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CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | REVIEW ARTICLE

Revitalizing Indigenous languages, cultures, and histories in Montana, across the United States and around the globe

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Abstract: Many educators have sung the praises of Indian Education for All, Montana's constitutional mandate, and heard the successes of Montana's Indigenous language revitalization efforts which reverberate around the globe. Teaching Indigenous languages is especially, challenging since there are limited numbers of fluent speakers and scarce resources resulting from harsh education and language policies imposed by the US federal government throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Tribal members in Montana spearheaded a unique licensure process for Indigenous language instructors to revitalize and maintain their languages. Language revitalization as a culturally responsive pedagogy strategy is enacted through Class 7 certification, as it is known. It took years of work to assure that the authority rests with the tribal nations, where it should be, to decide who should be a language/culture teacher. By embracing culturally responsive pedagogy, a dramatic change to education in Montana to truly promote the espoused democratic ideals of justice and equity has resulted. This multi-pronged approach has absorbed the revitalization of Indigenous languages; all 11 Indigenous

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The first inhabitants in Montana were American Indians and today, 12 tribal nations call Montana home. Approximately 92 percent of all American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students across the U. S. and in Montana attend regular public schools. These students are often unsuccessful in our education system, and experience low attendance, high dropout rates, and an ever-expanding achievement gap. Identity is a key factor in student achievement. The implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on efforts to support American Indians' cultural identity by preserving their heritage languages. These ideals are embraced in immersion programs in place in Montana, where Indigenous students' first languages are used in formal instruction. Providing ongoing and comprehensive professional development for the Indigenous language instructors is needed to support language preservation.

languages in Montana, are critically endangered. One of the most successful efforts at Indigenous language/cultural revitalization has resulted from the establishment of Indigenous language immersion schools. The creation of immersion programs within public schools in Montana has resulted in a critical need to provide much needed professional development to Indigenous language instructors.

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Keywords: Indigenous language; language revitalization; immersion programs; Indian education for All; Indigenous language and culture specialist licensure

1. Introduction

Many educators have sung the praises of Indian Education for All, Montana's constitutional mandate, and heard the successes of Montana's Indigenous language revitalization efforts which reverberate around the globe (Smiley & Sather, 2009). With seven sovereign nations located within its boundaries, Montana has paved the way to embracing culturally responsive pedagogy which supports the integration of Indigenous histories, cultures, and languages. In this essay I describe the Montana general and educational contexts, the Indian Education for All initiative, Class 7 licensure, recent legislative policies regarding the revitalization and maintenance of Indigenous languages, immersion language programs, and professional development opportunities for language instructors.

I highlight the most recent language conference that brought experts and scholars from all over the United States to share their best practices in creating, expanding, and sustaining immersion programs to teach Indigenous languages. I also introduce the elders, scholars, and language instructors who were in attendance at the Immersion Programs Conference which was held in Bozeman in July 2015, and who were invited to share their experience and expertise for this *Cogent Education* special issue on Indigenous language revitalization.

The invited contributors were asked to address two overarching questions: What do we need to do to develop and support language instructors who will design or expand immersion programs in order to revitalize the culture and Indigenous languages of their tribal nations? and what are the best practices in facilitating Indigenous language teacher development for sustainable language development and dissemination? In addition to this introductory essay, the following contributors have shared their thoughts on Indigenous language revitalization and maintenance: Dr. Jon Reyhner, Northern Arizona University; Dr. Lanny Real Bird, Crow Reservation; Dr. Richard E. Littlebear, President of Chief Dull Knife College; Dr. Martin Reinhardt, Northern Michigan University; Dr. Ku Kahakalau, KU-A-KANAKA, Indigenous Institute for Culture and Language; Drs. Sabine Siekmann and Joan Parker Webster and Yup'ik graduate students/language instructors: Sally Angass'aq Samson and Catherine Keggutailnguq Moses, University of Alaska Fairbanks; and Dr. Lenore A. Stiffarm, Ft. Belknap Reservation.

2. Montana context

Montana is shaped by the high plains and Rocky Mountains of the west. The official nickname, "The Treasure State," describes the rich mineral reserves found there; however, many are unfamiliar with this appellation and instead refer to the fourth largest state in the US affectionately as "Big Sky Country." Montanans serve as the fodder for many comedians. Grammy award winner Jeff Foxworthy boasts, you might live in Montana: "if you measure distance in hours; if your town has an equal number of bars and churches; if you know several people who have hit deer more than once; and if you're proud that your state makes the national news primarily because it houses the coldest spot in the nation" (Montana Associated Technology Roundtables, 2010). Although these assertions ring true, Montana is so much more.

