

Report Summary: Linn et al 2000

Title: *Awakening the Languages: Challenges of Enduring Language Programs: field reports from 15 programs from Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma*

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http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/ILAC/ILAC_13.pdf

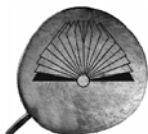
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Main questions:

- What is the status of different North American indigenous languages?
- What information can the Indigenous Languages Institute (ILI) offer to best meet the needs of individuals, programs, and communities?
- How can indigenous communities share with and learn from each other to develop and carry out language programs, to maintain and revitalize Indigenous languages and reverse negative attitudes?
- What types of language programs already exist?
- What do the model programs look like? What are the common methods and processes? What strategies work best?
- What challenges and problems do people experience when they set up a language program? How did they meet those challenges and resolve the problems?

Some background ideas:

- People often experience conflict and oppression when two or more cultures come into contact. The conflict and oppression are more likely



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when one culture dominates and uses its power over the other culture: for example political, military, economic, and/or demographic power. The conflict and oppression relates to things such as language choice, majority / minority issues, and identity crises.

- In the United States 74% of the states participate in some form of legislation that places English above a person's indigenous language. At the same time the US enacted the *Native American Languages Act* to recognize that indigenous languages are vital to indigenous peoples.
- Michael Krauss, University of Alaska classifies 211 North American indigenous languages:

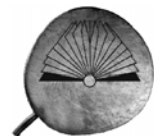
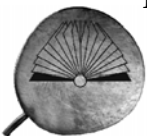
Class A: 32 languages / 15%: All age groups speak the language, including children. Expected life span: two generations without immediate intervention.

Class B: 36 languages / 17%: Only parents and older age groups speak the language. Expected life span: 50 years.

Class C: 85 languages / 40%: Grandparents and older age groups speak the language. Expected life span: 40 years.

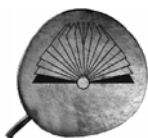
Class D: 58 language / 28%: Only very elderly people speak the language, usually less than 10 people. Expected life span: 10 years.

- One goal of **all** language programs is to produce new speakers.
- Indigenous people strongly believe that indigenous languages are the soul and spirit of the people; you cannot measure what language means to the people.
- The Indigenous Language Institute (ILI) works with communities to reverse language decline. They focus on three main areas:
 - i) Facilitate community-based language programs: how to record languages, plan a program, train teachers, develop curriculum, and prepare materials.
 - ii) Increase public awareness about the status of indigenous languages: the relationships between language and cultural health and wellbeing.



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- ✓ Re-create classrooms: Language teachers develop curricula and materials. They need to also create a natural language environment to promote communication and interaction between teachers and students, and between students and students.
- ✓ Change attitudes from hurt to responsibility: Language is a responsibility not a privilege. Students take responsibility to learn and pass the language on; communities take responsibility to promote language use, not simply give lip service.
- Successful language programs seem to share certain characteristics, to help overcome difficulties and to produce new speakers:
 - ✓ Use teams: A team includes Elders, community language teachers and advocates, outside resources people such as linguists and curriculum developers, and learners.
 - ✓ Use immersion, speak the language: Learn about different types and degrees of immersion, and how to use this approach.
 - ✓ Be family oriented: Children that learn the language need to go home and use it. Parents and extended family need to get involved. Some programs make this mandatory.
 - ✓ Set goals: Each community has its own goals, based on the language situation. Set long-term goals high; have easily attainable, intermediate goals.
 - ✓ Build up not out: Communities with very few speakers need to quickly produce new fluent speakers so they can then teach, rather than teach everyone just a bit about the language.
 - ✓ Find balance in old and new: Rely on Elders for decisions and council; listen to new ideas that younger people introduce. Emphasize spoken language; create a writing system.
 - ✓ Work through language variation issues: Create a process to discuss and resolve issues about oral versus written language, writing system, language variations, what to teach and how.



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- ✓ Work through the politics: Community-wide support is best but not necessary. Start small and gradually expand the circle of teachers and learners.
- ✓ Persevere: Keep going no matter what. Spread hope and optimism, be part of a strong support network.
- Individuals / groups **do not need** these things to get started: money, tribal support, or a large number of speakers.
- The ILI plans to keep gathering information and later produce a series of 'Facts' and 'How to' brochures.

