>101</sup> The program we proposed, and eventually found funding for through the National Endowment for the Humanities, provided stipends and training for master-apprentice style language learning wherein adults who are not fluent pair with fluent speakers. Unlike intense coursework, the Mentor-Apprentice language-learning model brings language out of the classroom and into speakers’ and learners’ everyday lives. With training, both mentors and apprentices work together to guide the learners’ language development as it applies to daily situations: driving, washing dishes, grocery shopping, gardening, cooking, childcare. The program can be as advanced or as beginner as needed. For the first year of the program (beginning in Spring 2018), language organizers chose participants who already had some experience learning since it was the first time such a language-learning model was implemented on Standing Rock. The pressure is on to develop highly proficient speakers, so it was important to choose individuals who had already demonstrated some self-learning in their lives.

The benefits of this kind of program, we reasoned, would be that learning would happen outside the classroom, which made good sense on two levels: 1) language learning would happen in real-life so apprentices would be encouraged to use what they learned in everyday situations. And 2) the language learning sessions would be flexible, so pairs could meet when it was convenient for them, as opposed to every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon as in a college class. In February 2018, the program started with three Master/Apprentice pairs. Results of this program are to be determined.

### Community Classes

In 2016 the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (SRST) Language and Culture Institute began a series of periodic “language weekends” in the various communities. These were an effort to make language accessible to people who could not get to Fort Yates or Mclaughlin or Mobridge (larger towns on or next to the reservation) for Sitting Bull College classes, and/or for those who could not commit to an entire semester of language classes. As mentioned, Standing Rock is a

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<sup>101</sup>Leanne; Matt Vera; Nancy Steele Hinton, *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-on-One Language Learning* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2002).

vast, rural reservation. It takes about an hour to get from the southern border to the northern border. For folks living in Little Eagle (Running Antelope District) it would take forty-five minutes to an hour to get to Fort Yates, as we saw with one of the families who had to leave the immersion nest because of the long distance (chapter 3). Still these classes, depending on who is leading them, are starting to grow.

### Section 3: Lessons and Suggestions

The programming discussed above represents a significant turn in language revitalization and language restoration at Standing Rock. Whereas previous work emphasized Lakota/Dakota language development for children, much of the new projects put forth at Standing Rock seek to address adult language development specifically. In doing so, we've been able to recognize some important aspects of adult language acquisition that differ from child language acquisition. On some levels, teaching adults Lakota/Dakota language is much more difficult than teaching children. From personal experiences, as well as from discussions with other learners, I have seen and felt the emotions that are wrapped up in language-learning that are not necessarily present in children. More than children, adults are aware of why the language is important and why language revitalization is needed. Also more than children, many adults have had experience hearing or speaking the language in some capacity or another. Because we recognize the stakes, and because we know what we are supposed to "sound like" we (adults) feel more embarrassed or perhaps more ashamed when we aren't progressing fast enough or when we make mistakes. We are also aware of how much (or how little) we are learning over the course of a given time period. Finally, as adults we have more obligations and responsibilities and demands on our time and energy. In short, while possible, it is certainly not easy for an adult in the Standing Rock community to learn Lakota/Dakota. While adult language programming is certainly what the community needs right now, adult language development comes with different kinds of challenges that cannot be addressed with better teacher training, course materials, or even more time.

One of the major actions we have taken up to address some of these issues has been to pay adults to learn. This was seen in the *Ĥpečášni* and Mentor-Apprentice programs. Language learning is not like learning other cultural things like archery, horseback riding, beading, hide tanning, etc. Language learning involves steps and other people to practice with. Most importantly, unless you love languages, it's not particularly fun and can be mentally exhausting. There is no real completion or end point and there is always something to improve on. Finally, unlike beading or hide tanning, you can't sell or give away your work. Making Lakota/Dakota language learning a job may seem counter-productive in the long run (we certainly do not want people to learn and use the language just for the money). However, paying people frees up some time in adults' otherwise hectic lives, and allows them to focus that time specifically on learning our language. And this is what we need right now in this moment to keep our language movement going forward.

Standing Rock could improve their adult language programming by combining the human resources available and creating positions and programs that serve more than one purpose. For example, adult language class could be built into the immersion program in some capacity.<sup>102</sup> If the immersion program is in need of staff, beginning adult learners (even with just

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<sup>102</sup>This is one idea that came from a discussion I had with Leanne Hinton about the current state of adult language learning on Standing Rock.

a little bit of language knowledge) could help the immersion teachers. For example, they could assist the teachers in the classroom or watch the children during recess using the little language they know. Adult learners could also help teachers prepare and check assignments. They would be learning on the job (in some ways, just like the immersion school teachers). Additionally, Sitting Bull College could require a certain number of volunteer hours with the immersion school, ideally as part of the NAS 101 course. The Lakota language nest is the only Lakota-only space on the entire reservation and one of only a few in Lakota country in general, so it would be important for SBC students to know what that space is like, and perhaps, to get them interested in continuing to learn. One idea would be to somehow combine the immersion program for kids and adult education and make the immersion program some sort of lab-school, wherein adult language learners could then earn college credit for being in the school.<sup>103</sup> This idea could be expanded so that adult learners could earn education credits as well as language-oriented credits.

