Back from the (Nearly) Dead

*Reviving Indigenous Languages across North America*

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The people of the Cochiti Pueblo were moved to revitalize their language after they conducted a survey that disclosed that all of its fluent speakers were thirty-five years of age or older. The few speakers under age thirty-five were semiliterate, according to Mary Eunice Romero, a Karas (Pueblo). Romero then asked, “What is going to happen to our language in 20 years when those [who are] 35 years old become 55? In 20 more years, when they’re 75?”

The Cochiti immersion program began in 1996 with a summer program for thirty children under instruction from the Tribal Council, all instruction to be carried out orally, with no written texts. After that, according to Romero, the program grew quickly: “When the kids went home, they spread the news that, ‘Wow, they’re not using any English. They’re not writing. It’s just totally in Cochiti.’ We started out with four teachers. The next day, we got 60 kids. By the third week, we had 90 kids. By the end of the summer, the kids were starting to speak.” Romero also watched the mode of instruction change the behavior of the children: “The behavior change was a major miracle. These kids came in rowdy as can be. By the time they left, they knew the appropriate protocol of how you enter a house, greet your elder, say good-bye. The fact that they could use verbal communication for the most important piece of culture, values, and love started a chain reaction in the community.”

Experiences at the Cochiti Pueblo mirror a trend across Turtle Island (North America). Native American languages, many of which have been verging on extinction, have enjoyed a revival in recent years largely due to many Native American nations’ adoption of “immersion” programs,
which teach a language as the major part of many reservation school curricula.

Two books have been developed from a series of symposia on teaching Indigenous languages that have been held annually since 1994. The symposia have gathered roughly three hundred people a year at several venues around the United States. Several were held at Northern Arizona University, where they were sponsored by its Multicultural Education Program, a subdivision of the university’s Center for Excellence in Education. These two books celebrate the rediscovery of language with a sense of joy. The revival of Indigenous languages—immersion training has become one of the hottest educational tickets in Indian Country— is in stark contrast to the somber purge of Native languages and cultures that was delivered more than a century ago with the federal government’s historical emphasis on assimilation into English-speaking mainstream culture. It was encapsulated in the slogan “Kill the Indian, save the man,” used by Richard Henry Pratt, who founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1879.

Julia Kushner, one of the contributors to Revitalizing Native Languages (she describes language work among the Arikara), cites studies indicating that 90 percent of the 175 Native languages that survived General Platt’s cultural gauntlet today have no child speakers. That figure dates from the mid-1990s. Speakers mourn the continuing loss of several languages, more than a dozen of which lost their last living speakers during the first half of the 1990s alone.

The revival of Native languages has been a grassroots affair in many Native American communities, as immersion programs have spread across Turtle Island, from the Akwesasne Mohawk territory (which straddles the borders of New York State, Ontario, and Quebec), to the Cochiti Pueblo of New Mexico and the Native peoples of Hawaii.

LANGUAGE AS THE BASIS OF SOVEREIGNTY

Why teach language? Little Bear said that “language is the basis of sovereignty,” as well as the vessel of culture. During the nineteenth century, said Little Bear, the United States showed its respect for Native American languages’ essential role in culture by trying to eliminate them: “We have all those attributes that comprise sovereign nations: a governance struc-
ture, law and order, jurisprudence, a literature, a land base, spiritual and sacred practice, and that one attribute that holds all of these... together: our languages. So once our languages disappear, each one of these attributes begins to fall apart until they are all gone.”7 Little Bear said that, for the Cheyennes, the transition to a written language occurred about a century ago. As more and more communication took place in English, “Those in my generation who speak the Cheyenne language are quite possibly the last generation able to joke in our own language.”8

The prestige of a language and the self-esteem of its speakers may play a pivotal role in its revitalization. Navajo, for instance, was in steep decline until the 1940s, when the language, once deemed worthless by many Anglo-Americans, was used by the Navajo Code Talkers to confuse the Germans and Japanese in World War II. With Navajo’s validity as a real, complex, and useful language suddenly nationally acknowledged, its usage increased, and today this language again is spoken widely.9

A CONFERENCE IN SANTA FE

Immersion programs had become popular enough by 1998 to sustain a wide-ranging conference, “The Critical Moment: Funding the Perpetuation of Native Languages.” The conference, held January 26–28, 1998, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was sponsored by the Lannan Foundation, which has made Native language reclamation one of its funding priorities.

