Beyond Numbers, Colors, and Animals: Strengthening Lakota/Dakota Teaching on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation

Author(s): Tasha R. Hauff

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Reports From the Field

Beyond Numbers, Colors, and Animals: Strengthening Lakota/Dakota Teaching on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation

TASHA R. HAUFF

In 2006 the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe took on efforts to improve Lakota/Dakota language teaching in K–12 schools. These efforts have included collaborating with the Lakota Language Consortium to create classroom materials and language-learning resources, partnering with Sitting Bull College to develop various language-teaching and language-learning programs for adults, and coordinating among the K–12 schools on the reservation to ensure students receive better Lakota/Dakota language instruction. While the efforts to improve language education in K–12 schools have not achieved the kinds of proficiency-based results originally anticipated, they have enhanced the way Lakota/Dakota is taught and have instigated significant changes in how Lakota/Dakota language learning is conceived of in the community. Based on data from participant observation and interviews with program directors and teachers, this article provides a bird's-eye view of these efforts, which have formed the beginning of Standing Rock's recent, and growing, Indigenous language revitalization movement.

In his report on Arapaho language programming, Steve Greymorning (1997) observes that many efforts to develop Indigenous-language proficiency in Indian Country have resulted in learners "only acquiring a limited number of words and phrases" (p. 22). He continues, "[T]he teaching of Native languages has had little or no effect upon reversing the steady decline of the number of speakers of indigenous languages" (p. 22). This has certainly been the case on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, where fluent speakers have been teaching Lakota and Dakota (mutually intelligible language varieties found on the reservation, which are often represented together as Lakota/Dakota)

as class subjects. Until recently, these classes have been "stuck" at numbers, colors, and animals. As in the Arapaho case, this lack of progress at Standing Rock was primarily due to a minimal understanding of language teaching methodology and limited time and resources allocated for teaching the language. Whereas Greymorning's (1997) research describes an Arapaho community's journey to and through Indigenous language immersion, this article examines the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's efforts to improve teaching Lakota/Dakota language as a class subject and the subsequent language revitalization programs these initial efforts inspired.[1]

Native languages are important to Native communities for a variety of reasons. Indigenous languages are understood to be the source and the reflection of particular worldviews that differ from European worldviews (Lyons, 2010). They play an important role in their associated cultural traditions and political self-determination, and they help develop and maintain a sense of identity among their speakers (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; McCarty, 2002; Sims, 2001). Native languages also work to connect Native people and communities to their homelands, and therefore serve as claims to those lands, becoming an important way to articulate Native belonging as well as sovereignty (Basso, 1996; Macfarlane, 2010).

In an effort to eliminate Indigenous claims to land and to justify the takeover of Indian territories, settler colonizers in the United States and Canada sought to remove aspects of "Indianness," including Indigenous languages, from Indigenous communities (Adams, 1995). Colonial assimilation policies, including but not limited to boarding schools, interrupted the intergenerational transmission of language to the point that, in many communities, there are not enough speakers of the language who have the time, energy, and institutional structures to raise a critical mass of Native language–speaking children. Today, the "natural" method of teaching Native language, where a learner is surrounded by speakers of the language throughout the day, is not an option for most Native communities. In the words of Fishman (1991), the "intergenerational transmission" of language has been disrupted. Therefore, language advocates in Native communities look to other methods of transferring language to the next generation, such as developing language immersion nests and schools where the focus is on teaching children entirely in and through the language (Hermes, 2014; May, 2003; Wilson & Kamanā, 2011); family-based programs, where whole families take up language learning together (Hinton, 2013; Leonard, 2007); and master-apprentice style programs, where one or more community members learn from a fluent speaker in everyday contexts (Hinton,

Vera & Steele, 2002; Olawsky, 2013). Another method is teaching the language in existing educational institutions as a school subject.