Developing a critical mass of adults proficient in the Lakota/Dakota language is key to language restoration at Standing Rock for many reasons. First, all the other language programs rely on adult speakers to run them. As we have learned, fluent speakers, who are also usually elders, do not always have the skills needed to develop language in others; and we certainly cannot expect kids to teach themselves. Additionally, the Standing Rock community needs more adults who have experience in successful language learning on leadership boards and other spaces where language and culture decisions are made. Lakota/Dakota language learning is a new practice that everyone will ideally undertake. But developing language proficiency is difficult; and only those who have tried and been successful, can have a say in what works and what does not. Having a growing body of adult L2s (second language learners) to consult will help leaders at Standing Rock to make better decisions when it comes to language revitalization. Finally, adult language teaching is simply needed to revitalize any indigenous language, as adults are a significant part of the community, too. It is now the job of adults to create spaces and reasons for Lakota/Dakota language learning and use. We cannot expect children to use the language when they become adults, if there aren't direct and material reasons to do so.

For example, adults now could create policies that require applicants at the tribe to need Lakota/Dakota language for certain positions (tribal chairperson, council members, tribal historic preservation officer, for example). This, as described in my introduction, is what distinguishes indigenous language revitalization work from simply learning an indigenous language or even learning a heritage language (which may or may not be an indigenous language). Adults now could work on defining spaces across the reservation specifically for Lakota/Dakota language and this process is much easier if those making decisions have experience in language learning. For example, adults in positions of authority could require signage across the reservation or within those institutions they oversee to be entirely in Lakota/Dakota. This could include schools or tribal buildings or even stores and gas stations. If adults now do not make Lakota/Dakota language a necessity in at least some areas of reservation life, it is unlikely that the children that we teach will use what they have learned through adolescence and adulthood.

It may be prestigious or noble to speak Lakota/Dakota, but adults now need to ensure that speaking Lakota/Dakota is a practical decision in the future. It is important also to remember that our Lakota/Dakota ancestors continued speaking English not necessarily because they wanted to be seen as “white,” but because it was economically smart. It was sometimes, perhaps often, impractical to use Lakota/Dakota. English was the practical language. Abstract concepts like

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<sup>103</sup>This idea came from a discussion with Yuliya Manyakina after we investigated the Lab-school set up the University of Hawaii, Hilo has with immersion schools on that island.

identity, peoplehood, and decolonization may not be motivation enough to keep growing children in the language, especially in places where using Lakota/Dakota is less efficient than English. Thus, adults now can create the systems that will encourage continued language use in the future. It is just a lot easier to create these structures if there is a large group of working-age adults who know the language or have experience learning the language, at the very least.

## Chapter 5

### Language Revitalization on the Reservation

This chapter discusses some of the general findings I draw from my ethnographic research. These are themes that impact Standing Rock's language revitalization movement as a whole, rather than one area or part of Lakota/Dakota language programming. This chapter includes four sections: The first provides a general summary and characterization of the recent movement to revitalize language at Standing Rock. The second section addresses the major obstacles to progress in this movement, which include the need for more research and education in indigenous language acquisition, the lack of basic community resources that characterize life on a large rural and impoverished reservation, and the sense of urgency imposed by the reality that the community is not generating fluent Lakota speakers as fast as they are losing them. Section three shows the importance of the fact that Lakota language revitalization at Standing Rock is part of a larger inter-tribal Lakota language movement, which is also a part of a larger, global movement to revitalize indigenous languages. The final section of this chapter discusses the intersections of indigenous language revitalization and conceptions of Native sovereignty.

#### Section 1: On Teaching and Learning

The most important change that characterizes Standing Rock's most recent movement to revitalize the Lakota/Dakota language has to do with language education. Since 2006 there was a conscious effort to improve the way Lakota/Dakota is taught. This sprang from the realization that children are no longer learning the language at home or in the community and that language courses may be one place where tribal language loss can be reversed or, at the very least, slowed down. From K-12 classes, through immersion, to adult learning environments, there has been more concentration, investigation, and experimentation on how community members learn language and how we might be able to teach the language. Not until this most recent language movement has there been such a push to improve language-learning. Before this movement there was much emphasis on language performance –as we saw with the Powwow Princess Speech – and on cultural understanding of the language, that is using words or phrases one might hear in the language to understand aspects of traditional Lakota/Dakota society. Neither of these approaches, however, actually gets people speaking or practicing the language. Today there is a conscious effort at Standing Rock to figure out best practices to teach language so that students will eventually become speakers and users of it.