Larger than Japan, Montana covers over 147,000 square miles and it can take more than a day to cross the state by car. It shares a border with three Canadian provinces to the north, Idaho to the west, North and South Dakota to the east, and Wyoming to the south. The only urban center, Billings, stretches over 32 miles and has just over 100,000 inhabitants, and only a few additional towns have a population greater than 43,000: Missoula, Great Falls, Bozeman, and the capital, Helena (US Census Bureau, 2010). Only Alaska and Wyoming are more sparsely populated, and like Montana, they are classified as Frontier States. Although there are many criteria that define Frontier areas, suffice to say, they “are sparsely populated rural areas that are isolated from population centers and services.” In Montana that translates into approximately 6.8 people per square mile and more cattle than humans statewide (Cook, 2017; National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017).

3. American Indian population

In actuality, it was not until 2012, that the Montana population arrived at the million mark (World Population Review, 2017). On the other hand, the American Indian population in Montana is substantially higher than the national average. The first inhabitants in Montana were American Indians and today, 12 tribal nations call Montana home: Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Chippewa, Cree, Crow, Gros Ventre, Kootenai, Little Shell, Northern Cheyenne, Pend d’Oreille, Salish, and Sioux. Montana’s seven Indian Reservations include: Flathead, Blackfeet, Rocky Boy, Ft. Belknap, Ft. Peck, Northern Cheyenne, and Crow; each is a sovereign nation and each one proudly supports a Tribal College. In addition, the estimated 4,500 Little Shell Band of Chippewa Indians who are landless, call northern and central Montana home. American Indians constitute 6.4% of the total population and 14% of the K-12 student population, a percentage more than 10 times the national average for American Indian students attending public elementary and secondary schools (Office of Public Instruction. Indian Education Division, 2016).

4. Montana’s educational context

Approximately, 92% of all American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students across the US and in Montana attend traditional state-funded public schools (US Department of Education, Office of Elementary & Secondary Education, Office of Indian Education, White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges & Universities, 2011). In Montana, the AI/AN students often attend schools on or near reservations with high concentrations of other American Indian students. In fact, out of 821 public schools across the state, 61 report 75–100% American Indian students, 18 report 50–75% American Indian students, and 32 report 25–50% American Indian students among their respective school populations (Office of Public Instruction. Indian Education Division, 2016). What is important to note here is that these public schools on or near reservations, like urban schools in more densely populated states, are where we experience the greatest concentrations of poverty, the highest dropout rates, and the numerous challenges of the ever-widening achievement gap (Office of Public Instruction. Indian Education Division, 2016).

During the 2015–2016 school year, there were 145,722 students enrolled in Montana’s K-12 public schools; approximately 20,401 were AI/AN. Even though the number of AI/AN students scoring “At or Above Proficient” levels on the Smarter Balance Assessment in English/Language Arts and Mathematics and on the Criterion Referenced Test (CRT of the *Montana* Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS)) for Science has increased, the ever-widening achievement gap prevails and the graduation rate for American Indian students is frightful. In addition, even though the overall high school graduation rate has increased over the past five years, the graduation rate for American Indian students remains 22.1% points lower than the graduation rate for White students (Office of Public Instruction. Indian Education Division, 2016).

Furthermore, in 2009–2010, 66% of the school districts on Montana reservations did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (Office of Public Instruction. Indian Education Division, 2010). Like their non-Indian counterparts, wherever the American Indian students attend public school, they are unlikely to have an American Indian teacher since only 2.68% of the teaching corps in Montana is made up of American Indian teachers (Office of Public Instruction. Indian Education Division, 2016).

A lot has been written about the cultural mismatch between the increasingly diverse K-12 student population and what is described as a teaching corps made up primarily of white, middle class, females in the US (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2010; Zeichner, 2003).

The task is then, to prepare educators to be culturally competent and to meet the academic and social needs of All students. In Montana, that means making sure teachers know about American Indians' unique histories, cultures, languages, and contemporary issues, as well as their contributions to core curricular areas. Pewewardy (1998) claims, "Enhancing the self-concept of American Indian learners is essential to their effective education. Helping learners recognize their heritage and giving them a sense of belonging as well as a sense of their uniqueness as American Indians are equally essential" (p. 11). It also means, collaborating with Indian educators and tribal members to make sure the curriculum integrates and reflects Indian perspectives, and Indigenous ways of knowing, as well as Indigenous languages.

