

Indigenous Language Immersion Schools for Strong Indigenous Identities

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Abstract

Drawing on evidence from indigenous language immersion programs in the United States, this article makes the case that these immersion programs are vital to healing the negative effects of colonialism and assimilationist schooling that have disrupted many indigenous homes and communities. It describes how these programs are furthering efforts to decolonize indigenous education and helping further United Nations policies supporting the rights of indigenous peoples. The fit between place-, community-, and culture-based education and immersion language programs is described with examples from Apache, Ojibwe, Diné (Navajo), Hawaiian, and Blackfoot language programs, illustrating how traditional indigenous values are infused into language programs to help build strong positive identities in indigenous students and their communities.

Introduction

International support for decolonization and the rights of indigenous peoples was formalized on September 13, 2007 when the United Nations (UN) adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by a vote of 143 to 4, with only Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and The United States in opposition (Declaration, 2007). Article 2 of this declaration affirms, "Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination." Other articles declare more specific rights; for example, "the right not to be subject to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture" (Article 8); "the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons" (Article 13); and "the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning" (Article 14).

In keeping with the 2007 Declaration, the UN's General Assembly made 2008 the "International Year of Languages." UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura (2008) stated, "Languages are indeed essential to the identity of groups and individuals and to their peaceful coexistence. They constitute a strategic factor of progress towards sustainable development and a harmonious relationship between the global and local context." He further noted that the ninth International Mother Language Day (February 21, 2008) would "have a special significance and provide a particularly appropriate deadline for the introduction of initiatives to promote languages."

These recent UN initiatives build on the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states in that "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children" (Universal Declaration, 1948, Article 26) and the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which declares that "States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and

linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity” (Declaration, 2007, Article 1). Article 2 (Declaration) affirms that “Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities...have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination.” The following year was declared by the UN to be the “International Year of the World’s Indigenous People.”

However, the international support that UN declarations appear to signal often does not extend beyond rhetoric. Skunabb-Kangas (2000, p. 492) finds that “many governments applaud...human rights, as long as they can define them in their own way, according to their own cultural norms.” She notes that the United States in particular had only ratified 15 of 52 universal human rights instruments as of 1998; on a list of ratifying countries, led by Norway with 46 ratifications, the U.S. is in the same place with Somalia and is just below Saudi Arabia (see also Reyhner, 2008).

Despite the U.S. government’s failure to support U.N. declarations supporting the rights of indigenous peoples, efforts restoring indigenous values and language are ongoing among American Indian activists, who are focusing on decolonizing Indian education (Grande, 2004). The goal of these efforts is to heal the historical wounds suffered by colonized peoples and to help them move beyond a mentality of victimization. Native language immersion schools have become a key part of the post-colonial healing process that aims to restore and strengthen Native families and communities. These programs seek to redress the abuse of indigenous languages historically carried out by assimilationist schooling while using the power of the language to convey tribal values. A key feature of indigenous immersion programs is that they are voluntary, allowing parents who choose to enroll their children in them to exercise a basic human right upheld by the United Nations’ initiatives and declarations on indigenous peoples. This paper examines evidence from several programs in the U.S. to understand their role in healing the negative effects of colonialism that have disrupted many indigenous homes and communities.

Assimilation and its Effects

For most of the history of the United States, the basic human rights delineated by the UN in 1948 and 1992 have been denied to ethnic minorities; in fact, it was government policy to assimilate them into the dominant English-speaking population through schools in which their native languages and cultures were suppressed. Schools were used to eliminate indigenous languages by punishing students who spoke them and indoctrinating them into the superiority of English as compared to their “barbarous dialects” and into Christianity compared to their “barbarous beliefs” (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

Starting with the **1928 Meriam Report** (Institute, 1928), an independent comprehensive study of the U.S. Indian Office by the Brookings Institute for Government Research at John Hopkins University, **studies have shown the harm this assimilationist language policy has done to indigenous students and their academic achievement, which has lagged far behind U.S. national averages.**