As my previous chapters describe, efforts to revitalize Lakota/Dakota language at Standing Rock are primarily taking place in the realm of language education. There are currently too few speakers of the language to spend time and energy on changing language policy or even the prestige of the language in the community, which are necessary parts of language revitalization according to Fishman, Hinton, and others working in the field.<sup>104</sup> Rather, the idea is, if Standing Rock can build a critical mass of highly proficient Lakota language users then the other components of reversing the language shift will be easier. Building a critical mass of

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<sup>104</sup>Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*. And Fishman, *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved?: Reversing Language Shift, Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective*. And Hinton and Hale, *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*.



language users is taking place, mainly, in three arenas: the K-12 institutions, the immersion programs, and adult language learning. While each arena faces unique challenges, there are some obstacles that impact the success of or otherwise shape each program that are characteristics of the language movement as a whole on Standing Rock. I discuss those obstacles below.

## Section 2: Revitalization on the Reservation

### **Obstacle 1: Language Education Training**

There are three major obstacles to the success of this movement. The first is the lack of research, training, and general understanding of indigenous language acquisition both in scholarship and in the community. Learning Lakota/Dakota language in any way other than being raised in the language is a fairly recent phenomenon at Standing Rock, as it is for all of Lakota/Dakota country. Before significant language loss, the strategy to learn Lakota/Dakota must have been similar to the current strategies of language learners who fully immerse themselves in a language environment and try to pick up everything from contexts and situations. This style of language learning, for the time being, is not a possibility in contemporary Lakota/Dakota communities. One might be able to find fluent speakers and learn from them in protected contexts (like the mentor-apprentice style programs), but eventually and probably very soon, one runs into someone who does not speak Lakota/Dakota: a store clerk, a gas station attendant, one's mother. It is pretty difficult, if not impossible, therefore, to create a 24-hour all-Lakota/Dakota environment right now. So Standing Rock and other communities are trying to figure out ways to teach Lakota/Dakota that are entirely new for the language and for the communities: in grade-school and college classrooms, in an immersion program, with textbooks and dictionaries and smart phone apps.

As discussed there is a lack of materials, philosophies, and methods for teaching Lakota/Dakota specifically, and there is only a small body of research investigating best practices to teach indigenous languages to indigenous communities. None of it, so far, takes up Lakota/Dakota language teaching. Because of this, practitioners in the language movement must draw from scholarship in heritage language acquisition or second language acquisition, neither of which fully apply to the context of teaching Native language to Native communities as part of language revitalization.

Additionally, practitioners in the language movement learn from other indigenous communities that have been more successful in the language teaching efforts. The immersion school, for example, sought help from both Hawaiian and Ojibwe programs when seeking out ways to train their new teachers. The primary method for learning best Lakota/Dakota language teaching practices, however, has been trial and error. Language organizers at Standing Rock expend a great deal of time and energy learning from their programs and making changes to them. They are generally open to changing the way a course is taught or the way a program is set up, if they are not seeing the results they hoped for. This process, however, would be greatly improved with better tools to evaluate existing courses, programs, and plans, as I discuss in detail in section four of this chapter. Nevertheless, not knowing how to best teach the language or how to best harness the strengths of each teacher is a major obstacle in the language movement right now.

A better understanding of Lakota/Dakota language acquisition is certainly needed at the level of the learners and teachers, but it is also needed at the level of tribal administrators and community leaders, who may not have direct contact with the language everyday, but who are nevertheless involved in major decisions regarding the community's language movement. While teachers need to understand best ways to facilitate language acquisition, administrators and community leaders need to understand the process of language-learning, what is required to facilitate it, and what the language teachers and organizers are facing as they seek to develop quality Lakota language learning programs. As my previous chapters described, the job of the Lakota/Dakota language teacher and program developer (in K-12 systems, the immersion program, or at Sitting Bull College) involves much more than guiding students through the material; it often involves creating those materials, and even determining what aspects of the language should be covered in those materials. For many teachers and organizers, it also involves learning or relearning those aspects of the language they are about to teach. The work of the language teacher and organizer is so new and different from other educational tasks in these institutions that sometimes administrators and leaders do not seem to understand the pressure and frustration the teachers and organizers feel, or the need for programmed time for the creative work necessary to invent the program. Additionally, without understanding the process of language acquisition and the tasks of language teachers and organizers, they are unable to aid the teachers when they need help, nor are they able to hold those individuals "accountable" in a realistic and productive way. The most important thing teachers and administrators need to understand, moreover, is that we are losing the Lakota/Dakota language rapidly and it will take a great deal of resources and energy to reverse this trend—a task that will involve everyone's participation, not just the language and culture teachers.