Language immersion programs are part of a growing commitment to traditional Native education often initiated by parents and educational professionals seeking an alternative to students’ alienation and high dropout rates in federal or local public schools. Mary Eunice Romero said that her people came to language revival as they sought “to understand why our children were not being referred to gifted programs. Our children are just as gifted as any other child.”10

This quest brought Romero and her associates to a realization that the Karas concept of giftedness was quite different from the dominant standard in most non-Indian schools. These schools tended to define giftedness in terms of tests and grades, while, said Romero, to the Karas “gifts and talents... are expressed in traditional terms” and directed not toward the fame and fortune of an intelligent individual but toward the well-being of the community as a whole.11 To many “immersion” educa-
tors, the revival of Native languages comprises an exercise of community-based intellect. “When we talk about trying to revitalize our language,” said Romero, “it is survival of how we think, who we are, and what we truly believe our children should be. We want to pass this information down to our children in the right way, the appropriate way.”

The Santa Fe conference allowed participants from across the continent to share the histories and curricula of immersion programs while also coaching participants in ways to raise funds for their programs, many of which rely on a combination of federal funds (such as Head Start) and private donations. The Lannan Foundation also sought through this conference to raise the salience of Native American language revitalization for other funding organizations.

Janet Voorhees, executive director of the Lannan Foundation, said that Native language revitalization benefits everyone, not only the Native peoples who are maintaining and enhancing languages that serve as vehicles for traditional cultures. For non-Indians, said Voorhees, Native language revival “will result in a world that is more deeply compassionate, wise, more caring and protective of the Earth, and more beautiful for its songs, ceremonies, and prayers.” Voorhees quoted Dorothy Lazore, a teacher of immersion Mohawk at Akwesasne, describing a basic paradigm shift in how Native children view schooling: “For Native people, after so much pain and tragedy connected with their experience of school, we finally now see Native children, their teachers and their families, happy and engaged in the joy of learning and growing and being themselves in the immersion setting.”

WHAT IS LOST WITH LOSS OF A LANGUAGE

Many immersion programs were started after parents became concerned about (in the words of author Joshua Fishman) “What you lose when you lose your language.” According to Fishman,

The most important relationship between language and culture . . . is that most of the culture is expressed in the language. Take language away from the culture and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, riddles, proverbs, and prayers. The culture could not be expressed and handled in any
other way. You are losing all those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing the land upon which you live and the human reality that you’re talking about.15

Fishman, a pioneer in the revitalization of Indigenous languages worldwide, has provided a theoretical structure for the revivals that are being carried out on reservations. His works, and others inspired by what he has written,16 are often cited at conferences where revival of Indigenous languages is a major subject.

In her opening remarks at the Santa Fe conference, Voorhees said that at least three hundred distinct Native American languages were spoken in North America at the time of Columbus’s first landfall in 1492. Today, 190 languages remain, but a great many of them are in imminent danger of being lost. Michael Kraus, former president of the Society for the Study of Indigenous Languages, was cited at the conference as having written in Stabilizing Indigenous Languages that only 20 of 175 surviving Native American languages in the United States are still being learned as a first language by children from their parents.17

Many immersion programs have been started after middle-aged or elderly members of Native nations discovered that the use of their languages had become restricted to a few elders and would vanish as collective cultural knowledge upon their deaths. This knowledge has provided motivation in case after case nationwide for efforts to teach Native languages to young people. Richard Little Bear told the conference that families must retrieve their rightful position as the first teachers of Native languages. “They must talk our languages every day, everywhere, with anyone,” he said.18

