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# Revitalizing languages through place-based language curriculum

## Identity through learning\*

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This paper discusses the components of Identity Through Learning (ITL), language learning and curriculum development that is community centered, experiential, and collaborative. It discusses three examples of culture- and place-based curriculum projects developed at the Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI) at the University of Oregon. We propose that place-based curriculum grounds student learning in their experiences in local events and places, and fosters community connection to traditional lifeways. As such, it can strengthen student self-esteem and identity. The paper addresses how place-based curriculum reinforces Native educators' goals for student learning, and how ITL is a promising strategy for supporting students in the classroom and beyond.

### 1. Introduction

Place-based curriculum provides a meaningful educational experience for Native students as it promotes authentic learning that supports communities in revitalizing their world views and associated lifeways. It honors the connection to one's home, family, community and world. The traditions embodied in the curriculum provide confidence and grounding for the child or adult learner while providing a perspective from which to investigate and understand the world at large.

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Place-based language learning is an essential tool for language revitalization as it fosters community connection to traditional lifeways. With community at the center, students learn about core values, culture, ancestral and home lands, and their people's history as they learn their language. Students become connected to what is essential to their tribal community and to the ways of their ancestors. Place-based learning is experiential and so nurtures students' curiosity, builds cooperation among students, and strengthens problem solving abilities. It links students with members of their community who contribute to its diverseness, and in so doing it opens students' awareness to elders, leaders, and mentors they might not have encountered in a more teacher-centered classroom learning experience. Culture and place-based learning is more compatible with the way information was taught or passed down in the Pacific Northwest of the United States of America 150 years ago, before the time of federally imposed education. It engages youth and children in learning their language in culturally appropriate ways that are participatory and project based. It builds relationships among mentors and youth, and older children as role models for younger children.

This paper introduces readers to the concepts of place-based curriculum and addresses how place-based curriculum supports Native educators' goals for their students. We describe the context of our work in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, and discuss the components of what we refer to as *Identity Through Learning (ITL)*. The paper then provides three examples of place-based curriculum projects developed at the Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI) at the University of Oregon, and we address ways that linguists and documentation specialists support curriculum development. The paper concludes with a discussion of Identity Through Learning as ITL is a promising strategy for supporting students in the classroom and beyond.

We begin with a brief introduction to the Native languages situation in the Northwest, Oregon and Washington in particular, touching historically on languages before contact with European-Americans and ending with the current status of these languages and the circumstances in which they are taught.

## 2. Native languages in the Pacific Northwest

### 2.1 Loss and revitalization

In 1800, before contact with settlers, what is now Oregon and Washington were inhabited solely by people currently referred to as Northwest Coast, Plateau, and Great Basin Native Americans. Historically, the entire Pacific Northwest region had an incredibly diverse set of languages with some 25 plus languages being spoken in Oregon alone, many with multiple dialects (Hymes 2007). Of these, only

a handful of languages with living speakers remains. What is now Washington State contained seven language families with around 23 languages and multiple dialects (Kinkade et al. 1998; Thompson & Kinkade 1990). The last fluent elders of many Oregon languages, including Alsea, Yaquina, Tualatin, Yonkala, Tillamook, Chinook, Kathlamet, Clatskanie, Rogue River, Molalla, Takelma and Cayuse, died during the first half of the twentieth century. The last fluent speaker of Hanis and Miluk Coos passed in the early 1960s and the last fluent elder speaker of Klamath in the early 2000s. Today, the only speakers of Kiksht and Walla Walla in Oregon are second language learners. Each of these languages represents a unique view of the world – the key and summation of an entire culture’s long history.

After the arrival of White trappers, traders, military, and settlers, disease left some languages with very few remaining speakers. The reservation system further destabilized languages and communities by placing people of disparate cultural and linguistic backgrounds together. For example, on the Siletz and Grand Ronde reservations there were people from over a dozen different tribes, speaking over a dozen mutually unintelligible languages. In this situation, Chinuk Wawa was spoken by most people, and became the community language; the original languages of those who were forced to the reservation fell out of daily use. Government educational policies added to the loss, as children were taken from their homes, often forcibly, and sent to boarding schools where the use of their native language resulted in harsh punishment. Children were forced to learn and speak only English. When these children became parents themselves, they wanted to spare their children the pain they had experienced, and so did not encourage fluency in the native language.