5. Indian education policies

Congresswoman Carol Juneau explained, "Indian people have understood for a great many years that it is only by educating our young people that we can reclaim our history and only through culturally responsive education that we will preserve our cultural integrity" (2006, p. 217). Although there is no one proven formula for successful reform of Indian education, it is clear it must involve the entire school system, as well as American Indian leaders. "Individual teachers can do phenomenal things, but nothing (in education is going to change systematically) ... until power is shared," says Julie Cajune (Salish), director of American Indian education for the Ronan Public Schools on the Flathead Reservation. Montana has crafted a unique approach to school reform by recognizing tribal sovereignty, partnering with tribes, honoring self-determination, and promoting economic development (Boyer, 2006).

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory published a comprehensive report on Indian Education policies in the Northwest Region: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington (the five states, where 16% of Indigenous students reside in the US). They described the mechanisms each state used to adopt Indian education policies (Smiley & Sather, 2009). By reviewing the literature over the 18-year period between 1991 and 2008, interviewing key players in the states' education departments and compiling their findings, they identified 13 key state-level policies including statutes, regulations, and executive orders. The researchers concluded that although states had different approaches to adopting Indian education policies, state statutes and regulations were the most common. Many western states, including North and South Dakota, Washington, Wyoming, and Arizona have modeled their Indian education policies after Montana's IEFA initiative, but Montana is unique in that it is the only state to meet all 13 policies, as well as the only state to have Indian education policy outlined in the state constitution.

6. Indian education for All

In Montana, Indian education policy translates into the constitutional commitment to preserve the unique cultural heritages and histories of American Indians by requiring all educators to integrate Indian content across the curriculum at all grade levels. The Montana Indian Education for All (IEFA) Act is an audacious legislative reform effort 45 years in the making. Now a funded reality, IEFA has set a national precedent. Educators in Montana have legal obligations, instructional responsibilities, and ethical commitments to teach all Montanans about the state's first inhabitants. "This precedent-setting education legislation is reverberating throughout Indian Country and stirring hope among Indian educators nationwide that they might win similar victories in their home states." (Pember, 2007).

IEFA is a shared responsibility where Indians and non-Indians, legislators, educators, and philanthropists have collaborated and continue to partner to share their time, talents, and treasures to address historical and contemporary oppressions of Indigenous peoples by transforming educational policy, curriculum, and pedagogy integrating Indian content across the curriculum for a more

inclusive historical and contemporary narrative, and second, closing the achievement gap and increasing the academic success of American Indian students. “Federally recognized tribes and American Indian educators indicated that now there is a severe shortage of ‘culturally competent’ and effective teachers in schools with large American Indian student populations. They cited the areas of teacher recruitment, training, certification, and cultural competence as falling particularly short.” (US Department of Education, Office of Elementary & Secondary Education, Office of Indian Education, White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges & Universities, 2011, p. 28). By embracing culturally responsive pedagogy, a dramatic change to the education system in Montana to truly promote the espoused democratic ideals of justice and equity has resulted. This multi-pronged approach has absorbed the revitalization and maintenance of Indigenous languages (Carjuzaa, Jetty, Munson, & Veltkamp, 2010).

7. Linguistic diversity in Montana

Indian Education for All benefits American Indian students in several ways: by reducing anti-Indian bias resulting from a lack of knowledge, by enriching instruction through cultural relevance, and by instilling pride in cultural identity. This positive affect is the by-product of the teaching of American Indian cultures, histories, and languages (Carjuzaa, 2012). Integrating Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum is easier said than done. Teaching Indigenous languages is especially challenging since there are limited numbers of fluent speakers and scarce resources because of harsh education and language policies imposed by the federal government (Littlebear, 1995; Reyhner, 2010).