Darryl Kipp, co-director of the Piegan Institute, a language immersion program on Montana’s Blackfeet reservation, estimated that without programs to make young people fluent in Native languages, 70 percent of the Native languages that are spoken today in North America will die with the next few generations of Elders. As on many other reservations, the Blackfeet Confederacy (totaling about 40,000 people) started language immersion as a response to the failure of education provided to them by outside governments and agencies: “Out of the 17,000 that belong to my band, less than one per cent have a college education. Sixty-five per cent of the students in our schools never finish the tenth grade.”19 Kipp continued:
These are damming statistics about a Western form of education that fails to educate us. The promise that we would give up our language, move forth as English-speaking people and become successful in the world, has not come true. This may never become present unless we use our Native language. When it is reintroduced to a child, this can be used as a very powerful force and source of healing. When we look at the beautiful, happy faces of the children re-immersed in their language, we begin to realize again that Native Americans have potential and possibilities.20

Kipp said that language is too often taken for granted, like the rugged Rocky Mountains with which the Blackfeet live. “Many a day we get up and forget they are even there,” said Kipp. “In America, we tend to treat language as a strictly political issue. We never talk about the aesthetics, beauty, or many attributes that come through a diversity of languages.” When he is asked why the Blackfeet want to preserve their language, Kipp is tempted to answer, “Why do we wish to breathe air?” or “Why do we wish to continue walking on this earth?”21 Language immersion instruction on Kipp’s reservation is now provided to five hundred children per year. “We have a goal,” said Piegan cofounder Dorothy Still Smoking, “that . . . 100 per cent of our Blackfeet children leaving Head Start will have proficient Blackfeet speaking skills.”22 Kipp was one of several speakers at the Santa Fe conference who urged that Native languages be conceived as living, evolving communities of speech: “We look at Native languages as part of the future. We cannot relegate them to the dusty bins of history of the artifact shelf of a museum, but as a living presence with ourselves.”23 Kauanoe Kamana, a leader in Hawaiian language revitalization, said, “We are really aggressive, especially in the area of Hawaiian word development. If a language is to be living, it has to change and move. You cannot have a language that is stuck in another century.”24 Kipp, like many other participants in the conference, committed himself to a revival of his Native language after a discovery that the last elder speakers of it might take the language to the grave with them. Kipp came to the language after having been an English professor and a writer.

The first time I understood our language was in peril was in 1985, when we did a research project. We went to homes in our reserve and asked people if they spoke the language and what they did that reflected our tribalism. We found that almost all the speakers in our
community were over the age of 50, and that there were no children, teenagers, 30-or-40-year olds who could speak our language. It didn’t take a mathematician or prophet to determine how long our language would last.25

After that study a group of Blackfeet, including Kipp, spent five years developing ways to teach the language. They ran into some opposition from tribal members who asserted that knowledge of the language was of little practical use. One woman asked him, “Can you make soup of your language?” Kipp replied, “I struggled and had a hard time with that one. While I can’t necessarily make soup, we can make healthy children, and healthy children can make all kinds of soups.”26

Among the Comanches a language immersion program has been started that utilizes master speakers who teach entire families (who then use the language at home) at once. Several Pueblo communities, including Cochiti, Acoma, and Laguna, maintain immersion programs that take place in a ceremonial context. Hawaiian Native people have established immersion programs that span several islands. “If our language dies, if our culture dies,” he said, “We die as a people to the world. . . . We cannot let that happen.”27

**LANGUAGE IMMERSION IN HAWAII**

Kamana outlined the steps that led to language immersion schools in Hawaii. First, he said, a group of people decided to make the effort required to maintain a living language. Like Kipp, Kamana was not a native speaker of his Native language when he committed himself to its preservation. “Most of the teachers had to learn it as a second language,” he said.28

Once a commitment to the language was made, a small group of people began to develop plans for organized instruction in it. “When we began, it was a belief,” said Kamana. “We didn’t begin with money. . . . We didn’t all live in the same community. We are university-level secondary-school teachers in the Hawaiian language from different islands. We decided one day that what had been happening at the university system was not enough.” “We began in 1983 with the idea,” said Kamana. “We were eating dinner one night and I said, ‘Yeah, let’s do it.’ We got a
non-profit licensed business and started opening schools. You can’t do it alone. You have to do it in a group.”