A greater sense of what it takes to learn Lakota/Dakota is also needed in the community more generally. Because so few people in the community have learned Lakota/Dakota as a second language, community members are unsure of what to expect, or they expect things from language learners that are not possible. For example, tribal council members were concerned because their constituents have noticed new language learners do not "sound like" the fluent speaking elders, or that the new language learners "sound like they learned from a book." These critiques are then brought to language organizers as legitimate problems to fix. However, in the process of language-learning, especially in a context with so few fluent speakers to interact with, a learner will sound, well, like a learner. Pronunciation and fluidity in speaking are aspects of language learning that develop over time. It would be too much to expect beginning learners to sound like fluent speakers, especially if these beginners are not learning how to simply recite and perform language, but understand and learn the language so they can build their own sentences and express themselves in it. Language organizers spend quite some time trying to explain this process to council members and the community when it, unfortunately, takes time and energy away from actual language teaching and programming. The more the community as a whole understands these aspects of the language learning process, the more they will be able to support language activists and the easier language revitalization will happen.

## **Obstacle 2: Housing**

There are some other obstacles to the language revitalization movement at Standing Rock that cannot be alleviated with more research and more community trainings. These are issues that emerge from the conditions of a rural reservation environment, where this particular language

movement is taking place. There are a number of resources the reservation lacks that would make language programming (as well as other programming) more successful. One such resource is housing. There were times when people from other parts of North Dakota or South Dakota were interested in becoming immersion school instructors, but did not consider applying for the position because they knew that housing near Sitting Bull College would be difficult to secure. The Standing Rock housing authority's agency overview states "the need for affordable rental housing on the Standing Rock reservation is extreme."<sup>105</sup> It also states that there are currently over 400 families in need of housing on the reservation. There is no private market for housing on Standing Rock. Additionally, getting a loan to build a house on the reservation is next to impossible because banks legally cannot own or place a lien upon the Indian (trust) land on which reservation housing is built, so they are not willing to risk a loan on a structure without the site. I experienced the lack of housing when I first moved to the reservation and stayed in the SBC dorms for my first 8 months. I then moved to a rental home in Fort Yates that, unfortunately, needed many more repairs than the owner could afford and so I moved off the reservation to Bismarck. The trip from Bismarck to Fort Yates is about an hour in good driving conditions (70 miles). It is also about an hour to Mobridge, SD, the second biggest town next to the reservation. Additionally, the roads that lead to Bismarck and to Mobridge are not conducive to high speeds, especially in the wintertime when snowdrifts and ice patches are a great concern. With the only available housing a potentially dangerous but surely long drive from work, it's easy to see why many people are not interested in moving to Standing Rock, even if it is to play a significant part in the Lakota/Dakota language movement.

### **Obstacle 3: Childcare**

Another scarce resource on the reservation is quality childcare. People often have to miss language classes because they need to stay home with their child when a safe and loving environment for that child cannot be found. There are approaches to language learning that involve the whole family together, as described in Hinton's *Bringing our Languages Home*.<sup>106</sup> This book describes methods in which indigenous parents have focused nearly all language effort on using their language with their own children and partners and helping them learn, sometimes by learning the language all together as a family unit. Advocates for such family-based programs may critique the notion that language needs to be learned by adults only, without their children present. Language learners and teachers at Standing Rock, however, would say that adult-only language-learning spaces are important because learning not only words and phrases in the language at home, but also how the language works, what the building blocks of the language are, and how to use the resources currently available to language learners, takes a great deal of focus. Having young children in the room can be disruptive. Ultimately the goal at Standing Rock is to teach adults enough language that they can use with their children, as well as enough "about" the language – grammar, pronunciation, usage – that the adult students can then practice on their own and with their families. It is hard to imagine whole families with toddlers and babies successfully sitting through a grammar lesson.

For students enrolled in SBC courses this issue is alleviated through the Kampus Kids program, which offers free or reduced childcare to SBC students. Participants in the *Ħpečasni*

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<sup>105</sup> "Standing Rock Housing Authority Site," The Official Home of the Standing Rock Housing Authority Website, accessed April 23, 2019, <http://standingrockhousing.org/>.

<sup>106</sup> Leanne Hinton, *Bringing Our Languages Home: Language Revitalization for Families* (Heyday, 2013).

program who had children were able to take advantage of Kampus Kids to some degree by enrolling in and paying for a few college credits at SBC each semester. Even then, the Kampus Kids program was often full or had many restrictions that prevented even some SBC students from taking part. Language activists, organizers, or program participants, who were not enrolled SBC students were not eligible for this program, or, if employed by SBC, were pushed to the back of the waiting list. All in all the demand for quality childcare on the reservation is higher than the supply, and this impacts nearly all programming on the reservation, including language programming.