As quoted in the Montana Indian Language Preservation Pilot Program Report, Clarena Brockie (Aaniiih) of Fort Belknap, a Representative in the State Legislature of Montana, testified before the United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in 2014 and shared,

When Christopher Columbus and other Europeans first came to Indian Country, more than 300 different languages were spoken here. Today, well less than half remain. Most of these are spoken only by a handful of elders and are in serious danger of disappearing—in fact, all but 15 or 20 of our Native Languages are spoken only by adults who are not teaching their younger generations the language. This tragic outcome is a direct result of prior US government policies, including assimilation which sent many Indian children to government-run boarding schools where they were prohibited from—and often fiercely punished for—speaking their own languages, their last tie to their homelands and their very identity. This terrible legacy is made even worse when you consider that once a language becomes extinct, it takes with it much of the history, philosophy, ceremonies, culture, and environmental and scientific knowledge of the people who spoke it. (Barrs, 2014)

Even though these Indigenous languages were suppressed, they were not completely annihilated. There is an active resurgence of Indigenous languages and Montana does support considerable linguistic diversity. Currently, it boasts the highest percentage of speakers of the following five Indigenous languages in the US: Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Cree, Crow, and Salish in addition to having the greatest number of speakers of Belarusian in the US Montana also ranks second in the percentage of Arapaho speakers and third in the percentage of Dakota, Finnish, and German speakers (US English Foundation, Inc. Montana, 2016). Despite these statistics, all of the 11 Indigenous languages in Montana, are critically endangered.

The goal of the Indian Boarding Schools was to assimilate Indian children into the melting pot of America by placing them in institutions where they would be stripped of their traditional ways and required to adopt the values and traditions sanctioned by the federal government (Haag, 2007). Under this forced assimilation model, all Indigenous languages and spirituality were forbidden. American Indian children were forcibly taken hundreds of miles from their homes and placed in boarding schools. The children were often beaten for speaking their native languages and sent home ashamed of their heritage languages. Adult survivors of this brutal experiment, parents and grandparents, cautioned their children to speak English exclusively in order to avoid the abuse and terror

that they endured. “We were told, ‘You’d be better off learning only English, so what happened to us won’t happen to you,’” says 68-year-old Cynthia Kipp, whose grandchildren attended Real Speak on the Blackfeet Reservation (Nijhuis, 2003).

But before Europeans “discovered” the Americas, there were some 500 tribal groups speaking unique Indigenous languages across what later became the United States. And although many Indigenous languages adhere to oral tradition, the first Indigenous language to be written, the Cherokee Syllabary, was invented by Sequoyah back in 1821. Although Sequoyah never learned how to read or write English, he developed a phonetic alphabet using letters he created and others he borrowed from the Roman alphabet. He taught his six-year-old daughter how to read and write Cherokee using the syllabary. This tool greatly increased communication between geographically isolated Cherokee. The Cherokee printing press was invented and the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the first Cherokee newspaper was first published in 1828. The Cherokee also developed a school system which used the alphabet. Similar efforts have been replicated throughout Indian Country, (Cherokee Nation, 2017).

8. Critically endangered languages

It is estimated that by the end of the twenty-first century, approximately half of the world’s 7,000 languages will be extinct. In fact, while only 4% of the world’s languages were extinct in 2011 (Johnson, 2011a) only 57% of the world’s languages are considered safe, 10% are vulnerable, 11% are definitely endangered, 9% are severely endangered, 10% are critically endangered and 4% have become extinct since 1950 (McLachy Washington Bureau, 2011). These distinctions are made based on who is speaking the languages. For instance, safe languages have members of three generations, children, parents, and grandparents all speaking the language, whereas, critically endangered languages are infrequently spoken by grandparents, or by the youngest speakers of the language (Johnson, 2011b). Alarmingly, one language dies every 14 days and in the US only a dozen Indigenous languages of the original 400–500 have a chance of surviving beyond the next 30 years (Rymer, 2012).

Because of this imminent threat, efforts have been made to preserve these languages and cultures. In 1990, the US Congress passed the Native American Languages Act that made it US government policy to protect and promote American Indian languages and in 2007, the United Nations passed the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that recognized that education designed to eradicate Indigenous languages and cultures is a basic violation of human rights (Warhol, 2011). Still, there has been tremendous loss and the peril of extinction looms ominous or threatening.

9. Why save a language

According to Dr. Richard E. Littlebear, President of Chief Dull Knife College on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Eastern Montana, English is a voracious language that makes the revitalization and maintenance of Indigenous languages very challenging. Nonetheless, the core of Littlebear’s message is “just speak your language.” As cited in Paskus (2013), Littlebear explained the importance of keeping Indigenous languages alive, “All the unique references, all the unique humor, all the world-views that go along with that—that might act as a conscience for a country like the United States—are slowly dying out.”