Kamana and others in Hawaii studied as many other examples of Indigenous language revival as they could find, including the Maoris of New Zealand, who have been using Elders to teach their language to young children, even babies. The Hawaiians decided to name their school “Punana Leo,” which means “Language Nest.”

Having assembled a core of committed people, Kamana and others then built support for language revitalization in their communities. “Our first stage was to find people . . . like parents who wanted it,” said Kamana. Soon they had a schoolroom and a teacher. Next, they researched the best ways to teach the Native Hawaiian language to their children. The curriculum was created locally; Kamana said that he developed the curriculum for grades 7 through 11 himself.

Attention to financial resources became a concern for Punana Leo’s language revivalists only after public support was evident. Money comes because you are doing a good job, Kamana believes. Once popular demand enhanced prospects for funding, the Punana Leo school became a physical reality, with buildings, materials, teachers, and curricula. Once a school is established, said Kamana, the stress must be placed on producing people who utilize the language in their daily lives.

Kamana’s experiences were shared to some degree by Edna Viak McLean (Inupiag), who is an instructor at Ilishavilk College in Bear, Alaska. Any immersion program may fail if it lacks a core of committed people, she told the Santa Fe conference. The second biggest hurdle, she said, is the lack of educated Native language speakers who can serve as translators, curriculum developers, teachers, and advocates and people versed in the fundamentals of an immersion program who can advocate for it with the school board and funding agencies. McLean said that another common concern is the need to insure Native cultural transmission in the language schools.

Darlene Franco of the Native Californian Action Network said that her grandmother and grandfather were the last in her family to use Native language as a living tool in their daily lives.

The language started breaking down in my mother’s generation. She didn’t speak English until she was eight years old, and was
forced to go to boarding school where the language was beaten out of her. She was far away from home. As a result, when I was growing up, my parents wanted me to speak English. They wanted me to survive in this world, but, in doing so, they didn’t let us forget who we were. Ceremonies were still carried on.31

Franco teaches at an immersion preschool, where “We have two- to six-year-old kids who are learning and speaking the language every day.”32

A small group of young people on the Prairie Band of Potawatomi Indian Reservation in northeast Kansas decided to arrest the decline of Indigenous language on their reservation, despite scoffing by some there who said, “You can’t learn to talk Potawatomi.”33 Eddie Joe Mitchell, a 1991 graduate of Washburn University, who has a strong background in English and journalism, was one of the early organizers and often played the role of facilitator by sounding out the words and writing them on a makeshift blackboard. Potawatomi Elders who wanted the language to continue came forward to teach. Men such as Nelson Potts and Irving Shopteese were both supportive and instrumental in the early days of the class. After these two men died, Potawatomi women, such as Cecilia “Meeks” Jackson, and Albert “Shaw no que” Wamego stepped forward to take up the slack.34

When the class started during 1990, it had as many as fifty to sixty students in attendance at any given time. Of these original students only three have remained with the group from the beginning—Eddie Joe Mitchell, Mary Wabnum, and Mary LeClere. The students have since accumulated 6,000 words of the language and the ability to use them in sentences. During the ensuing decade, “The influence has spread out among the community to where the usage is more prevalent today. Mostly, by every-day use by the participants, the elders and their children are now using parts of the language in daily situations.”35

Some programs have a large geographical reach. Kenneth Funmaker of the Ho-chunk nation (Winnebago), for example, has taken part in an immersion program that draws students from a reservation that spans fourteen counties, about two hundred miles from one end to the other. The program, with twenty to thirty-two teachers at any given time, also provides immersion language education in some urban areas with large numbers of Ho-chunk people, including Chicago, the Twin Cities, and Madison, Wisconsin.
Bill Wilson of the Punana Leo school said that the word “immersion”
does not wholly cover what goes on in these new language schools. “We
are not talking just about immersion. We are talking about going to
school in a Native language, if you’re a Native speaker or not. In Hawaii,
we have one community that has all Native speakers.”

