

Kahutokt/Tracy Maria Williams

Dr. William Demmert and Dr. Perry Gilmore

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Introduction

Support for Indigenous language is one of the key elements that must be present in a culturally based education curriculum, which will help improve Native American children's school performance (Demmert and Towner, 2003). Recent research proves that "evidence exists to support pursuing the inclusion of Native language and culture in educational programs serving AI/AN students as a strategy for improving academic and other educational outcomes" (Lipka, 2001). In Oneida, Wisconsin, we have taken steps toward recovering, revitalizing, documenting and preserving our language. Our community is in the beginning stages of teaching our language to adult tribal members who will begin to teach in the schools and the community in one year from now. As their fluency in the language improves, planning turns toward creating a curriculum. I want to elaborate on the process of acquiring one's own language as an adult second language learner. In the following discussion, I want to investigate how ancestral language could be taught in a culturally based education (CBE) curriculum and how a teaching curriculum can be implemented into school-based and community-based programs.

Much of the discussion is from experiences with Oneida language and culture as well as case studies from other indigenous communities. In order to set the stage a short ethnography of Oneida follows. Oneida language is a daughter language of the Iroquoian language family, and is closely related to the Mohawk language. Originally, speakers of

Oneida resided in central-western New York with territories extending into Pennsylvania and Virginia. The Oneida Nation of Wisconsin is located 5 miles west of Green Bay. They were removed in the 1820's from New York State because of pressure from religious factions, white settlers and United States' policy, which made it possible for the federal government to remove any indigenous peoples in the way of westward expansion (Lewis, 2005).

There are four Oneida speech communities: Oneida, New York; Southwold Oneida Settlement, near London, Ontario, Canada; Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario, Canada and Oneida, Wisconsin. In 2005, there are about 15,000 enrolled tribal members of the Wisconsin Oneida and about 6000 of the total membership live in Oneida or in surrounding areas (Lewis, 2005). There are at least four remaining speakers that have Oneida as their first language and they are bilingual.

Personal Experience

As a researcher, I have followed a method that was introduced to me during the American Indian Language Development Institute. This required first, finding an Oneida language teacher. Second, we had to make plans as to when we would meet. Third, we discussed what kind of activities I could be a part of. Fourth, I had to come up with a documentation process, which consisted of tape recording, video recording and field notes. Embedded in all of this was Oneida culture and protocol. For example, when asking someone, particularly an elder, for help or for them to do something, one must offer them something in return. This parallels the belief system of Oneida culture, which claims in order to gain, something, one must give something in return. For instance, I

offered my elder some canned berries. In Oneida culture, berries are highly regarded in the fruit family for their medicinal uses.

As a participant in my own acquisition process, I learned how to ask questions in Oneida. When I did not know the name of something or the meaning of something, I had to specify with Oneida words what I needed in order to understand. I spent many hours repeating to myself the words I had learned previously during a session or class. I also relied on my memory to write down new words in my field notes because my language teacher would not allow me to write during our sessions together. I could get him to write but as a learner, my teacher told me that writing would get in the way of the language being in my heart. He thought if I wrote it, the words would only stay in my head and not in my heart where the words come from.

As a teacher, I used a language immersion method. I used props and objects to mediate language learning. I would not consider it a full immersion atmosphere because not much of the traditional Oneida culture was displayed. The culture of everyday life is what was used. For example, the lessons started with a greeting, then, numbers, colors, names of animals, names for utensils and names for everyday objects like toothbrush and towel. I have taught preschool, kindergarten, third grade and adults. The culture is inherent in the language but to display it during a language lesson is can be challenging. I would like to delve deeper into the sociolinguistics and sociocultural aspects in order to transmit meaning while planning lessons and teaching the language.

Oneida Sociolinguistics

In January of 1997, I began studying my language. First, I studied books, language curriculum and listened to tape recordings of stories and lessons. I also majored

in linguistics as an undergraduate and studied my language linguistically. In that year, I found out there were approximately twenty-four fluent speakers left. I made a personal commitment to become a fluent speaker.