In 2006, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (SRST) began new efforts to improve the Lakota/Dakota language classes taught in reservation schools. While these programs have not achieved the kinds of proficiency-based results originally anticipated, these efforts have greatly enhanced the way Lakota/Dakota is taught and have instigated significant changes in how Lakota/Dakota language learning is conceived of in the community. This article will examine what it took to make such shifts in Standing Rock's Lakota/Dakota language-as-subject programming. First, I provide an overview of the projects, materials, and programs that facilitated the improvements; I then analyze the results of this multifaceted and multiyear undertaking. My goal is to report on the constellation of factors shaping these processes at Standing Rock rather than provide in-depth analysis of any single language project. Specifically, I examine the ways these projects and programs have been shaped by and continue to shape the language conditions at Standing Rock. As Margaret Noori (2009) reminds us, when examining language work, "there are no wrong ways of doing things, only ways that produce different results" (p. 13). While researchers such as Cantoni (1997), Hornberger (2010), and McCarty and Nicholas (2014) have acknowledged that teaching Indigenous languages as school subjects will not, on its own, result in intergenerational transmission of the language, the outcome of Standing Rock's recent efforts to improve Lakota/Dakota language class in schools has been not only to move beyond numbers, colors, and animals in the classroom but to also kick-start a dynamic, modern language movement.

Positionality and Methods

The data for this article come from over five years of participant observation in the recent language movement on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. I am very much an "insider" to the Lakota/Dakota language movement at Standing Rock. I am an enrolled citizen of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and a Lakota language learner, teacher, and activist. I participate in and help shape some of the activities described herein. When researching language revitalization, I am also *doing* language revitalization. I have personally felt the stress or frustration when a project does not go as planned, and the joy and accomplishment when something does. As Brayboy & Deyhle (2000) argue, this "lack of distance" enhances research (p. 165). Nevertheless, I am

also an "outsider" to this movement. I am not enrolled at Standing Rock, did not grow up there, and have no close family there. I therefore have no political stake in what goes on in this particular reservation context. I cannot, for example, vote for tribal council. Further, I am an academic, which, as Dakota/Chinese researcher Mary Hermes (2007) describes, "can put even insiders on the outside" (p. 56). I therefore come to this research having had the time and the resources to study as well as the ability to step away from on-the-ground efforts, unlike many of my counterparts in the language movement. Nevertheless, what is happening at Standing Rock influences Lakota/Dakota language revitalization as a whole, including my family and me, and I am therefore humbled that Standing Rock has allowed me to report on what the community has accomplished and the lessons learned along the way.

Since 2013 I have been at Standing Rock every summer to conduct research and/or participate in their Dakota Lakota Summer Institute (discussed later in this article). I also lived at Standing Rock from January 2016 to January 2018. I have been involved in many efforts to revitalize language, including teaching K–3 grade immersion, teaching at Sitting Bull College, helping write grants, and serving as a member of the tribal language and culture code committee. I have also been able to form professional and personal relationships with language activists at Standing Rock. Details of the story offered here come from interviews with two former tribal education managers, the current director of the Standing Rock Language and Culture Institute, insights from tribal-wide language and culture teacher meetings, and individual interviews with other language activists in the community. The final version of this report has been checked with language activists at Standing Rock to ensure its validity.

Setting the Stage

Stretching across the border of North Dakota and South Dakota, the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation is 3,571 square miles and home to about 8,500 people. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe consists of two nations that are part of the Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, or Seven Council Fires, a historic confederacy of western woodlands and eastern plains peoples who speak mutually intelligible language varieties. Two of these varieties, Lakota and Western Dakota, are found at Standing Rock. Assimilation policies and colonial land grabs sought the disruption of Lakota/Dakota home life and economy, a process that continues to this day, as evidenced by the recent construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline

(Estes, 2019). Over the century, some families secretly maintained and passed down aspects of traditional Lakota/Dakota ways of life, including ceremonial and spiritual practices, to the point that many Standing Rock residents have grown up with traditional songs, prayers, ceremonies, foods, crafts, and other practices. Even though today Standing Rock residents are free to speak Lakota/Dakota whenever they wish, very few Standing Rock residents under the age of 60 have the ability to do so. In 2010, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe conducted a language survey and determined that there were less than 300 fluent Lakota/Dakota speakers on the reservation (personal communication, 2018). Most of these speakers were Elders in the community, and many have passed away since the survey was conducted. The Standing Rock Tribal Language and Culture Institute estimates that today there are about 150 fluent speakers left on the reservation (personal communication, 2018).