#### **Obstacle 4: Human Resources**

The language movement at Standing Rock has to deal with a shortage of human resources. There is so much to do, and so few people to do it on the reservation. While Chapter Three describes how there is a great shortage of immersion teachers, and limited ways to train new teachers, it is also important to recognize that immersion is not the only domain where human resources are needed. In fact, reservation-wide, there are many positions left unfilled, in all areas.

Because of the lack of housing and other amenities on the reservation (such as shops, entertainment, and other institutions one might find in a more populated area), the difficulty of securing trustworthy transportation, and other factors that result from living on an impoverished and rural reservation, it is difficult for the few reservation employers to recruit and hire people (especially trained people) to take on many jobs on the reservation. This applies to language programs as well. Because of this, the language movement at Standing Rock suffers from what one parent called “Same Ten People Syndrome” or STPS, wherein the people at the core of the language movement, of which there are few, take on too many roles and risk burn-out. Like the immersion school teachers, language program directors and organizers often feel burned out or overwhelmed as they are simultaneously advocating for the language in various arenas at the tribal, state, or national level, developing and maintaining language programs at Standing Rock, securing funding for those programs, teaching language classes, and trying to develop proficiency in the language themselves.

#### **Obstacle 5: Small Town Politics**

As with all small towns and places, Standing Rock faces micro-political challenges that shape life –including language programming –on the reservation. There are some families, people, ideas, and programs that other families, people, ideas, and programs will not work with. These politics are always changing, but they are also always present. Indeed, in any social organization, whether that is an academic institution, a government, or even a family, micro-politics play an important role in how those organizations operate. In rural places like Standing Rock, where there are few people to take up positions in these spaces, micro-politics can seem like a larger, more dominating force. There are some instances where programs would run smoother if this was not the case. Nevertheless, the language movement in general at Standing Rock seems flexible enough to encompass many facets of the community’s micro-political climate in a positive way, moving forward with language goals. It is just worth mentioning that in small, sparsely populated areas, micro politics may play a larger role than in more populated places because in bigger cities there usually is more people to take on more jobs.

## Obstacle 6: Time

Unlike many Native communities across the U.S. and Canada, there are still fluent speakers of the language on Standing Rock. Yet, there are few of them, and less than 300 around Standing Rock, the Language and Culture Institute estimates. These fluent speakers are only getting older and are passing away. In the year that I have lived in Berkeley since moving away from the reservation, two of the fluent speaking elders who were part of the language revitalization movement at Standing Rock passed away. Time is not on the side of language activists and there always seems to be a feeling of great urgency when it comes to language programming.

While a goal might be to spend as much time with a fluent speaking elder as possible, we have also found that it is important to help learners develop a certain level of proficiency in the language before pairing them with fluent speakers as many fluent speakers don't know how, or don't have the patience, to work with a less advanced learner. Thus, this sense of urgency is not just on programs that involve fluent speakers, it is present in all aspects of language programming. The aim is to develop proficiency in the learners before they work with and learn from fluent speakers, and when you see your fluent speakers pass onto the next life the fear is that few if any will get to the level where they can really work with and learn from fluent speakers at a high level. Language revitalization becomes much harder to do with no fluent speakers. We are just at a point in learning on Standing Rock where we know enough of the language to efficiently or effectively learn from fluent speakers. It is important that we get to that point before our fluent speaking elders move on to the next life.

Time is also working against the language movement when it comes to children as well. There is belief among language organizers and community members that language is best learned at a very young age, meaning the best way to teach the language is to teach young children before they get too old. So there is a sense of urgency, though not as great as in the first sense, to develop language programs quickly so that the kids currently in those language programs will get maximum language learning.

If language revitalization takes so much time, energy, money, and thought, how much of those resources can be allocated to language revitalization when the community is facing so many other problems, including low life expectancy, high rates of drug abuse, high rate of diabetes, malnutrition in children, high rate of alcoholism, etc.?

I think one way to look at this is that despite all of these problems, the tribe is still allocating great time, energy and money to these language programs. Much of the reason why has to do with what language activists believe the language can offer a community. As mentioned in my introduction, Lakota/Dakota language can offer people a uniquely Lakota/Dakota way of understanding themselves, their relationships to community, to the environment, and indeed to the world and the universe. It is a belief among language activists that, if people had their language, they would not look to drugs or alcohol for comfort. Nevertheless, there is this belief that if we bring our language back we would have fewer social ills in our community. There is probably some truth to this, actually, if language is practiced with Lakota/Dakota tradition, ceremony, and custom. I do not believe that being able to speak and understand the language will make you a healthier person. Rather being able to speak and understand the language would give you new ways to solve the problems I listed before.