There is no question, language and culture are intricately interwoven. Tom Raymond, an educator with the Sicangu Lakota, described this relationship and justified the importance of saving Indigenous languages as cited in Paskus (2013) in this way,

We tend to think of language as something to be used to communicate with people. The problem with that is the Lakota language is a way of life. It’s part of a whole culture. You don’t just learn a language; you learn a way of living. It reflects back on the old ways of life, when there was a lot of sharing and traditional ways of living ... I’m talking about preserving a traditional way of life that is one with the world around.” He adds that once a language has disappeared, “it’s not only the words that are gone—but also the culture, and a people.”

Furthermore, language stores the wisdom of a group and language loss leads to the irrevocable loss of human cultural heritage. Each language expresses a mindset that is, in the end, unique to the community that speaks it (Littlebear, 1999, 1995). For example, the loss of Crow would result in the loss of the unique Crow way of looking at the world. The Crow Reservation, the largest reservation in Montana, encompasses approximately 2.2 million acres. The tribal members originally referred to themselves as “Apsáalooke,” which means “children of the large-beaked bird.” White men later misinterpreted the word as “Crow.” The Crow Tribe has a membership of 11,000 with approximately 7,900 Crow residing on the Crow Reservation. Crow, a Siouian language with no known dialects, boasts between 3,000 and 4,000 first language speakers, most of whom are over 30 years old (Golla, Campbell, Goddard, & Mithun, 2008). Although 25 years ago, 85% of the tribe spoke Crow as their first language, in a recent survey in 2014, conducted by the Crow tribe, the fluency rate has dropped to approximately 28%. In addition, an alarming decrease in Crow language fluency among youngsters was uncovered; only about 3% of youngsters are Crow speakers and it is feared that within 20 years no Crow children will speak the language (Ko, 2017).

The same concern about a drop in fluent speakers, was outlined by Burt Medicine Bull, Language Professor, at Chief Dull Knife College in Lama, Montana.

The role of a Northern Cheyenne language professor here at Chief Dull Knife College is critical to maintaining and preserving our language. The language revitalization is the highest priority here at the college because we are losing the language each time another fluent speaker passes away. Currently we have approximately five hundred fluent speakers. The youngest fluent speaker is sixty-five years old. However, there are some tribal members whom do not speak the language but understand. (personal communication, February 16, 2017)

Medicine Bull also emphasized the role the tribal college plays in language preservation. He explained what he covers in his language classes,

I take my mission to maintain and preserve my Northern Cheyenne language very seriously and have worked hard to create a continuum of learning throughout my courses. I teach Cheyenne Language I, Cheyenne Language II, Cheyenne Language III and Cheyenne Language IV. I do need to say that both Cheyenne Language I & II courses are primarily for vocabulary building while also learning the elocution of the language. Cheyenne Language III course is the start of reading the language and the continuation of pronouncing the language. In Cheyenne Language IV, the reading and translational writing is introduced, as well as the continuation of pronouncing the language. (personal communication, February 16, 2017)

10. Montana American Indian language and culture specialist (Class 7) certification

According to Littlebear (2014) even though the relationship between the State and sovereign Indian nations in Montana is not always smooth, Montana has been recognized for its progressive, innovative approaches to Indian Education. The creation of a Class 7 certification is an example. In addition to taking a leadership role in Indian Education, tribal members in Montana spearheaded a unique licensure process for Indigenous language instructors in an effort to revitalize and maintain their languages. Class 7 Certification took years of work by tribal language advocates and the tribal colleges to assure that the authority rests with the tribal nations, where it should be, to decide who would be a language and culture teacher (Littlebear, 1997). Under the leadership of Dr. E. Littlebear, fluent Cheyenne speaker, a separate certification for teachers of American Indian languages where the tribes identify, test and recommend the most qualified language and culture teachers to teach their language was created in 1995. To date, nearly 200 Class 7 specialist licenses based on their respective tribes' recommendations, have been issued. Today there are 93 individuals that hold current Class 7 licenses. They are endorsed in 10 Native languages: Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Chippewa, Cree, Crow, Dakota, Gros Ventre, Kootenai, and Salish (personal communication with Mike Jetty, Indian Education Specialist, Office of Public Instruction, 2015).