Thus, Standing Rock is a language community with a relatively small speaker base. Like many communities in this category, the main direction of language work is toward generating new speakers and users of the language in the community with the help of community members who grew up speaking the language and documentation of the language, if available (McCarty, Nicholas, & Wigglesworth, 2019). Since the 1970s (or earlier in some cases) Standing Rock leaders have sought to generate new speakers on the reservation by teaching the language as a subject in elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as at Sitting Bull College, the tribal college on the reservation. But these language classes were not effective in developing student proficiency in Lakota/Dakota speaking or understanding. If a student did experience Lakota/Dakota language in schools, they typically learned only the names of numbers, colors, and animals, and, if they were lucky, how to briefly introduce themselves. In 2018 I interviewed a current Lakota/Dakota language teacher in the community. "We had Lakota teachers back when I was in high school," says 43-year-old Courtney Yellowfat, a language learner who teaches Lakota/Dakota at one of the local middle schools.[2] Even though these teachers were fluent speakers in the language, they did not have the methods to teach the language. "Teachers put words on a board and made students memorize them," Yellowfat continues. For decades this was what one could expect out of a Lakota/Dakota language teacher on the reservation. "When I first started teaching," says Yellowfat, who has been teaching since 1999, "it was really, really kind of awful. [. . .] I was one of those teachers that got stuck with numbers, colors, and animals. [. . .] That's the knowledge I had of teaching Lakota." Despite having had multiple language

classes with multiple teachers, most adults I spoke with on the reservation had not been able to hold even a basic conversation with a fluent speaker. Not only did this style of Lakota/Dakota language class over the decades fail to develop any speakers in the language, it also discouraged many Standing Rock residents from further study. Comments Sunshine Carlow, a Lakota/Dakota immersion teacher, on the new language programming, "Before [the recent language efforts] I didn't think I could even learn my language."

Getting Started

The language revitalization movement at Standing Rock is tribally driven. By this I mean that the Standing Rock tribal government is the central organizing entity for language work on the reservation. It is also the entity that began the recent efforts to improve language classes, which are discussed in this article. In 2006, the Standing Rock tribal education manager held meetings with language and culture teachers across the reservation and determined that teachers overwhelmingly wanted language curriculum and training. In an era when many teachers were creating learning materials from scratch, using their own orthography, with a very transient student base, teachers at Standing Rock believed a common curriculum that could be used across language classes and schools was most needed. To begin such work, the tribe turned to an outside resource—a nonprofit called the Lakota Language Consortium (LLC).

Established as a nonprofit in 2004, the LLC is a nontribal organization dedicated to the revitalization of the Lakota language. The LLC has on staff a full-time linguist who specializes in communication-based language acquisition. Despite some tension of the kind tribes often face when working with technical experts who are not community members, the tribal department of education was able to facilitate a productive working relationship with the LLC that became a central catalyst for a series of new language programs. At the time Standing Rock first reached out to the LLC, the organization had already created two levels of Lakota language curriculum designed specifically for the K–12 schools. The tribe established a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the LLC wherein the LLC would provide training and support for the K–12 language teachers on reservation and further develop their curriculum and other language-learning materials. The MOU also stipulated that the tribe would financially contribute to the LLC by purchasing those materials for students in schools on the reservation.[3]

The Standing Rock tribal council was not initially supportive of working with the LLC. There was some contention because the LLC is a non-Lakota organization. Further, directors of the consortium were involved in an intellectual property dispute with language advocates on the Pine Ridge Reservation (another Lakota community in South Dakota). In the end, Standing Rock moved forward with the relationship. "We had to go with whatever we had," said Sacheen Whitetail Cross, then tribal education manager, "and that was the LLC."

Orthography

The decision to work with the LLC coincided, moreover, with the decision about which writing system the tribe would use in their new efforts, in order to, in effect, standardize the form of Lakota to be used in the curriculum. Before working with Standing Rock, the LLC had been developing a new orthography and making materials with that system. As the developers describe, the system is similar enough to English that learners can begin to engage with it; in addition, it marks different sounds and sound changes in the language that only an already proficient or fluent speaker would otherwise be able to predict (Ullrich, 2008). The LLC calls this system the "Standard Lakota Orthography" or SLO.