The National Center for Education Statistics' report, *Status and Trends in the Education of American Indians and Alaska Natives* (Freeman & Fox, 2005), found indigenous students with more than twice the White dropout rate, the highest death rate of 15-19 year olds, the highest percentage of special education students, and the highest absenteeism. These students are also the most likely to have failed to complete core academic programs in their schools, and the most affected by school violence. These grim statistics are tinged with irony given that the U.S. government's past English-only policy in schools has been so successful that 51% of American Indian and Alaska Native eighth graders reported in 2003 never speaking any language but English at home and only 22% reported speaking a non-English language half the time or more (Freeman & Fox, 2005).

The problems of modern Indians extend beyond the classroom walls. Unemployment among Native people is three times the national average (Freeman & Fox, 2005). Gang activity is prevalent and incarceration rates are high. This social and economic plight is a direct result of the destruction of American Indian families and communities brought about by assimilationist policies, including those implemented in schools.

When an Ojibwe (aka Anishenabe or Chippewa) high school student shot and killed a teacher and seven students in 2005, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley (2005) expressed a belief that poverty and the breakdown of traditional tribal culture contributed to the conditions that made tragedy this kind of tragedy possible. He wrote:

We are all terribly saddened by the news about our relatives on their land in Red Lake in Minnesota. Unfortunately, the sad truth is, I believe, these kinds of incidents are evidence of natives losing their cultural and traditional ways that have sustained us as a people for centuries.

Respect for our elders is a teaching shared by all native people When there was a problem, we would ask, "What does Grandpa say? What does Grandma say?"

....

Even on the big Navajo Nation, we, as a people, are not immune to losing sight of our values and ways. Each day we see evidence of the chipping away of Navajo culture, language and traditions by so many outside forces. (p. 5)

Joy Harjo, a member of the Muscogee Creek tribe, sums up the result of this systematic dismantling of culture and the linguistic means of transmitting it: "Colonization teaches us to hate ourselves. We are told that we are nothing until we adopt the ways of the colonizer, until we become the colonizer" (as quoted in Mankiller, 2004, p. 62). This is a tragic legacy of assimilationist policy.

Language, School and Assimilation

Efforts at revitalizing indigenous languages in schools have to overcome the deep suspicion that some Indigenous people harbor towards schools, which as mentioned earlier, were colonial instruments used to eradicate Native languages and to assimilate Indians into the dominant North American culture (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

Whether government- or missionary-run, the goal of schools was to replace indigenous community and family values with a new set of ideals. While government-sponsored institutions saw education and suppression of the native language as a means of assimilation, religiously affiliated schools viewed the imposition of English as a means of conversion to Christianity. Conversion and assimilation tore tribal communities and families apart as some members hung on to cherished traditions, whereas others rejected those traditions as outdated, the work of the devil, and/or “savage.”

In her 1999 autobiography *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear*, Lori Arviso Alvord, the first Navajo woman surgeon, described her grandmother’s and father’s schooling, during which they were punished for speaking Navajo and “told by white educators that, in order to be successful, they would have to forget their language and culture and adopt American ways” (Alvord & Van Pelt, 1999, p. 86). She concluded “two or three generations of our tribe had been taught to feel shame about our culture, and parents had often not taught their children traditional Navajo beliefs--the very thing that would have shown them how to live, the very thing that could keep them strong” (Alvord & Van Pelt, 1999, p. 88).

Platero (1975) the first director of the Navajo Division of Education, reports the deleterious effects of a similar language policy on a Navajo student, “Kee”:

Kee was sent to boarding school as a child where--as was the practice--he was punished for speaking Navajo. Since he was only allowed to return home during Christmas and summer, he lost contact with his family. Kee withdrew from both the White and Navajo worlds as he grew older because he could not comfortably communicate in either language. He became one of the many thousand Navajos who were non-lingual--a man without a language. By the time he was 16, Kee was an alcoholic, uneducated, and despondent--without identity. (p. 58)

Platero concludes by emphasizing the need to use the Navajo language more in teaching Navajo students.