Tribal communities are acutely aware of their loss. Communities that have not had living speakers for generations are trying to recover whatever they can of their languages from minimal written and audio records. The languages with fluent speakers are acting with urgency to revitalize their languages. Communities are faced with the urgent task of ensuring the survival of their languages for future generations. With current efforts communities are once again hearing their languages spoken. Children and adults both are speaking Ichishkíin (Sahaptin), Coastal and Inland Salish, Numu (Northern Paiute), Chinuk Wawa, Siletz and Tolowa Dene (Athabaskan), Kiksht (Wasco), Klamath and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce). Children are finding their identity in learning from their elders.

## 2.2 Native language in the classroom

Native American students fall behind other ethnic groups in math and reading attainment, high school graduation and college entry rates (NEA 2011). Most Native children live in homes where their language is not known or used and attend schools where their language, cultural traditions and values are undermined. Loss

of cultural identity, and teaching practices that do not resonate with their culture have been linked to the lack of success Native American children are experiencing in education (Wiley 2008).

Current studies indicate how integral language is to the sense of well-being of Native children, and in turn, to their academic performance, self-esteem, and ability to navigate in a complex world. Studies also show that connecting Indian youth with their languages increases their resiliency to addiction and promotes positive health and well-being (see for example Goodkind et al. 2011). According to Mmari, Blum & Teufel-Shone (2010), risk factors for youth include loss of language and culture, while protective factors include knowing one's Native language, participating in traditional ceremonies, and dancing at powwows.

Place-based education can therefore boost student achievement and well-being. The examples and discussion of curriculum that follow have been used in formal learning situations: schools, preschools and small group lessons. These formal settings are not the only context for language learning or place-based models. Furthermore, they have not typically been successful on their own in bringing the languages back to everyday use throughout the community. Without language spoken in homes and throughout communities, revitalization successes are limited. Hinton sums this up: "the most important locus of language revitalization is not in the schools, but rather the home, the last bastion from which language was lost, and the primary place where first language acquisition occurs" (Hinton 2013: xiv).

However, school-based revitalization efforts are critical for several reasons. First of all, in the communities in which we work it is the only place that many students have access to their language and traditions. As the Native languages in the Northwest United States are severely endangered, the majority no longer spoken since the mid-1900s, learning them through intergenerational transmission in the home and family is no longer viable. It is out of necessity that Native languages have found their way into public and tribal schools; it is this unique, or perhaps one could argue, unnatural learning situation that drives communities to develop meaningful and culturally rooted teaching and learning strategies for Native languages. For example, at the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the immersion programs have made it possible for many more students to learn the language and culture in an effective learning environment than if language transmission was restricted to the home only. If there were no classroom teaching, most of the children in the program would have no Native language learning. A second important strength of formal learning situations is that they can identify and inspire those community members who are dedicated to bringing the language home. Finally, having language classes in schools and at language programs can boost awareness and support for the language throughout the community, leading to increased opportunities for revitalization.

### 3. Models for Northwest language learning

#### 3.1 Place-based curriculum

A place-based educational approach grounds curriculum and lessons in students' experiences in local events and places, and acknowledges that learning happens not only in formal educational settings but also outside of school in families and communities. This reinforces connections to one's home, family, community and world. Included components can be the cultural, historical, social, religious and/or economic relevance of specific locations or areas (Smith 2002; Gruenewald 2003).

Gruenewald writes that place-based education does not have one particular theoretical tradition, but rather that

its practices and purposes can be connected to experiential learning, contextual learning, problem-based learning, constructivism, outdoor education, indigenous education, environmental and ecological education, bioregional education, democratic education, multicultural education, community-based education, critical pedagogy itself, as well as other approaches that are concerned with context and the value of learning from and nurturing specific places, communities, or regions (2003:3).