Choosing a writing system, or orthography, is often a serious point of contention in Indigenous communities engaging in revitalization work (Hinton, 2014). While writing a traditionally oral language can itself be considered a colonial act, standardizing a writing system is fraught with political as well as pedagogical complications. Because teachers at Standing Rock were in need of language-teaching materials, and the LLC was one of the few organizations developing such resources, Standing Rock adopted the new orthography, but not without resistance from members of the community. Since multiple ways of writing Lakota/Dakota were developed over the past 150 years, language and culture teachers used whichever system they had been taught—if they were taught to write Lakota/Dakota at all—in classrooms. As was found to be true in the context of Indigenous language immersion in Hawaii, particularly in its earlier stages (Wilson, 2018, p. 88), the new writing system at Standing Rock was often criticized or even rejected within the community. Some fluent speakers at Standing Rock have not accepted the new writing system. There are some who continue to work in language education and who use the LLC materials but do not write in the orthography. These are usually Elders who

remain in the habit of writing the way they learned. A few people at Standing Rock, however, have been offended by the notion of a standard way of writing Lakota/Dakota, especially one that seems unlike any of the systems used by Elders. Community members have been particularly wary of the SLO, which appears to be developed by outsiders who are not fluent speakers and would require considerable study for a fluent speaker to use.[4] SRST has tried to ease tension around the orthography by praising the learner-focused foundation of this writing system but not enforcing that particular system. Language activists at Standing Rock also refers to it as simply the "SLO" or even "*Suggested* Lakota Orthography." Nevertheless, just as in the Hawaiian example, more and more people at Standing Rock are realizing how useful and important the SLO is to Lakota/Dakota language teaching, and it is by far the most common writing system used on the reservation.

New Materials and Training Programs

Having established the terms of their working relationship and settled on a writing system, the SRST and LLC took on a number of materials-creation projects as well as teacher-training programs to aid Lakota/Dakota language teachers.

New Lakota Dictionary

A key product created by this working relationship is the *New Lakota Dictionary,* which has been an important tool in improving Lakota/Dakota language education. Written by Czech linguist Jan Ullrich in consultation with Ben Black Bear Jr. from the Rosebud Reservation and other fluent Lakota speakers, the *New Lakota Dictionary* includes 23,000 words (Ullrich, 2008). Nearly every entry provides a series of example sentences from audio or written recorded data. The dictionary also includes a grammar section to help learners formulate more complex sentences. The section has since been expanded into an entire workbook (Ullrich & Black Bear, 2016). Dictionary entries include various possible verb forms, as well as identifications of dialect differences where applicable and known. Having a reliable and user-friendly dictionary has been helpful for second language learners and fluent speakers alike. The dictionary is available as a computer and mobile phone application for the use of language teachers and learners on Standing Rock and elsewhere.

Lakȟótiya Wóglaka Po! Workbooks

The main project the LLC undertook to help Lakota/Dakota language education was the development of Lakota language workbooks to be used in classrooms. This series of books is called *Lakȟótiya Wóglaka Po!* or *Speak Lakota!* Eventually this series will contain sixteen workbooks designed to help teach Lakota language in a classroom setting to children and will also contain Western Dakota versions. Each workbook includes useful images and diagrams to represent the language and small amounts of text designed to be read by each level of learner. Produced to foster communicative-based language development, these workbooks not only provide materials for teachers to work from but also organize language learning into different stages throughout the book and the series. In other words, students are set up to gain more and more proficiency in the Lakota/Dakota language as they progress through each workbook and as they progress through the series. The LLC had already produced two workbooks before working with Standing Rock (Lakota Language Consortium, 2004, 2006). Working with the SRST, the LLC has produced three more (Lakota Language Consortium, 2010, 2012, 2014). Along with these books, the LLC has developed supplementary materials including flashcards, teacher guides, worksheets, and other items that can be used to teach language in the classroom. This set of projects is important not only because it provides materials for language and culture teachers to use, but also because it has begun to organize Lakota/Dakota language learning into steps. The *Speak Lakota!* series is, in effect, a scope and sequence for language learning and teaching at the elementary, middle, and high school levels—exactly what the language and culture teachers said they needed.

Matȟó Waúŋšila Thiwáhe

Another project was a series of twenty *Berenstain Bears* cartoon episodes rewritten and performed entirely in Lakota/Dakota. With voice talent from all over Lakota/Dakota Country, *Matȟó Waúŋšila Thiwáhe* seeks to bring the language into the home through one of a household's most used devices, the television. At the time of their creation, few people on Standing Rock, outside of the fluent speakers, of course, understood the language enough for these cartoons to be entertaining or effective in language learning. Today, parents involved in the language movement show them at home, learners watch them to reinforce their self-learning, and immersion school teachers use them in their classrooms as educational entertainment.