Speaking at the U.S. Office of Indian Education’s Language and Culture Preservation Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2004, former Menominee Tribal Chairperson Apesanahkwat recalled that in Catholic school, the nuns, in effect, told their students “to throw stones at the elders.” He opined that Indians today “have tasted cherry pie [the good things of modern America] and we like it.” However, Indians today are “like fish lying on the beach... we need to be in that water” of their culture. Apesanahkwat, like Arviso and Holm (2001), Platero

and others, argues that indigenous cultures are inextricably intertwined with the survival of the people, and that when those cultures suffer attack, the survival of the people is jeopardized.

Support for the Revitalization of Indigenous Languages

Many American Indian leaders have expressed their support for their indigenous languages. At the 2005 annual meeting of the National Indian Education Association, Cecelia Fire Thunder, President of the Oglala Sioux at Pine Ridge, testified, "I speak English well because I spoke Lakota well.... Our languages are value based. Everything I need to know is in our language." She declared that language is more than communication: "It's about bringing back our values and good things about how to treat each other." Sisseton Wahpeton tribal college president Dr. William Harjo LoneFight declares, "When people spoke Dakota, they understood where they belonged in relation to other people, the natural world, and to the spiritual world. They truly knew how to treat one another" (as quoted in Ambler, 2004, p. 8).

Midgette (1997) recounts her experience: "I have heard several Native Americans speak feeling about their sense of rootlessness and despair, and how they recovered when their grandmothers taught them to speak Tolowa, or Navajo, and they regained a sense of themselves and their heritage" (p. 39). Interviewing Navajo elders Yazzie (1995) found that "Elder Navajos want to pass on their knowledge and wisdom to the younger generation. Originally, this was the older people's responsibility. Today the younger generation does not know the language and is unable to accept the words of wisdom" (p. 3). An elder told her that television had taken the Navajo language away from children. Midgette values language similarly: "The use of the native tongue is like therapy, specific native words express love and caring. Knowing the language presents one with a strong self-identity, a culture with which to identify, and a sense of wellness" (p. 3). As indigenous children learn English or other "National" languages and cultures through the media and in schools, they increasingly become separated from their heritage, and some cannot speak to their grandparents. One of Yazzie's informants told her, "Older people who speak only Navajo are alone" (Yazzie, 1995, p. 4). Many American Indians see language as the key to their identity, and they question whether one can be Cherokee, Navajo, Crow, Seminole, and so forth without speaking their tribal language.

Littlebear (1999), a North Cheyenne educator, concluded,

Our youth are apparently looking to urban gangs for those things that will give them a sense of identity, importance, and belongingness. It would be so nice if they would but look to our own tribal characteristics because we already have all the things that our youth are apparently looking for and finding in socially destructive gangs.... [A] characteristic that really makes a gang distinctive is the language they speak. If we could transfer the young people's loyalty back to our own tribes and families, we could restore the frayed social fabric of our reservations. We need to make our children see our languages and cultures as viable and just as valuable as anything they see on television, movies, or videos (pp. 4-5).

The Focus of Immersion Programs – Restoration of Traditional Values or Preparation for the Larger Society?