Although the tribes have the authority to certify their language instructors, these educators face many challenges. Often they are elders with limited formal education and no pedagogical training or classroom management experience. The Class 7 language instructors are often invisible in their school districts and most of them have had limited professional development opportunities. In addition, unlike other K-12 teachers who have a wealth of curricular materials to choose from, Class 7 teachers are expected to create their own curriculum spanning all grades and develop the necessary resources and materials they need to teach on their own with little guidance and minimal financial support. As Burt Medicine Bull explained, there are many issues that these elders need to understand to function well in the school system. He advised,

I also work together with the surrounding schools that employ Class 7 Language teachers to ensure that students coming to their classes are successfully becoming beginning language learners. It starts with good training for the Class 7 instructors. They need to have self-discipline to be able to hold a teaching job. Punctuality is a must as well as being there every day for the students. Another skill set they need is lesson planning as well as classroom management. These last two are very important to ensure that there is a welcoming and productive learning environment. Scope and sequencing the language learning is also very important to address, as well as assessment of the language. (personal communication, February 16, 2017)

11. Immersion language schools

One of the most successful efforts with Indigenous language and cultural revitalization has resulted from the establishment of Indigenous language immersion schools (see e.g. Reyhner, 2010; Reyhner & Johnson, 2015). Studies show that language immersion schools can have far reaching effects on their students. So in addition to the private immersion programs in Montana, the Native Language Immersion Schools to support instruction in Salish, Aaniiih and Blackfeet have provided instruction in their respective languages and cultures. They include the following K-8 immersion schools: Nkuseum Salish Language School on the Flathead Reservation, White Clay Immersion School on the Ft. Belknap Reservation, and Cuts Wood School on the Blackfeet Reservation.

Montana Senator Windy Boy was instrumental in the innovation of the Indian Language Preservation Pilot Programs. Following Windy Boy's lead, on 22 February 2013, Governor Steve Bullock, awarded funding to tribes for supporting language preservation. He asked legislators to appropriate \$2 million to fund a joint partnership between the State of Montana and the eight Montana tribal governments. On 6 May 2013, Governor Bullock signed into law the Montana Indian Language Preservation Pilot Program or "MILP3." This pilot program, the outcome of Senate Bill No. 342 established by Windy Boy was heralded throughout Indian Country. According to Director Casey Winn Lozar, the tribes capitalized on the language preservation Pilot Program (2014). The eight unique pilot projects were aimed at preserving the languages of Montana's Indian tribes and enhancing the educational opportunities students have on Montana's reservations, while protecting American Indians' cultural heritages. Each tribal nation decided on their approach to preserving their unique languages (Barrs, 2014). The projects were as diverse as the tribal nations themselves. The resulting deliverables were shared at the State Capitol in Helena, MT in early 2017. The endeavors included: compiling dictionaries, holding language camps, recording history in language, recording storytelling, creating apps, establishing Class 7 standards and certification, designing K-12 curriculum, collecting artifacts, administering language surveys, and translating and posting bilingual road signs and place names.

Subsequently, US Senator Jonathan Tester's Native Language Bill, *Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act* (S. 1948) was approved on 31 July 2014. It authorized \$5 million in 2015 to be put towards the preservation of Indigenous languages in Montana. Tester stated, "Native Languages are vanishing at an alarming rate and with them the culture, tradition, and knowledge that are so important to the future of Indian Country."

Then on 23 April 2015, HB 272, the House passed the Native Language Preservation Bill. “The legislature finds ... language in the form of spoken, written, or sign language is foundational to cultural integrity.” Montana became the second state, following Hawaii, to provide funds for Native American immersion language programs in public schools. Under HB 272, there are 88 eligible school districts of which (22%)—have 10% or greater American Indian populations. The requirements specify that 50% of the instruction must be delivered in the Native language of the community. Each public school immersion program is required to have two qualified Class 7 licensed teachers. The first year that a school district would be prepared to enroll students would be the Fall 2017 semester. This legislation was designed to keep Native students in school, by building their self-esteem and supporting the development of their cultural identity.

12. Professional development

What became painfully obvious through the enactment of this legislation was that providing help to communities to build a language infrastructure is paramount. Tribal elders, fluent speakers, and language activists need support and guidance in order to develop apps and multimedia materials to teach basic vocabulary and language structure, create assessment and testing procedures in order to track student progress, assemble online and print dictionaries, grammar books and other materials, provide teacher training on basic curriculum design and classroom management in addition to step-by-step instruction on how to locate, create, and design instructional resources, materials and textbooks.