It is also important to recognize that many, if not all, of the societal issues this community faces that hinder language revitalization are all direct results of European

colonization of the Americas, just as language loss is. Therefore, I argue that projects that seek to revitalize the reservation community aid in language revitalization. Conversely, language revitalization is part of community revitalization. And we must recognize the links between the two in order to do each successfully.

### Section 3: Beyond Standing Rock

One might ask: would not it be a smarter, more economically viable, and efficient for the language organizers to put the time and energy into language revitalization in areas where there are more resources, such as Bismarck or Rapid City? I asked a similar question as I learned more about what was going on in the K-12 institutions. I thought, if it's so hard to make progress in the K-12 schools, is not the language better off if we focus all our time and energy in spaces on programs or on people who are not as restricted as they are on the reservation? We can develop more proficient speakers faster, if we put our time and energy where there are already resources.

Doing what is best for the language (that is creating the highest number of speakers in the shortest amount of time) is, however, only one way to look at language revitalization. And there are probably reasons why a community might look at such strategies. But what is best for the language is not necessarily what the language movement at Standing Rock is all about. Instead most Standing Rock language activists see language revitalization, both the use of the language and the programming to support language use and learning as essential to community health and wellbeing. It is the revitalization of the community that Standing Rock language activists see as their top priority, and language is the main means of serving that goal. Plus, it was the Standing Rock tribal department of education that did the majority of the organizing for the most recent movement to revitalize language there, and their primary responsibility is to serve the enrolled members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Their question was, and always will be “how to revitalize our Lakota/Dakota language?” That is, how do we revitalize Lakota/Dakota at Standing Rock?

Yet it would be a mistake to believe that Standing Rock is the only place where such work is happening for Lakota, just as it would be a mistake to believe that Standing Rock is doing all its work without influence and assistance from outside its reservation boundaries. Lakota/Dakota language revitalization is happening to some degree (and with varying levels of success) at all Lakota/Dakota reservations and in many of the off-reservation communities. A language conference called Tusweca draws representatives from the various language programs and communities to share work and ideas with others from Lakota/Dakota country.<sup>107</sup> As discussed in previous chapters, the Lakota Language Consortium works with other Lakota/Dakota tribes, institutions, and communities, not just Standing Rock. In 2018 they worked with the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation to open a version of the Lakota Summer Institute at Oglala Lakota College, and they worked with United Tribes Technical College (Bismarck) to open an institute there. While there is some collaboration among these endeavors across reservation boundaries, and between different types of communities, there is no central system for organizing all Lakota/Dakota language work. We have a lot to learn from each other, and the language movements in each community would benefit from having some sort of platform

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<sup>107</sup>“Tusweca Tiospaye – Uniting the Seven Council Fires to Save Our Language,” accessed April 23, 2019, <http://tusweca.org/>.

(either online or a physical office/ convention) where resources could be shared to increase the efficacy of each program, and, of course, to prevent wheel reinventing.

Other indigenous communities who have worked to revitalize their own languages also influence the language movement at Standing Rock. Language organizers at Standing Rock learned lessons from the Maori and Hawaiians, the Mohawks, and the Ojibwe, and other indigenous groups. The immersion program is part of an inter-tribal (and inter-national) group called the National Coalition of Native American Language Schools & Programs, which aims to empower Native language schools in programming, lobbying, and policy-designing.<sup>108</sup> The work of a Lakota/Dakota language organizer is to take lessons and experience from other indigenous communities and adopt and adapt those lessons and ideas to the specific context of Standing Rock. This is no easy task, and much is learned from trial and error. For example, the Lakota immersion program at Standing Rock was modeled after the Hawaiian immersion schools, but had to change significantly over time because there were too few people on Standing Rock who knew the language to expand the program, while there was a critical mass of parent-age Hawaiian speakers and learners to grow the program in Hawaii. While indigenous communities can certainly learn from other communities, it is important for language organizers to think critically about how those lessons may or may not apply to their own specific context. This can be rather difficult when something like a language movement involves many moving parts, and requires expertise in many areas from running a school, writing grants, understanding linguists, and of course, learning the language.

#### Section 5: Lakota Language, Native Sovereignty, and Resistance to Settler Colonialism

When I first thought of doing research at Standing Rock, I had a conversation with Dr. Kelly Morgan, who then worked in the Standing Rock Tribal Historic Preservation Office. I had told Kelly that I was interested in the intersections of Lakota/Dakota language revitalization and Lakota/Dakota sovereignty, believing that revitalizing our language was an exercise of tribal sovereignty. Dr. Morgan was quick to point out that the tribe needed more sovereignty, more control, particularly in education to revitalize language and culture. In other words, what Dr. Morgan summed up, and what my research describes, is that in many ways the tribe's lack of political sovereignty, that is its inability to take sole control over its own affairs, impedes on its linguistic sovereignty, that is its ability to choose the language in which to conduct its affairs and daily life.