Educational reformers advocate immersion programs which would teach subject matter in the native language. **It is not enough, however, to simply introduce the native language if a school's curriculum remains unchanged (Nevins, 2004). Just translating a non-Native curriculum into the Native language and focusing on vocabulary and grammar is in no way part of a decolonization agenda. In fact, it could be viewed as nothing more than a new way to approach colonization. On the other hand, if the non-Native curriculum is ignored as language revitalization programs are implemented, students will be denied access to the skills needed to negotiate the larger society and participate in the modern economy.** In addition, reversing the longstanding assimilationist policy may engender confusion and deep suspicion among Native peoples who accommodated to the pressures they faced by assimilating into the dominant culture, for example by converting to Christianity. Some Christian Natives may worry that language revitalization programs are attempting to bring back Native religions (see e.g., Yazzie, 2003).¹

Some educators, however, are uncomfortable with the premise that curriculum can be balanced so that students “can live in two worlds.” LaDonna Harris (a member of the Comanche tribe) remarks, “It drives me crazy when people say we have to live in two worlds. We can't live in two worlds. **We have to live in one world and carry those values with us and live them every day wherever we live. People become dysfunctional when they adopt situational values**” (as quoted in Mankiller, 2004, p. 68-69). Oglala Sioux educator Dr. Sandra Fox also dislikes “the ‘walk in two worlds’ idea; **the time you should be most Indian is in the white world**” (as quoted in Reyhner, 2006c). Like Harris, Fox wishes to foster traditional tribal values, which usually include cooperation, generosity, reciprocity, respect, and humility, and emphasize our relatedness to all things and the need for balance and harmony. In her view, these cultural values cannot be taught just as a thing of the past as children are growing up in and must live in the present.

Calsoyas' (1992) interview of Navajo elder and medicine man Thomas Walker reveals similar concerns about the values fostered in non-Navajo education.

For over one hundred years the white man has defined what education will be for the Navajo people.... I was brought up with the old philosophy and what I see now with the White Men's way in today's world there is a wide difference and the intent of education does not relate any more. Because of this, in this present time, the children that are taught whatever is real, the old philosophy does not touch. The old language does not touch on these things. The children are given too much power. Whenever you try to correct a child from wrongdoings it becomes difficult to discipline them because of the laws that have been developed to protect children from abuse. When one is trying to discipline a child they say that they are being called names and are being abused. When you try to tell them something and you touch them, they report they were hit. Because of this law that protects them many are wandering and doing whatever they feel like. Because of this others act as if they are the

authorities on everything. Because of this, the school administrators are getting in trouble to the point that they lose their jobs. I do not agree with this. (p. 168)

Place-, Community-, Culture-based Education

A successful Native language revitalization program must address the questions raised in the preceding section regarding what will be taught using the medium of the Native language. In schools, will the program reflect the standard school curriculum or will it be indigenized and contextualized to reflect a particular Native community? As Wayne Holm (2006), former director of the Navajo-English bilingual Rock Point Community School, noted, **“If school is to be relevant, it has to deal with the realities of the land, the animals, and the people”** (p. 2). While such an education can be done largely in English, as Bingham and Bingham’s (1982/1994) work shows, it makes sense to teach these same concepts in the Native language as well.

Deloria and Wildcat (2001) outline a rationale and framework for indigenous language revitalization programs. In the preface to their book, Wildcat proposes “an indigenization of our educational system” (p. vii), something that can be accomplished by clearly understanding what is distinctive about Native American society and values. Deloria (1994) contrasts the “Native American sacred view” with the “material and pragmatic focus of the larger American society” (p. v), and draws a distinction between a “unified” Indian worldview where everything is related versus a “disjointed sterile and emotionless world painted by Western science” (p. 2).

As a way of emphasizing an interconnectedness with our environment and our relationship to the world, **Deloria and Wildcat (2001) advocate both experiential learning involving example and observation and a focus on the importance of reciprocity and giving back.** Both educational approaches not only reflect Native American world views, but are deeply embedded in tribal values. Deloria (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) notes that “human personality was derived from accepting the responsibility to be a contributing member of a society” (p. 44) and that **“education was something for the tribe, not for the individual”** (p. 84).