In the Oneida community, I promoted ways to halt language shift and maintain Oneida language especially for the children. I am concerned with language shift because 1) cultural identity is of great importance in the education of our people, 2) speaking the language gives respect to the authenticity of cultural identity: through the language people organize their world 3) language is a gift from the Creator and deserves to be protected. Can a person be Oneida without having the language? Yes, a person can be Oneida by means of ancestry or parentage and one can assert one's culture through English. However, within the language lies the key to life values and beliefs. For example, values and beliefs my ancestors knew like how to express gratitude "for all beings, including the People, Mother Earth, Plants, Grasses, Birds, Waters, Trees, Three Sisters (corn, beans, and squash), Animals, Grandmother Moon, Elder Brother the Sun, Winds, the Thunderers, Stars, the Four Messengers, Handsome Lake, and the Creator" (The Thanksgiving Address, Cornelius, n.d.:149). All of these instructions are found in the words of our language.

Language is an initial force in human development. The people's spirit is in the language. The sound of our languages moves us. Our languages bring our minds together as one to promote our own creativity. Thought processes run parallel with language representing a unique worldview of the people. When language shift occurs, there is a loss of the worldview and the epistemological capacity. The moral order of a people loses its expression.

The loss of the original moral order embedded in the language causes confusion, which leads to dysfunction and imbalance in the community and in individuals. The English language seems to be reaching a level of omnipotence in Oneida, Wisconsin. It is clearly dominant and brings with it opportunities that are thought of as rewards at all levels of life including higher education, economic opportunity, and social hierarchy, which are all western beliefs transmitted through English. With English as the language of opportunity, a conscious effort and decision was made because the people believed English would ensure their survival. With survival the top priority, the ancestral language is at the threshold of extinction.

Wishing not to remain socially disadvantaged has led to the original moral order of the Oneidas to be suppressed, thereby creating the belief that to survive one must leave traditions behind, including language. This creates a notion that to survive there must be a certain degree of assimilation, which allows the predator language of English more value and more speakers of our ancestral language diminish. CBE is one way to remedy this situation.

Some other examples of traditional Oneida customs and beliefs that are conveyed by the language are found in our Creation stories and the story of the Three Sisters. The Three Sisters are the spirit protectors of beans, corn, and squash. In the story, the Sisters show a boy and his family how to preserve the food staples so the family can use them in the winter. The Three Sisters are the staple food of the Oneida. Our Creation story tells us where we not only came from but also provides explanation for the creation of Oneida numeric system, the Earth, other peoples, and our position in relationship to all life. Language teaching and learning now must be in a conscious and deliberate manner. It is

not possible for the language to be acquired “naturally” at home. A curriculum that implements our strong oral stories and tradition will encourage our community to keep speaking our language.

Language Planning

There are two branches of language planning: corpus and status. However, another branch, developed by Richard Ruiz, is called acquisition planning, which includes teaching methods (lecture, 9/8/03). CBE is woven throughout language planning but, in particular, acquisition planning can be starting point for implementing CBE. How will the heritage language be taught? There are several teaching methods and language immersion is most popular because it is efficient when teaching children. How can immersion be culturally relevant? By beginning a plan for a CBE curriculum, first thing is to recognize how the elements of CBE will fit into a curriculum.

For ancestral languages, it is particularly important to incorporate culturally relevant ideas, objects, stories, events, customs, music and ceremony. The foundations of teaching within an immersion framework include only using the heritage language as well as cultural materials. It takes rigorous planning for the teacher. For example, the teacher must be able to anticipate the learner’s responses and how they are feeling. They must be able to read the person and decide what should come next. In the case of Oneida, the following elements must be present in the curriculum (Demmert, 2001):

- 1) Recognition and use of Native American (American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian) languages as the language of instruction, as a bilingual approach to learning, or as a first or second language.
- 2) Pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural characteristics and adult-child interactions as the starting place for one’s education (mores that are currently practiced in the community, and which may

differ community to community).

- 3) Pedagogy in which teaching strategies are congruent with the traditional culture as well as contemporary ways of knowing and learning (opportunities to observe, opportunities to practice, and opportunities to demonstrate skills).
- 4) Curriculum that is based on traditional culture, which recognizes the importance of Native spirituality, and places the education of young children in a contemporary context (e.g., use and understanding of the visual arts, legends, oral histories, and fundamental beliefs of the community).
- 5) Strong Native community participation (including partnering with parents, elders, other community resources) in educating children and evident in the curriculum, planning, and operation of school/community activities.
- 6) Knowledge and use of the social and political mores of the community.