Place-based learning addresses a long-stated criticism of most educational experiences: that outside of school, people "experience the world directly; in school, that experience is mediated, and the job of students...is to internalize and master knowledge created by others" (Smith 2002:586). A place-based curriculum is intimately dependent on the world outside the classroom and is responsive to its locality. Place-based education has a goal of involving "teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there" (Gruenewald 2003:620).

Place-based education has links to communicative and culturally-based approaches. Communicative approaches to language teaching (see Brown 2006; specifically for Native language teaching see Hinton & Hale 2001; Supahan & Supahan 2001) stress the significance of authentic communication. This can easily be imbedded in a place-based curriculum.

Place-based education supports recommendations of Native educators for Native students. The National Education Association proposes that Native ways of knowing be incorporated as a "critical cornerstone of relevant, rigorous, and high quality instruction for Native students" (2010:4). Place-based education meets the call for integration of the local and the inclusion of cultural knowledge in teaching, as well as increased involvement by the community (Blanchard 1999; Gay 2000; Nee-Benham & Cooper 2000). The traditional importance of place is discussed by Cajete (1994), who writes that the purpose of traditional education in Native cultures is to deeply connect young people to their heritage and their physical

homelands. Curriculum geared toward exploring places can deepen empathetic connections and expand the possibilities for learning outward. Sobel explains, “[place-based] curriculum can mirror the expanding scope of the child’s [or adult’s] significant world, focusing first on the home and school, then the neighborhood, the community, the region, and beyond” (1996: 19).

Clearly, the literature points to a curricular design that considers both culture and place to ensure a meaningful educational experience for Native students. Demmert and Towner offer an operational definition of culturally-based education that brings together culture and place. It includes six critical elements (2003:9):

1. Recognition and use of Native American languages.
2. Pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural characteristics, including the importance of adult-child interactions.
3. Teaching strategies that are based on traditional culture as well as contemporary ways of knowing and learning.
4. Curriculum based on traditional culture that 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 in educating children and in the planning and operation of school activities.
6. Knowledge and use of the social and political mores of the community.

Perhaps of most importance, tribal elders highlight the notion that place-based education brings about wholeness of the individual and community, and thus contributes to students’ positive self-esteem and identity. Elders note that younger people do not all know the cultural part of life; who they are; how their ancestors survived. Teaching to the seasonal calendar links what was and is traditionally done during each season to distinct geographical areas. Other native educators with whom we work design curriculum centered around traditional foods and nutrition, longhouse and sweathouse protocol, and legends that link powerful moral lessons with sites on traditional lands.

### 3.2 Identity through learning

Place-based learning is not a new trend within education or Native education, but its emergence in Northwest Native communities as a promising approach for language teaching is a more recent development. An example of a Northwest place-based curriculum, albeit one that does not teach language, is the Salmon Watch curriculum prepared by Oregon Trout, an organization with the mission of protecting and restoring native fish and ecosystems. The organization is a

public-private partnership with input from the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and individual tribal members. The middle school through high school curriculum was “designed to provide a holistic, multi-disciplinary and watershed-based approach to environmental education, using the salmon as the key indicator species of watershed health and the cultural icon of the Pacific Northwest” (Oregon Trout 2005: iii). The school year begins with planning and taking a field trip to a riparian environment. While there, students may make observations, collect data, or speak with a tribal member about the significance of salmon or the selected site. During the year, students learn about salmon lifecycle, Native American storytelling, watersheds, and human effects. Students also carry out a service learning project and disseminate the results.

Looking farther north, the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (ANKN) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks has been a forerunner in promoting Alaska Native ways of knowing and provides resources on integrating Native and Western knowledge systems within educational systems. The materials and school standards the ANKN has developed emphasize a shift from learning *about* cultural heritage to learning *through* the local culture as a foundation for all education (Barnhardt 2005).

The Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI) at the University of Oregon (UO) began writing curriculum with tribes in 1997 with a focus on topics directly related to culture and culture revitalization. The Institute’s ongoing collaborative efforts support and strengthen language preservation in various communities. Projects range from linguistic documentation and revitalization to curriculum and standards development to language program and state policy development.