In presenting their framework for indigenizing education, Deloria and Wildcat (2001) are addressing problems associated with non-native education and societal values. Wildcat describes the United States “as a nation of homeless people” who have places to live but don’t know their neighbors (p. 67). Deloria (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) characterizes the American worldview as one “that separates and isolates and mistakes labeling and identification for knowledge” (p. 133). **Instead of just learning skills and facts, students in indigenous schools should develop a positive identity that includes having a sense of place both physically and socially; in fact, as Wildcat points out, the word “indigenous” means to be of a place (p. 31).**

Even though Wildcat maintains that “there are good reasons for American Indian students not to discard knowledge traditionally held by their tribes, he also calls on them not to “romanticize the past” (p. 8). While children need to respect their elders, they also need to learn from the failures of elders as well as their successes. Children are to be educated to “find home in the landscapes and ecologies they inhabit” (p. 71). Fox’s (2001, 2001a, 2001b) focus on curriculum is similar to Deloria and Wildcat’s (2001).

Some Revitalization Efforts

The following section discusses several examples of indigenous language revitalization programs and the cultural and values goals and educational philosophy that drive them.

Common to these programs is the combined focus on language teaching and Native values. For example, Wilkins (2008) gives an account of her school district's work, with the help of an elder, to put together a values curriculum based on her Yakama Nation's values of honesty, compassion, caution, courage, taking care, respect, thoughtfulness, humility, and service. Lipka, Mohatt, and the Ciulistet Group's (1998) study of Alaska Native education pointed out that Yup'ik teachers rejected the profuse "bubbly" praise promoted by outside [non-Native] teachers because traditional Yup'iks believed "overly praising will ruin a person" (p. 126).

Nevins' (2004) study of an Apache language maintenance program showed that "awareness and participation in activities sustaining of family life" was viewed by the community as "central to knowing the Apache language" (p. 280). "Knowing how to speak Apache is an index of the child's involvement in the intimate moral universe of family life" and "language loss is therefore interpreted as an indication of problems within the family" (p. 282). Nevins notes that "Apache family-centered pedagogy teaches language by cultivating a child's awareness of the social world in which speaking is possible" (p. 278). The community wanted the Apache language program to strengthen families. Because the language program Nevins studied failed to focus on what the community saw as important, the tribal government ended it.

An Ojibwe language maintenance program was created to address not only language loss, but the social problems linked with it. An Ojibwe band saw the decline in the use of their language as correlating "with a loss of Ojibwe traditions, the unraveling of the extended family, depression among Band members, high dropout rates among Ojibwe students, and an increasing amount of gang activity among youth" (Bowen, 2004, p. 4). An Ojibwe Commissioner of Education argued that "By teaching the language we are building a foundation for a lifetime of productive citizenship.... Ojibwe values are inextricably linked to the language. These values, such as caring for the environment, healing the body and mind together, and treating all creation with respect are taught most effectively when they are taught in Ojibwe" (as quoted in Bowen, 2004, p. 4). The Ojibwe Advisory Board "firmly believed that writing Ojibwe was not as important as speaking it" (p. 8). They wanted two fluent speakers in each classroom so conversation could be modeled for learners. They have also incorporated Ojibwe music into classroom instruction.

Similarly, there are several Navajo examples of culture-based American Indian education implemented as part of the healing efforts to restore traditional family values. These programs show that the "either-or" idea that one either restores traditional values or assimilates into the non-Indian dominant society in order to achieve academic and economic success is a false dichotomy. In the 1970s, the all-Navajo Rock Point Community School Board called for teaching Navajo behavior in the classroom, concluding "that it was the breakdown of a working knowledge of Navajo kinship that caused much of what they perceived as inappropriate, un-Navajo, behavior" (Holm & Holm, 1990, p. 178). To counteract this breakdown, the Rock Point School Board established a Navajo-English bilingual program in their school that emphasized

Navajo Social Studies and the Navajo beliefs about kinship. For the Navajo and other tribes, kinship through family and clans establishes rules for interacting in a respectful manner. And this interaction is reflected in the language itself. In addition to the Navajo social studies component of the immersion curriculum, a hands-on approach to math and science using manipulatives and experiments allowed students to understand and talk about what they were learning (see e.g., Reyhner, 1990). Studies of this program found that the Navajo immersion students showed more Navajo adult-like, responsible behavior than the Navajo students not in the immersion classes (Arviso & Holm, 2001; Holm & Holm, 1995).