Most of the materials described above were intended to improve language-as-subject in the existing K–12 institutions on the reservation. Language instructors at Sitting Bull College, however, also benefited from these efforts and use some of the new materials and, of course, the new orthography in their classes.

Lakota Summer Institute

Reyhner (1999) argues that "if we are to get beyond teaching students numbers, colors, and names of animals, teacher education will be critical in regard to school programs designed to revitalize Indigenous languages" (p. xvi). Standing Rock has found this to be the case. The SRST, LLC, and Sitting Bull College worked together to design two related Lakota/Dakota language teacher-training programs that would help Standing Rock teachers use these new materials. One of the most influential institutions to come out of the LLC and SRST relationship is the Lakota Summer Institute (LSI) at Sitting Bull College. LSI began as a way for teachers to receive training on the use of *Speak Lakota!* classroom materials, communicative language teaching methods such as Total Physical Response (Asher, 1969), among others, and as a place for language and culture teachers to share ideas, opinions, and experiences. Cantoni (1997) acknowledges that language teachers "have often been alone in their struggles to understand and alleviate problems, and when they have succeeded, they have seldom been given the opportunity to share their findings with others" (p. 8). LSI mediates this issue and, in many ways, continues to be Standing Rock's language teaching convention. Through collaboration with LLC and Sitting Bull College, the tribe was able to create an institute wherein teachers who participate in LSI can earn continuing education credits, or college credits, which count for the teachers' certifications or recertifications or a Lakȟótiyapi/Dakȟótiyapi (Lakota language/Dakota language) two-year degree at Sitting Bull College.

In its beginning, the Lakota Summer Institute had only 20 or so participants, and the courses it covered were mainly Lakota/Dakota teaching methods. It now serves more than 120 participants every summer and teaches both the language itself and teaching methods. Participants range in age from middle and high school students to Elders, and new institutes like it are developing across the region. In 2017, LSI was renamed Dakota Lakota Summer Institute (DLSI) in recognition of the importance of both language varieties on Standing Rock.

LLEAP

In 2010 the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, the U.S. Department of Education, Sitting Bull College, the University of South Dakota, and the Lakota Language Consortium collaborated to develop the Lakota Language Education Action Program, or LLEAP. This program developed important Lakota/Dakota language teaching courses based on those developed for LSI. The program also funded tribal members to participate in those courses, opening up a pathway for more people to become language and culture teachers at K–12 schools.

About 15 students participated in the program and obtained jobs or continued their jobs at schools on or around the Lakota/Dakota country. In retrospect, the program focused far more on how to *teach* the Lakota/Dakota language than how to *speak* the language itself, although participants generally learned more Lakota/Dakota through learning how to teach it. Few of the participants were proficient speakers to begin with and the classes were not designed to develop proficiency in students. The program also did not include instruction on classroom management, lesson planning, and/or pedagogical theory, all topics that teachers generally understand before they take teaching jobs. Participants in LLEAP had to look outside the program (either in other programs at Sitting Bull College or University of South Dakota, or from mentors at their schools) for resources and training in these basic areas of teacher training. Further, the LLEAP program eventually led to a Lakȟótiyapi/Dakȟótiyapi certificate and two-year degree at Sitting Bull College, which has plans to expand into a four-year degree in the near future. While the LLEAP program has ended at Sitting Bull College, new LLEAP programs have developed at the University of North Dakota.

Agreements with Schools

To ensure that K–12 schools on the reservation would continue to invest in language and culture classes, the tribe holds agreements with nearly every school on the reservation wherein the tribe purchases *Speak Lakota!* textbooks and other materials for the students in the school if the schools send their teachers to DLSI and other trainings and meetings throughout the year.[5] These agreements not only provide each school with the materials and training needed to improve their language education programs, but also ensure that language was taught more consistently across the reservation.

Current Results

Results of the above initiatives have come in many different forms. Research on teaching Indigenous languages as classroom subjects has highlighted the difficulties of trying to teach a minority language in underfunded and often under-resourced schools like those on Standing Rock, and Standing Rock is no outlier (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). It has been over 10 years, and the efforts have not produced the kinds of language proficiency the tribe had hoped for. There have been no proficient speakers graduating from Standing Rock schools. However, the efforts to improve language-as-subject on the reservation have brought about many changes on the reservation that should be considered key steps forward.