A description of how these elements can be used for Oneida is a start to the future in acquisition planning.

In order to get a start on planning for a CBE curriculum a draft Plan for Oneida is required. First, the Oneida language is recognized as the people's first language historically but in contemporary times it is the second language of nearly the entire population. Within a CBE curriculum, Oneida will be taught as a second language, the curriculum will begin by using English to describe Oneida, and slowly English will not be needed as the student gain levels of fluency. The consideration of age and grade level will have an impact on the design of the curriculum. For example, the adult language learners now will use different teaching methods depending on the age of their students. In the pre-schools and kindergarten, immersion can be used but if the language teacher is teaching a high school group, more English can be used to help describe the teaching process.

Second, adult-child interaction will be modeled after traditional teaching methods. As is Oneida custom, the aunts and uncles of the child are her teachers to begin with. Parents become involved, as the child gets older. Perhaps as the Oneida teachers become more skilled at teaching the language, they can refer to themselves as the aunts and uncles while the teaching is going on. Each language teacher can be responsible for teaching a traditional more of the Oneida as a way of teaching the language and they will use the language to teach the culture. For example, the gathering of tree sap for the maple syrup is an important yearly event where all ages get together and tap the trees. During the outings, specific vocabulary can be introduced as the teachers talk about how to gather the syrup using the language.

Third, Oneida pedagogy consists of learning by doing (Gardener, 1985). The structure of learning is very loose. The learners will observe what is being taught and then when they are ready they will start to participate in some of the actions. For instance, when learning to plant Oneida white corn a teacher can demonstrate where to plant, how to plant, when to plant and as the learner becomes comfortable and familiar with the information she can start planting. Therefore, children will watch what their teacher does and then try it for themselves.

Fourth, children will participate in the traditional ceremonies for Oneida yearly calendar. Spirituality will be taught together to show that it is within everything that needs to be done on a daily basis. Asking the Creator for help to complete the activities of your day is something that is done at the start of the day. The pedagogy will reflect that by using our prayers as language lessons and the actions that go with prayer.

Fifth, our entire community needs to become involved in teaching the language. All ages will participate in weekly meetings that support our school-based and community-based language programs. Parents, grandparents, all relatives can get together to rely on each other as a way to support curriculum. For instance, our organic farm can bring the outreach workers to a family's garden and the language teachers can do a lesson for the entire family on gardening.

Sixth, the curriculum will teach about our traditional form of government. Clanmothers will be brought in to talk about how the leaders of our community are chosen. The Faithkeepers will be brought in to talk about how our religion and government work together to form a powerful political presence. In all a CBE curriculum needs to have involvement of everyone in the community in one way or another. Tribal offices, businesses, schools, the museum, the nursing home, the childcare centers all must address the issue of how they can support the language.

After planning how to teach the language, another question comes to mind: how to implement the language into a curriculum? Looking at some ways that other communities have used CBE is helpful. In one case, the Akwesasne Freedom School in Kanienhaka (Mohawk) Territory in New York is a full immersion school (www.potsdam.edu/EDUC/Akwesasne/AFS.html). The school began with a group of parents whose goal was to teach the Mohawk language and culture to their children. The school has approximately sixty-five students who are instructed in the Mohawk language for all subjects (math, reading, writing, history and social studies). The Mohawk culture is taught through attending the calendar of ceremonies in the Longhouse (Ibid). The

“curriculum is negotiated continually around the Thanksgiving Address honoring all elements of the universe in sequence (Stairs, Peters & Perkins: 45).

In a second case, the Kohanga Reo or language nest “provides a culturally supportive Maori learning environment for the whole family and their community (Cherrington: 33). The curriculum is implemented with the child’s learning needs at the center. Maori believe that the center is where meaning and reason begin. The shape of the child-centered educational model resembles the womb. The child in the center represents the learner. Other relationships can be derived from this model: teacher-student, older-younger sibling, or grandchild-grandparent (Ibid: 31). “This is a total language immersion ‘nest’ where Native language is valued and practiced (Ibid: 34).