The Rock Point bilingual program was modified and transported to the Window Rock Public School. The Window Rock Navajo immersion program started in 1986. The 200 students in the program, most of whom are English dominant, are immersed in Navajo during kindergarten and first grade with curriculum based on the Navajo Nation's Diné cultural content standards as well as Arizona State academic standards. English instruction is gradually introduced, usually beginning in second grade, as the students' Navajo proficiency develops further. By sixth grade, half of students' instruction is in English (Johnson & Wilson, 2005). **Besides the improvement in student behavior reported, the immersion students showed higher English-language test scores than the non-immersion students in the same school district (Johnson & Wilson, 2005; Johnson & Legatz, 2006).** Johnson and Wilson's (2005) table summarizing what was learned from implementing the Window Rock immersion includes benefits such as improved student and teacher retention as well as family participation in working towards outcomes, and validation of student identity (p. 31).

Manuelito and McLaughlin (as cited in Reyhner, 2006b) noted in their observation of Window Rock's Navajo immersion program that, "Navajo values are embedded in the classroom." A parent whom they interviewed noticed differences between students who were in the immersion program and those who were not:

[The immersion students] seem more disciplined and have a lot more respect for older [people], well anyone, like teachers. They communicate better with their grandparents, their uncles.... [It] makes them more mature and more respectful. I see other kids and they just run around crazy.
(pp. 79-80)

The Navajo Nation's Education Committee's Diné Cultural Content Standards (Office of Diné Culture, 2000) states in its preface, "The Diné Cultural Content Standards is predicated on the belief that firm grounding of native students in their indigenous cultural heritage and language is a fundamentally sound prerequisite to well developed and culturally healthy students" (p. v). The empowering values of the Diné individual to be taught include being "generous and kind," "respecting kinship," "being a careful listener," and "having a balanced perspective and mind" as well as not being lazy, impatient, hesitant, easily hurt, shy, or mad. Diné individuals are to respect the sacred, have self-discipline, and prepare for challenges (p. 80).

In the keynote address on March 9, 2004 at the U.S. Office of Indian Education Program's Third Symposium on Language and Culture Preservation, the theme of which was "Journeying Home: Creating Our Future From Our Past," Navajo elder and statesman Jack Jackson summed up the goal of values based Dine language programs. He noted that, at Diné College, the Navajo Nation's tribal college, they are "in a search to create our future based on our past." He emphasized the importance of teaching Navajos the Navajo philosophy of "Ké," of being a balanced person. This involves examining beauty before oneself, beauty behind oneself, beauty underneath, beauty above, and beauty around, with the goal of becoming a balanced person who walks in beauty.

Native Hawaiians have also been very active in seeking to restore their traditional values through language immersion programs. Aha Pūnana Leo (2006), which since 1983 has established schools throughout the Hawaiian islands, is built around re-establishing the Hawaiian philosophy of life.

From its start with Hawaiian preschools in the 1980s, Hawaiian language immersion classrooms were extended into successively higher grades until the first five K-12 immersion students graduated from high school in 1999. Students, most of whom are English speakers, they are immersed in Hawaiian from kindergarten to grade five with some English introduced after grade five. In a case study of a new immersion teacher at a Hawaiian immersion school, Keiki Kawai'ae'a and Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley observed the interaction between approaches to teaching and the values being transmitted:

At the Hawaiian immersion school, the day began and ended with traditional Hawaiian protocol—a Hawaiian chant, a positive thought, and a prayer to open and close the day. Included in the morning protocol was the formal request chant and reply in Hawaiian to enter the school. This opening protocol set the mood for the day by helping all to focus and reflect on the task of learning, teaching and leading with good thoughts, intentions and feelings, and a cooperative spirit. The school day ended with a chant to attune them to another realm, that of home, family, friends, and place with all its different idiosyncrasies. The well-being of the whole group through active participation at the *piko* (a spiritual gathering place) was a part of the healing, health and lifelong learning daily experiences for the total learning community—students, teachers, support staff, families and guests. (as quoted in Reyhner, 2006d, p. 78)

The researchers noted the pivotal role that the Hawaiian language played in the school's cultural education program:

The language best expresses the thought world of the ancestors and thrusts them into the Hawaiian worldview. This is the language of connectedness, relatedness and respect. The language provides the cultural sustenance and the lens from which the dynamics of the school community has evolved. The

language is formed by the landscape with its soundscape and therefore, conducive to living in concert with Nature. ... The language shapes and nurtures the school learning community as a complete and whole entity. (Kawai'ae'a & Kawagley, 2006)

With the help of elders, seven guiding values for Hawaiian educational success, were developed to express essential values: value of place, applied achievement, cultural perspective, cultural identity, intellect, personal identity, and relationships.

On a smaller scale, the Cuts Wood School in the Blackfeet Nation, Montana (2010) immerses its students in their Blackfeet language both as a goal in itself and a means of transmitting cultural values. According to Kipp (2009) the school has found content that is taught in Blackfeet becomes part of English knowledge as well. In addition to academics and language, values are also emphasized. The Cuts Wood School avoids competition, "a form of violence," (p. 5) as well as hierarchal concepts, ranking, and punitive designations.

Conclusion

One of the goals set by the U.S. Secretary of Education's Indian Nations at Risk Task Force's report (Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, 1991) was that "By the year 2000 all schools will offer Native students the opportunity to maintain and develop their tribal languages and will create a multicultural environment that enhances the many cultures represented in the school" (p. i). (This goal is still far from fruition despite the work of immersion schools outlined in this article).

While academic knowledge and test scores are important, it is students' behavior towards others that is of paramount importance because it is a determinant of how individuals use the knowledge they have gained. Students of whatever race or culture who are disconnected from their traditional values are likely in modern America to pick up unhealthy values of consumerism, consumption, competition, comparison and conformity from the barrage of popular culture transmitted by television, movies and the Internet. **In 1998, the National Research Council reported that immigrant youth tend to be healthier than their counterparts from nonimmigrant families. It found that the longer immigrant youth are in the U.S., the poorer their overall physical and psychological health. The more "Americanized" they became, the more likely they were to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, unprotected sex, and delinquency (Hernandez & Charney, 1998). There is evidence that a similar pattern holds true for Native youth, with those who are less assimilated into the dominant culture doing better in school and in life. As Deloria (1994) wrote, "A society that cannot remember and honor its past is in peril of losing its soul" (p. 272).**

A primary goal and impetus of indigenous language revitalization programs is to re-establish this lost link to traditional values and culture. The future of tribal individuals, communities, and nations depends on our ability to get along with each other and work together for a better future. Well thought out and implemented indigenous immersion programs can restore positive traditional values, develop students' reasoning ability, and teach solid academic content. Pease

(2004)) concluded her research of immersion schools by stating that “immersion improves overall educational achievement, strengthens family ties, and increases retention rates, keeping Native students in school who might otherwise drop out” (p. 16). While more research needs to be done on the academic advantages of immersion programs, students who participate in them tend to do well academically as well as behaviorally (see Johnson & Legatz, J., 2006, and Johnson & Wilson, 2005).

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Note

- [1.](#) A program that has resolved this tension successfully was developed by Hawaiian activists. Their language revitalization program emphasizes the “Hawaiian philosophy of life,” incorporating its values into the curriculum instead of teaching traditional Hawaiian religion.