Wilson said that children who are immersed in their Native language
also tend to do well at learning English as it is introduced. “One of our
immersion children won the state English-language award. He’d only
had one hour of English a day starting in the fifth grade.” Learning En-
glish is not difficult for immersion students, said Wilson, because they
are submerged in it as soon as they leave school. At school, instruction is
half in Hawaiian and half in English. Students in immersion school
“reach parity with non-immersion students in reading comprehension,
vocabulary, and grammatical knowledge,” said Wilson. “They have not
lost anything,” he said, “and they have gained a language.” Hawaiian
immersion teachers told a U.S. Senate hearing in 2003 that their students
have an 85 percent acceptance rate at colleges and universities.

In some cases, language revitalization becomes part of general com-

munity life, as at Akwesasne, where the weekly community newspaper,
Indian Time, carries regular Mohawk language lessons by Mary Arquette
that cover everyday situations, such as weather: “Teioweratasēne, It was
a windstorm; lonen’onkion:ne, it was hailing.” A quarter of the Mohawks
at Akwesasne speak Mohawk with some degree of fluency.

The emphasis on language revival is arriving barely in time for some
Native American languages, those which have reached stage eight of
Joshua A. Fishman’s eight stages of language loss; in this stage only a few
Elders speak the language that once served an entire people at home and
in their working lives.

The two books developed from the immersion program symposia
present concrete, tested strategies for preserving Native languages as liv-
ing tools of culture in daily life, not as museum pieces of a presumably
also-dead culture. Fishman’s landmark book, Reversing Language Shift:
Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Lan-
guages, is cited throughout these two volumes. The reach of language re-
vivals described in these books is worldwide; lessons and examples are
freely borrowed from the Maori of New Zealand, who have had an active
language revival program for several decades. The New Zealand government has maintained a Maori Language Commission since 1987. These two books also describe Native peoples’ efforts to revive their languages in Australia and Northern Africa.

“Repatriated Bones, Unrepatriated Spirits,” a poem by Little Bear that appears at the beginning of Revitalizing Native Languages, reveals a sense that revival of Native American languages closes a historical and cultural circle:

We were brought back here
to a place we don’t know.

We were brought back here
and yet we are lost.

But now we are starting to sing our songs.
We are singing our songs
that will help us find our way.

We came back to a people who
look like us but whose language
we do not understand anymore.

Yet we know in our hearts
they are feeling good too, to have
us back here among them.41

In Revitalizing Native Languages, editor Jon Reyhner stresses the need to use a revitalized language as a living tool to teach academic subjects rather than as a second language. The language must be restored to its place in the everyday life of a people, he believes. This belief is widely shared.

SHOULD NATIVE LANGUAGE BE WRITTEN, OR SOLELY ORAL?

Reyhner’s two books present a balanced summary of a subject that causes controversy in Native language revitalization studies: should the revived language be written, or solely oral? Some language activists point out that many Native languages were first committed to writing by missionaries seeking, as Reyhner writes, “to translate their Bible and convert Natives from their traditional religions.”42 These two volumes present a
wide range of programs that have evolved locally, some in opposition to earlier efforts at written languages by church-affiliated programs, and others that have grown out of the same type of programs. While some of the programs strive to maintain an emphasis on spoken language to the exclusion of written communication, others emphasize production of written sources to be revived in the Native language as well as in English. Some of the programs use computers extensively, while others avoid them as a culturally inappropriate intrusion.