The Center for Bilingual and Multicultural Education (CBME) at Montana State University (MSU) has been revitalized to support the MSU community and tribal nations across Montana by generating multiple funding streams focusing on the following program areas: “best practices” in the revitalization and maintenance of Indigenous languages, facilitation of culturally responsive pedagogy in K-12 schools including the integration of Indian Education for All across the curriculum in all content areas and at all levels, as well as a variety of projects designed to promote social justice by increasing cultural sensitivity. The Title II: Improving Teacher Quality Grant and the Spencer Foundation Grant provided funding to pull the Class 7 and additional language instructors across the state together for professional development.

13. Title II: Improving Teacher Quality grant

The Class 7 Language and Culture Teachers Professional Development Institute was held from 15–17 June 2015 in Bozeman. Over 100 Class 7 Indigenous language and culture teachers and other language instructors and supporters from school districts and communities across Montana attended the three-day professional development institute focusing on pedagogical strategies for teaching American Indian languages. Keynote speakers included Dr. Richard E. Littlebear, President of Chief Dull Knife College and leader in Indigenous language revitalization, and Terry Brockie, Blaine County Superintendent of Schools and language teacher. Littlebear, who was instrumental in passing the Class 7 legislation in 1995, was honored during this 20-year anniversary celebration. Arlene Augare, the first language instructor to ever earn a Class 7 certificate, was also recognized. A panel of dignitaries featuring Carla Lott, Native American liaison for Montana Senator John Tester; Casey Lozar, Montana State Tribal Economic Development Commission; State Senator Jonathan Windy Boy; and representatives involved in language preservation efforts from each reservation shared their efforts.

14. Spencer Foundation grant

With funding from the Spencer Foundation, the CBME hosted the “Immersion Programs Conference: Revitalizing Endangered Indigenous Languages,” 25–27 July 2016 in Bozeman. The CBME at Montana State University along with several partners, hosted this professional development conference designed to help Class 7 teachers develop and/or expand their immersion language programs. The conference was made possible by a \$50,000 grant from the Spencer Foundation awarded to the CBME. Partners included Dr. Richard E. Littlebear (Cheyenne), president of Chief Dull Knife College and Mike Jetty (Spirit Lake Lakota), Indian education specialist at the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI).

This education research conference was designed to build urgently needed capacity for Indigenous language preservation by bringing together leading scholars with expertise in using immersion models to revitalize Indigenous languages to dialog with each other, policy-makers, tribal elders, Class 7 and other language instructors representing all 11 Indigenous language groups in Montana, as well as other local leaders. Since 1995, the authority to decide who should teach courses in American Indian languages and cultures was returned to the tribes. The Class 7 certification does not require a degree in education but rather is granted solely upon recommendation from an individual's tribe.

The conference included keynote presentations by Littlebear; Ryan Wilson, a member of the Ogalala band of the Tituwan Oceti Sakowin and former president of the National Indian Education Association; and Montana Senator Jonathan Windy Boy (Chippewa Cree). It also included panel presentations by tribal members involved in language immersion programs; discussions regarding intellectual copyright issues and standardizing the framework for Class 7 teacher certification; poster presentations by invited experts and scholars; and a number of small-group exercises and discussions.

Three main products have been designed as outcomes of this conference: three immersion language webinars which were delivered during the Fall 2016 semester, a logic model for creating or expanding an Indigenous language immersion program which adapts best practices immersion methodologies to the context of their community and this special journal edition. Each of the contributing authors to this special issue presented at the conference.

15. In conclusion

Securing funding and supporting language activists in the revitalization and maintenance of critically endangered Indigenous languages are essential if we are to save these languages from disappearing. Since the development and expansion of immersion programs has been identified as the best approach to preserving these languages, going forward it is important to help communities build language infrastructure. Documentation, including collecting and cataloging artifacts, creating, planning and managing archives, recording elders, and transcribing recordings, will help preserve existing materials and capture the wisdom of elders before it is too late. It is also important to train community linguists and researchers so the necessary knowledge and skills needed to create online and print dictionaries, syllabaries, apps, and multimedia are shared. It is important to capture the sounds, words, usage, and return revitalization—to everyday use, in addition to create language nests, and host culture camps. It is also important to provide ongoing, comprehensive professional development to language instructors and language advocates and support them as they design resources/materials and textbooks and grapple with lesson planning, curriculum design, assessment and classroom management.

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