Personal Experience

At the time of my immersion experience, I was a twenty-seven year old college senior majoring in linguistics. I was in the language community during school breaks and hundreds of miles away during school. When in the language community, language use is learning new words (orally), saying simple phrases, and the beginnings of conversing. When away from the community, language use is very diminished. Listening to tapes and reading stories are the replacements. In addition, at times I recorded myself saying some words I remembered. To supplement my acquisition process when I am at home (in the community), the learning style is family-based which includes everyday functions. The learning style at school is linguistic analysis with supplemental recordings of stories and some curriculum. Some profound experiences have been hearing prayers and receiving meditative dreams.

I used the Master/Apprentice Program. A linguist named Leanne Hinton and the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival designed this program. It is especially created for communities where the ancestral language is endangered. "It is for communities where there are elders who still know the language, but rarely have an opportunity to speak it" (Hinton 1997:4). This type of program is aimed at using the language in conversation. It is a method that facilitates full immersion. For example, the first day of a master/apprentice type program would be to learn greetings in the target language. During each session there should be no English used. Gestures and physical response can be used to convey meanings to the words.

The program was created in such a fashion so that the learner(s) could benefit from working as a team without any outside help. It is for people who are motivated and open to learning together. The program was created to be part of a greater effort in the community. "Any community who wants to turn around language loss must use multi-faceted efforts" (Hinton 197:5). For example, the first step in creating a master/apprentice relationship might be sharing your desire to acquire the language with the speakers. Second, ask if the speaker(s) are willing to try a specific method of acquisition. Three, set up a schedule of times to meet. If more than one speaker is available, alternating days could be beneficial. Ideally, the program can be customized to fit the needs of both the master and the apprentice.

It is imperative to stay in the target language for the duration of the session. The master and the apprentice decide on the time allotted for each session. Some examples of activities include: "visit another speaker, make a meal together, make up a language lesson to teach children, take a drive, take a walk, attend a ceremony, watch t.v. with the

sound off (and describe what the actors are doing), build or make something together, look at picture and talk about it, tell a story, learn a song, or make up a skit or a play together” (Hinton 1997:42-43).

I formed an Oneida Language Partnership. I had expectations of what this type of partnership would be like. I could envision working together with an elder. I would shadow him or her and we would do everyday things together using the language exclusively. This is not an impossible task: getting to know a speaker well enough so they have faith in the language relationship we create together. To accomplish this task I needed more time. There seemed to be other events that go with living that put a strain on the time allotted to language, such as schedules, summer travel, and personal issues.

I made myself available whenever and wherever there was a speaker who was able to spend time with me and to let them know ahead of time that I have a strong desire to acquire the language. One of the speakers summed it up perfectly, ‘if you want to learn it bad enough, you will’. I came to understand just how demanding this particular language learning strategy was and what degree of planning is involved. My dreams and expectations have become more “real” now that I have the experience and information to gauge my effort with the resources that are or will become available.

Each language community is different. Because of the structure of the Master/Apprentice Program, it provides flexibility for creating a customized version. I spent time with two elder speakers, my great aunt (grandmother) and one of my grandfathers. It was a goal to be exposed to the sounds of two different speakers. We met when it was convenient for them. The days we met were not consecutive due to differing schedules. I met with the speakers one-on-one or with one or more learners.

We had meeting places at the library, school office, or at their home. Each time we met I prepared by consulting the Master/Apprentice Manual for ways to facilitate using Oneida language and for suggested topics to talk about.

I have become aware of how much work is going to be involved in acquiring Oneida. English has become so strong it is difficult to feel comfortable speaking Oneida and using the language in communication because very few people understand what is being said. When I asked my grandmother to speak to me in Oneida she said I would not understand and I told her I just wanted to listen.

The questions, what are the needs of the particular community and what does the community have as a goal for language really needs to be answered by the people before a CBE curriculum can be established. It is really up to the people whether a curriculum will work or fail. The process of planning is one that is fraught with differences of opinion, which ultimately wastes valuable time. In my experience, my most significant language learning experiences in my community were the times when I could access culturally relevant materials and activities that supported and made my efforts much more satisfying. Also, I found my self more motivated if I knew I was going to learn something new about my culture. In writing my experiences, I have noticed about three out of the six elements from CBE. I also noticed the most influential learning happened when my culture in the teaching of the language. I can only imagine if I had met all of the elements how much better I would be at speaking my language.

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