We certainly saw elements of this in language work at the K-12 level. Language advocates and teachers had to fight hard to convince school administrators to allow adequate time for language learning. Before students were only getting 20 minutes or so a week. Now many schools offer language classes more regularly, like any other school subject. (We've also seen how this isn't the case for all the schools on the reservation.) For Dr. Morgan, and for many others interested in language revitalization on the reservation, the issue is control. Non-tribal forces or expectations are dictating what happens to tribal language. In the K-12 schools, state and federal standards such as mandates regarding how many minutes of math class a student must receive each week left little room for language learning. Schools risked getting lower scores on tests, and in turn, receiving less funding if they took time away from math and

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<sup>108</sup>“National Coalition of Native American Language Schools & Programs,” National Coalition of Native American Language Schools & Programs, accessed April 23, 2019, <http://www.ncnalsp.org/>.

language arts to teach Lakota/Dakota language. Here, sovereignty is wrapped up in funding for education.

But what about those instances of language work that happen outside of the purview of the settler government. The language nest and school and Sitting Bull College are both institutions that could arguably be thought of as more sovereign or independent of the settler government's education policies. Compared to the K-12 institutions, these schools do not have to answer to the state or federal education standards for most of their funding. The immersion nest, as I've described, opened precisely because restriction in K-12 schools were impeding on the language work the tribe, or at least the language advocates on their reservation –thought ought to be carried out. Sitting Bull College, as a TCU, likewise was created to serve specifically tribal educational needs. Sitting Bull College's mission, even, includes language revitalization. But these programs are still facing difficult challenges. Here the issue is not so much contemporary political sovereignty or lack thereof, but the settler structures that lower the quality of life for tribal communities, which include a lack of tribal political sovereignty in the past. Many language activists point to the fact that no one, not even the colonial government anymore, is telling Native peoples they cannot speak their languages. In fact, in 1990 the United States federal government passed the Native American Languages Act, which acknowledged that Native peoples have the right to speak and use their languages.<sup>109</sup>

My research shows that more than just the right to choose language and more than just money to support language programs is needed to revitalize Native languages. It shows first that more understanding of indigenous language learning and teaching are needed to transmit the language from the elder generation to new ones. More importantly, my research shows that healthy communities are needed to revitalize language revitalization.

Yet, these two processes –building healthy indigenous communities and revitalizing indigenous languages –go hand in hand. In recent years, Native Studies scholars have been highlighting more and more how Native language can and should play a role in Native resistance to settler colonialism, thus strengthening Native communities. Muscogee legal scholar and activist Sarah Deer, for example, writes of the importance of Native language in reconceptualizing what she calls an indigenous jurisprudence of rape.<sup>110</sup> Native women experience nearly three times the amount of sexual violence than any other group in the United States.<sup>111</sup> In her book *The Beginning and End of Rape*, Deer contextualizes this statistic, demonstrating that it is part of a historical trend wherein Native women's bodies were (and are) considered lesser, and therefore rapable by colonizers, as well as part of the current settler colonial structure wherein tribal governments are not given the resources or authority to prosecute perpetrators. While Deer and others are working on reinstating jurisdiction to tribal governments regarding rape and other types of sexual violence, Deer emphasizes that tribal governments do not simply adopt or reform the existing American rape law. Deer shows throughout her book that such rape laws are inherently dysfunctional as they conceive of women, often at the level of language itself, as property, specifically men's property. In such laws any infraction against a woman is seen as a crime against a man, and not, against the woman herself.

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<sup>109</sup>“Text of S. 2167 (101st): Native American Languages Act (Passed Congress Version),” GovTrack.us, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/101/s2167/text>.

<sup>110</sup>Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (U of Minnesota Press, 2015).

<sup>111</sup>Amnesty International, “Maze of Injustice: The Failure to Protect Indigenous Women from Sexual Violence in the USA,” 2007.



Deer argues that effective rape laws are those that acknowledge that the crime is against the woman and, since women serve such important roles in family and community life, the crime must also be seen as an infraction against the community. Deer therefore argues that tribes develop their own legal responses to rape, but ideally start from a tribal centric perspective.