One way to measure success is to note the buy-in from so many educational institutions on the reservation. Before the recent movement to improve the language classes, not all schools had a language and culture teacher, or had one teacher who might have been responsible for teaching all grades in three or four schools instead of teaching just three or four grades in one school. Today, all but one has a language and culture teacher.[6] Some schools have two teachers—often a fluent speaker and language learner who work together to teach their classes. The amount of language classes still differs from school to school. Nevertheless, in theory, every student on the reservation receives some Lakota/Dakota language education every year, a feat brought about by the organizational tactics of the tribal department of education.

The quality of language education a student receives, however, is still difficult to assess. A key area of need in the language movement at Standing Rock is language acquisition evaluation. While the LLC has created a series of online language tests that the tribal department of education (now the tribal Language and Culture Institute) administers twice a year, the tests mainly focus on vocabulary and grammatical pattern recognition. In no way do they measure student output in the language. The tests are also the same every time, and students have more or less memorized the answers. As Todal (2018) points out for South Sámi, a great deal of time and resources must be put forth to develop valid and useful tests that can measure how well a learner is acquiring the language (p. 79). At the moment, Lakota/Dakota communities, like the South Sámi, face a problem when it comes to objective language measurements. While activists at Standing Rock and other Lakota/Dakota communities are working to remedy this issue, language activists at Standing Rock currently measure language suc-

cess in Lakota/Dakota language classes based on how far a class moves through the *Speak Lakota!* workbooks. Courtney Yellowfat says that in the last year he had welcomed sixth graders into his class who are ready to move to the third book. "We are just now seeing the product of all our hard work," he says, and is petitioning his school to let him offer a more advanced language class.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the above-described efforts was their role in jump-starting the current growing language revitalization movement on the reservation. Standing Rock's efforts to improve language-as-subject, which started with the creation of classroom materials and trainings, have had a snowball-like effect outside of the Lakota/Dakota language class. For example, when it was clear that schools were not allowing enough time for adequate language education, the tribal chairman suggested that the tribal department of education look into language immersion schools. Standing Rock therefore opened its Lakȟól'iyapi Wahóȟpi (Lakota Language Nest) in 2012 and expanded to include a kindergarten-and-up immersion school called Wičhákini Owáyawa (New Life for the People School) in 2014. The two programs together began the 2018–2019 school year with about 20 students spanning preschool to fourth grade. When the immersion program recognized the need for more proficient adult speakers, the tribe began to work with Sitting Bull College to develop more efficient Lakota/Dakota language classes for adults. One of these programs was the Lakota Language Capacity Building Initiative (LLCBI), cofunded by the National Science Foundation's Documenting Endangered Languages Program and Tribal Colleges and Universities Program. LLCBI provided eight Standing Rock community members with intense Lakota/Dakota language instruction every day for an entire school year, and trainings in second language acquisition theory and methods at the University of Minnesota over the summer.[7]

The contemporary language movement at Standing Rock has also seen the development of the Standing Rock Language and Culture Institute at the tribal level. The Language and Culture Institute (LCI) is a hub for Lakota/Dakota language revitalization on the reservation. Becoming an official entity with the help of the Bush Foundation in 2015, the LCI is tasked with multiple projects including but not limited to collaborating with the K–12 schools on the reservation regarding Lakota/Dakota language and culture; developing trainings for the teachers in these schools; creating Standing Rock–specific language-learning materials; collaborating with and supporting the existing immersion program at Sitting Bull College and helping to develop plans for new

ones; organizing and hosting Lakota/Dakota language and culture competitions; documenting Lakota/Dakota language by interviewing Elders in the community; managing, transcribing, and translating existing Lakota/Dakota archival materials; hosting community language workshops for adults; and working with the tribal government to develop an official language and culture code and other policies pertaining to language revitalization on the reservation. While each of these language revitalization activities merits its own scholarly analysis, the point of this long list is to simply show that there is a lot going on in terms of Lakota/Dakota language revitalization at Standing Rock. All of these projects use materials and trainings developed from those initial efforts, most prominently the dictionary and the summer institute.