Fishman himself comes down squarely on the side of literacy. “Unless they are entirely withdrawn from the modern world, minority ethno-linguistic groups need to be literate in their mother tongue (as well as in some language of wider communication),” he asserts. The often-disputed distinction between oral and literate language may be culturally artificial because many Native American cultures possessed forms of written communication, even if many European immigrants did not recognize them as such. From the wampum belts of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), to the illustrated codices of the Aztecs and Maya, to the winter counts of the Plains, written communication was used in America long before Columbus. Reyhner quotes H. Russell Bernard as he urges Native Americans to establish publishing houses.

**LANGUAGE REVIVAL AND MUSIC**

Language revival also is being used in some cases to encourage the expression of Native oral histories, in written and spoken forms, as well as to enhance and preserve musical expression. Some teachers of language are finding that music is an amazingly effective way to introduce young students to music and cultural heritage. “Why music?” asks Amar Almasude, who writes about language revival in Northern Africa:

It is perhaps the best vehicle for becoming acquainted with humans. It is the expression that is the most pervasive. In songs, human society is portrayed and everyday experiences are reflected. Their themes are usually social issues and historical events, including national and religious feasts and holidays. . . . Thus, music is a fundamental element in human life.

Reyhner’s books present precise descriptions and examples from teachers who have been involved in a wide variety of language revival
programs, from several Native bands in British Columbia, to the Cheyenne, Yaqui, Arapaho, and Navajo. While describing individual programs, these books also sketch the common pedagogical essentials basic to all language revitalization efforts.

Reyhner suggests use of the “3 Ms” of language revitalization: methods, materials, and motivation:

Methods deal with what teaching techniques will be used at what age levels and stages of language loss. Materials deal with what things will be available for teachers and learners to use, including audiotapes, videotapes, storybooks, dictionaries, grammars, textbooks, and computer software. Motivation deals with increasing the prestige (including giving recognition and awards to individuals and groups who make special efforts) and usefulness of the indigenous language in the community, and using teaching methods that learners enjoy, so they will come back for more indigenous language instruction.46

Language must become a familiar part of a student’s life; immersion specialists believe that 600 to 700 hours of such contact is necessary to acquire the kind of fluency that allows for transmission of culture from generation to generation.

These two books are a treasure-trove of linguistic innovation, describing how Native languages are being revitalized using both traditional methods and modern technology to extend the reach of oral cultures. In Mexico traditional Aztec Danza (dance) is being used to teach classical Nahuatl. The dances are part of an eighteen-ceremony ecological calendar, so while learning the language, students also absorb some knowledge of Aztec history and culture. These ceremonies deal with rain, germination, ripening of corn, war victory, hunting, and the tribal dead, comment authors of a study on revernacularizing classical Nahuatl through Aztec dance. The authors list the intertwined benefits of this approach, by which students acquire not only knowledge of language, but also, “Nahua [Aztec] history from an indigenous perspective, a deeper understanding of Danza steps, creation myths, [and the] making and playing of indigenous [musical] instruments.” 47

In Alaska a number of Deg Hit’an (Ingalik Athabasken) people have been teaching each other their language, Deg Xinag, over the telephone,
using conference calls. Telephone technology allows widely dispersed speakers of the language to create a space to practice their skills and to teach each other new phrases and words. Phone conferences are hardly immersion (since the calls last only an hour a week), but language is being taught. Callers have joined the conversations from as far away as Seattle.

In a similar vein, KTNN AM 660, the Navajo Nation’s official radio station, has been making plans to offer instruction in the Navajo language over the air in an attempt to follow Joshua Fishman’s advice that revitalized languages, to be successful, must be shared by a people via the communications media of their communities. “The Voice of the Navajo Nation,” as KTNN is called, has a signal that reaches from Albuquerque to Phoenix.

The Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas (SSILA; see http://www.ssila.org/) was founded in December 1981 as an international scholarly organization representing American Indian linguistics. The society has approximately nine hundred members, more than a third of them residing outside the United States. The society maintains a comprehensive listing of articles on American Indian languages in more than one hundred journals (1988 to the present). The group also maintains an index of abstracts for more than two hundred dissertations and theses on American Indian languages and related topics, also dated 1988 to the present.

These initiatives and many others have helped to stimulate language revival by providing a forum for a wide range of ideas. General Pratt would certainly be surprised at how completely his set of educational assumptions have been turned on their heads, now that educators are no longer (as Pratt once proudly announced as an advertising slogan for his boarding schools) “killing the Indian to save the man.”

A measure that might have General Pratt turning over in his grave has been advanced by advocates of language immersion schools: federal funding, just as boarding schools were funded a century and more ago. The idea has been advanced before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs but not yet passed out of committee. University of California at Berkeley linguistics professor Leanne Hinton, who has advanced the idea, testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs during May 2003 in support of S. 575, a bill that would give long-term funding
to Native American language “survival schools,” another name for immersion programs. “These are languages that exist no place else in the world,” Hinton said. “They’re a part of what makes America America.” Of 85 Indigenous languages in California, 35 have no speakers and the remaining 50 are spoken by only a few Elders, Hinton said. “We’ve found that teaching the kids everything in their native language is the most effective way of doing it,” Hinton said. “If people aren’t learning the language at home, they’ve got to learn somewhere, and school is the next best thing.”

Native communities that have too few speakers remaining to staff an entire immersion program may establish a “master-apprentice learning program,” where a single teacher is assigned to a student. Through such a program, enough young adults may learn a given language to eventually form the core of an immersion program. Hinton hosts a biennial conference called “Breath of Life” at the University of California at Berkeley to help revive Native American languages with no living speakers. Languages with no living speakers sometimes can be revived, at least in part, from documents. “We have sound archives and paper archives on campus,” Hinton said. “We invite California Indians to come learn how to use their languages.”

One wonders what General Pratt would think of the joy with which Native peoples across North America are recovering their languages a century after his boarding schools prohibited the speaking of them and did it, so he said, for Native peoples’ own good. Pratt and other reformers of that era thought they were doing Native peoples a favor, that their policies were a humane alternative to outright extermination. Left unsaid a century ago was a third option—that a rich quilt of diverse Native languages would be preserved and cultivated. Barely in time, just as many of them were losing their last speakers, that is what we are seeing today.

The language revival movement has become strong enough to sustain a festival called “Native Nations, Native Voices” to honor contemporary Native language writers. Native language writers are being invited to participate in a three-day festival sponsored by the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center of Albuquerque. Writers will read from their works in their Indigenous languages. A special effort has been made to include and honor high school and college authors in Native languages. As of this writing, the festival is being scheduled for July of 2005.
NOTES


2. Critical Moment.


4. Jon Reyhner, ed., Teaching Indigenous Languages (Flagstaff, AZ: Center for Excellence in Education, Northern Arizona University, 1997); Jon Reyhner, Gina Cantoni, Robert N. St. Clair, and Evangeline Parsons Yazzie, Revitalizing Native Languages (Flagstaff, AZ: Center for Excellence in Education, Northern Arizona University, 1999).

5. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, 81.

6. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, 1–2.

7. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, 2.

8. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, 1–2.


34. “Community Effort Brings Potawatomi.”
35. “Community Effort Brings Potawatomi.”
40. Reyhner, Teaching Indigenous Languages; and Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages.
41. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, iv.
42. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, xviii.
43. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, 38.
44. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, xiii.
45. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, 121.
46. Reyhner et al., Revitalizing Native Languages, xviii.
47. Reyhner, Teaching Indigenous Languages, 71.
49. Wittmeyer, “Linguistics Prof Revives Fight.”
50. Wittmeyer, “Linguistics Prof Revives Fight.”