Further, Deer highlights, key to developing indigenous models of rape law, Deer argues is the consideration of tribal cultures and philosophies. Part of this, Deer emphasizes, involves an understanding of tribal languages. She writes, “Stories, ceremonies, and spiritual teachings have always played a central role in indigenous responses to crime. When determining the best way for any particular community to respond to sexual violence, it may be beneficial to revisit some of these stories and beliefs.”<sup>112</sup> She continues, “Written records and/or English translations are not often recommended as valid sources of information. In many tribal cultures, the most sacred laws are passed down through oral traditions in the tribal language, and it would be inappropriate to condense them to written words or render them into other languages.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, Deer highlights that knowledge of tribal language is key to developing effective tribal rape laws.

While there are some stories and songs in Lakota/Dakota culture that have not, and perhaps should not be written, there are still thousands of stories in archives (digital and hard-copy) that could contribute to a Lakota/Dakota jurisprudence of rape. This issue is, that, no matter if they are written or oral, there are very few people in this world who know the language enough to be able to engage with them on a level that could effectively inform any legal matter, let alone a tribally centered model of rape law.

As my dissertation has shown, tribal communities like Standing Rock are struggling just to get through kindergarten-level materials in the language. I am not arguing that Deer is wrong in her call to Native languages; rather, I am emphasizing that in order to do the work with the language that actually changes structural aspects of the settler colonial paradigm, in order to acquire the different worldviews our languages offer and to apply them in our world in structural ways, we need to focus more time and energy into actually learning to speak and use our languages. It is not enough to learn a few key terms or phrases and it is not enough to learn the spiritual or philosophical meaning of those words in English. We must get to the point in our communities where we can speak and understand our languages, argue in our languages, and develop new concepts and new ideas in our languages. This may not be a realistic goal for all indigenous communities, but I believe it is possible for Lakota/Dakota. Through such language skills, we can develop understandings of our problems and new ways of creating solutions for ourselves and for our communities. If this study has done anything, I hope it has highlighted just how difficult this process is, not to overwhelm anyone with the giant task of language revitalizing, but to highlight an area of tribal life that needs more research and resources and human attention in general.

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112 Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, 118.

113 Deer, 119.

## Conclusion

### Recap and Recommendations

Since 2006 Standing Rock has developed many interrelated language revitalization projects and programs that form the core of the current language revitalization movement there. Standing Rock took on the great challenge of improving Lakota/Dakota language courses in K-12 institutions. Even though those efforts have not yet produced proficient K-12 speakers, those efforts kick started an array of other programs designed to increase the number of Lakota/Dakota speakers in the community. A central aspect of the recent movement to revitalize Lakota/Dakota on Standing Rock is the immersion programs. This dissertation has not only told the story of Standing Rock immersion projects, it has also discussed at length the difficulty of running such programs and the sometimes unrealistic expectations an immersion program places on local human resources. Chapter 4 then explored the ways Standing Rock has worked to develop and support working-age populations and prepare them for future language revitalization tasks. All of these projects, moreover, have been in many ways shaped by the conditions and realities of rural reservation life. And this dissertation has shown some of the various ways everyday life on Standing Rock often hinders current language revitalization efforts.

The main task Standing Rock is currently taking up is tribal language revitalization, that is creating more speakers and domains for the Lakota/Dakota language in this reservation context. At the heart of these efforts, is Lakota/Dakota language teaching and learning. Overall, language learning and teaching that does not happen in immersive, everyday contexts is something completely new to indigenous communities like Standing Rock. More research is needed to determine best methods of teaching indigenous languages to indigenous communities. By trying new methods and continually learning and growing every year, Standing Rock as a community is contributing to this research. As we move forward in research on indigenous language learning and teaching, we must keep a few things in mind.

Language learning methods and practices must bear in mind the context of the language work. Standing Rock is an impoverished rural community that faces many other hardships besides indigenous language loss. While there are not very many fluent-speaking elders in the community, there are a good number of open-minded, dedicated ones who are willing to help the language movement where they can. And while there still remains some disagreement about how to teach the language, there is general agreement about teaching it in schools, and writing it using the SLO (this is not the case for all indigenous languages, and not for all Lakota communities.) All these factors, as we have seen impact the success of various types of language programming. We should pay attention to both the obstacles reservation life presents for tribal language revitalization, as well as the opportunities, such as tribally controlled colleges and universities, and tribal government powers.

In moving forward with language revitalization at Standing Rock that the community is still struggling to get on with daily life in many ways. This can be mentally, emotionally, and spiritually exhausting. As we reflect on our successes in language revitalization we must remember that we have made that progress not only in the face of language loss, but in the context of settler colonialism. When we are frustrated with our failures or setbacks, we must recognize that we are working in an environment that was designed to see us fail. The fact that Standing Rock language organizers regroup, reassess, and restart many of their language

programs shows that settler colonialism is not and will not be a complete project. The determination to revitalize Lakota/Dakota language will continue until we are all speaking our language.

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