Discussion

Research has shown that teaching Indigenous languages as school subjects is not the best way to increase the speaker base of that language (Haynes, 2011; McCarty & Nicholas, 2014). In even the best language-as-subject programs it takes a great deal of time and energy to produce proficient speakers. Nevertheless, Standing Rock's efforts to improve existing language classes ultimately laid the groundwork for what has become a strong, determined, and multifaceted local language revitalization movement. Each of the above materials, projects, and programs could be the subject of its own important analysis that would be beyond the scope of this report. Nevertheless, there are a few general findings that emerge when we look at the Standing Rock efforts to improve language teaching.

One unique aspect of language revitalization at Standing Rock is that it is tribally driven. While other researchers in Očhéthi Šakówiŋ Country such as Fredericks, Jesse, Brave Heart, & Strickland (2018) have focused on language projects set within specific schools or programs, this study tells a story of a language movement with a tribal government at the center. The history of Standing Rock's government and an analysis of the limits and possibilities of tribal governments when it comes to language revitalization and forwarding other decolonial goals is a discussion for a separate article. Nevertheless, the tribe's involvement in language work speaks to the importance of community control and tribal sovereignty in education and language revitalization (Lee, 2015). A tribal government can function as the central organizing force that

can ascertain community wants and needs and then flex political muscles so that those needs are met. At Standing Rock, the tribe has used its resources to facilitate education about language loss and language revitalization in each of its districts and has fostered important discussions about these issues. SRST has been able to organize among various institutions that want to or ought to participate in the language movement and has been able to garner institutional and political weight behind language issues when advocating as a federally recognized national entity. Of course, the tribe is not involved in every instance of language work on the reservation. Plenty of language lessons, workshops, and projects occur without the LCI or other tribal entity. Still, most of the people leading these nontribal activities have participated in, or even led, the tribally supported projects described above at least once. Further, many language advocates at Standing Rock believe the tribe could do more to support language. They would like to see the tribe provide more funding for various language projects and programs and would like the tribal government to create more opportunities and motivation for language learning by requiring all tribal employees to learn the language, incentivizing local businesses to use more Lakota/Dakota, and passing an official Lakota/Dakota language and culture code.

A second general characteristic of the language movement at Standing Rock is the tribe's strong sense of direction. In the terms used by Kroskrity (2009), Standing Rock has "clarified" its general ideology about Lakota/Dakota language and what its future should be in the community. While everyone who came to the community meetings believed that Lakota/Dakota language was important, in the past not everyone agreed on what should be done about its decline in the community. With a great deal of strategy, dialogue, and patience, language activists were eventually able to agree on working with the LLC to improve language education in schools. In doing so, language activists clarified some basic beliefs about what the tribe could and should do with Lakota/Dakota.

The first belief is that the language should not be kept solely within the world of ceremony. In other words, the Lakota/Dakota language belongs in all facets of life, including schools, and all Lakota/Dakota people deserve to learn the language, even if they did not grow up with the language. Second, Standing Rock believes it is important to develop proficiency (and eventually fluency) among its citizens so that the language can be used throughout reservation. This means that the Standing

Rock prioritizes *teaching* the language over *teaching about* the language. In the past, fluent speaker teachers who had little or no training in how to teach any language, let alone a Lakota/Dakota, would often spend much of the class time explaining meanings of certain words, or the reason behind men's and women's differing speech patterns, or the way someone would treat a particular relative in Lakota/Dakota culture, all in English. Today, teachers (including fluent-speaker teachers) spend more time teaching useful vocabulary in practical contexts, helping students practice their traditional gendered speech pattern, and designing communication-based language activities that foster traditional Lakota/Dakota family values.

Third, the Standing Rock language movement believes the language can and should be written. While some Lakota/Dakota speakers have argued that writing the language somehow damages, or reduces its power and potential, Standing Rock on the whole recognizes the importance of writing in facilitating language acquisition. In fact, as discussed, nearly all Standing Rock teachers have more or less settled on an orthography precisely because of the new writing system's ability to help learners speak the language.

Fourth, because members of the younger generation were not learning the language and because the fluent-speaking generations were getting older, Standing Rock believes actions must be taken to combat language loss. While Meek (2011) highlights that such enumeration rhetoric ultimately focuses on the younger generation's inability to learn Indigenous languages and thus contributes to the colonial trope of Native American failure, I argue that Standing Rock used the same rhetoric of enumeration to investigate the older generation's lack of training in how to teach Indigenous language, thus opening up areas of possibility for language revitalization. As other researchers have shown, understanding the younger generation's struggles with language learning as a community-wide issue, instead of a problem of just the younger generations, has enabled Indigenous communities to move forward in language revitalization (Lee, 2009, 2015; McCarty & Wyman, 2009; Wyman, McCarty, & Nicholas, 2014). At Standing Rock moving forward has meant gaining a deeper understanding of second or subsequent language acquisition, a topic Indigenous communities elsewhere have been increasingly exploring (Berlin, 2000). While there is still debate about how best to facilitate language learning in various contexts, what to expect of language learners at different levels, the creation of new words, and what kinds of new learning projects to develop, all of these discussions are guided

by the common belief that the purpose of the Lakota/Dakota language movement at Standing Rock is to develop new speakers and that to develop new speakers the tribe needs to develop new and better ways of teaching the language.

Finally, Standing Rock has clarified its general ideology about non-Native involvement in Lakota/Dakota language revitalization. The issue of outsider involvement in community language movements has been discussed and still needs more attention in contemporary scholarship (Hill, 2002; Speas, 2009; Whaley, 2011). While a full analysis of the working relationship between SRST and LLC is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that Standing Rock chose to engage with the LLC, recognizing that the LLC had knowledge of language acquisition at the ready. The decision to work with the LLC represents a deliberate choice to move quickly when it came to improving Lakota/Dakota language classes, as well as a refusal to reinvent the wheel when it came to creating classroom materials. Both are exercises of Standing Rock's sovereignty over its linguistic future.

Conclusion

The methodology for this study relied heavily on information from program leaders and organizers, and general discourse gleaned from language meetings and events. More can be learned regarding Lakota/Dakota language teaching by engaging more closely with Lakota/Dakota teachers, school administrators, curriculum designers, and the pedagogical materials themselves. Further, this Standing Rock specific report does not investigate the many ways Standing Rock collaborates with language activist and programs in other Očhéthi Šakówiŋ communities. Nevertheless, this bird's-eye view of language at Standing Rock has shown an important realization among language teachers and learners alike: It may take decades to become fluent in Lakota/Dakota but it is possible. Language class therefore plays an important role in a learner's language journey. "I'm trying to arm [students] with a knowledge base in the language so that they can figure things out themselves," says Courtney Yellowfat. For Yellowfat and others on Standing Rock this means helping students develop sufficient academic skill to navigate the new dictionary and grammar book, and sufficient confidence to practice sentence structure and conjugations on their own and with other speakers. In this way, language class complements the growing interest in Lakota/Dakota language evident at Standing Rock. "They're gonna seek people out who speak the language" concludes Yellowfat.

"No matter how imperfect they speak the language, they're gonna try to speak it!"

Tasha R. Hauff*, PhD, (Mnikȟówožu Lakȟóta) is a University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research, teaching, and outreach focus on Indigenous languages and tribal sovereignty. In addition to her scholarly research, she contributes to the ever-urgent project of community language revitalization, primarily on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Since 2013 she has served on leadership committees, developed programs, led courses, taught in the immersion school, and even acted on stage in an all-Lakota play.*

NOTES

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2. All individuals cited in this report have given their permission to use their full names.

3. Funding for this project also came from federal grants and outside donations made to the LLC.

4. It should be noted that the LLC did not create this orthography from scratch but developed it out of existing Lakota orthographies including those created by Ella Deloria and the University of Colorado. See Ulrich (2008) for more details on how this writing system was developed.

5. These included the Bureau of Indian Education schools, public schools, and the Catholic school within the exterior boundaries of the reservation.

6. At the time of this writing, all schools but McIntosh school held MOUs with the tribe. This may be because McIntosh school has the lowest percentage of Native students on the reservation. The school only provides language instruction when the students advocate for it. However, in Summer 2019, McIntosh school sent a teacher to the Dakota Lakota Summer Institute, so they may enter into a MOU with the tribe in the future.

7. The LLCBI is a project carried out for the Documenting Endangered Languages Program and the Tribal Colleges and Universities Program of the National Science Foundation, under Award # 1664416. Tasha R. Hauff, and Nacole Walker are principal investigators of this project. The findings and opinions expressed regarding this project are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the NSF.

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