By 2000, we realized that NILI and partners were addressing not only culture but also its link to geographical areas and to individuals in the community. This motivated us to become more aware of the literature on place-based learning, and with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR), we began developing culture and place-based curriculum for their Chinuk Wawa immersion pre-school. Over the past 12 years, with funding from the Administration for Native Americans (ANA), Department of Education, and Spirit Mountain Community Fund (SMCF), NILI and the CTGR Cultural Resources and Education departments have developed and implemented culture and place-based curriculum which focuses on language arts, ethno-science, social studies/history and math skills development.

Through SMCF funding in particular, NILI, in collaboration with communities, has been able to develop an Identity Through Learning (ITL) framework. It is a place-based learning model that is rooted in the lifeways of indigenous communities. We have identified three elements that are integral to the ITL



framework and essential for curriculum design and development. For us, ITL is *Community-centered*, *Experiential*, and *Collaborative*. We address each of these three in the descriptions of curriculum projects below.

Identity Through Learning curriculum is *Community-centered*. We assume a broad definition of place to include home, family, community, and land (the area within current reservations as well as traditional lands). The examples below show that a seasonally based curriculum links learners to individuals and places locally on the reservation and more broadly to ancestral or ceded lands. Specific locations throughout what is now Oregon and Washington have a rich and sustained history as locations for gathering and celebrations, religious practices, fishing, hunting, and food collecting. Many geographical formations along the Columbia River, for example, are tied to a legend that describes how they came into being or an event that took place there (Aguilar 2005). A drive with an elder along the river brings out these legends, as well as stories of events that took place within the elder's lifetime: childhood fishing sites; the loss of those sites when the river was dammed; locations of petroglyphs; more recent events and activities with family and friends. We also take community-centered to mean that the curriculum represents what community members believe is important for their children to know. The multidisciplinary character of community-centered curriculum means it relies on the input of a wide section of community experts. The units described below are not limited to language, but involve art, math, botany, physics, and more.

Identity Through Learning is *Experiential*. It takes students out of the classroom and places them in their environment. It asks them to engage and create. For Kolb and Fry (1975) experiential learning follows a spiral. The spiral begins with experience, then moves through reflection, forming and testing concepts, and reaching conclusions that are applied to the next iteration of the cycle. In the canoe curriculum discussed below, learners learn how to move around properly in the canoe: how to get in and out, how to move from one side to the other, how to bail. As children experience the effect their weight and movement have on the boat's movement they are able to adjust their actions to keep the canoe balanced.

Experiential learning requires the student to be inquisitive and interested in life, their learning and their larger environment. In the basketry project, for example, students gather and prepare materials and in so doing gain respect for the materials and an understanding of how they relate to the natural environment. The curriculum we develop is typically intergenerational, and this too is experiential, as students work with elders and hear their words and experiences. This helps youth internalize a worldview rooted in their ancestral legacy. The curriculum is hands-on, and we have learned that hands-on activities can both energize and calm students as they work. Hands-on activities thus contribute to classroom management. This way of learning inspires sharing, conversation,

curiosity, and group work at all age levels; with younger children, a child can sit on an elder's lap to weave or hold an elder's hand when exploring their environment which provides feelings of security or nurturing.

Thirdly, Identity Through Learning is *Collaborative*. Collaborative work is a core value of NILI and the need for and benefits of this sort of work are increasingly apparent across academic fields. Grinevald (2003:57) notes the evolution towards linguistic fieldwork done *with* and *by* language community members, rather than *on* a language or *for* the language community. Cameron et al. (1992) and Rice (2006) discuss an "empowerment" framework for fieldwork, in which "the work is on the language, for the speakers, and *with* the speakers, taking into account the knowledge that the speakers bring and their goals and aspirations in the work" (Rice 2006:132). Yamada (2010) describes a Community Partnerships Model, a collaborative approach that depends on long-term partnerships in which projects are mutually determined and mutually beneficial. The desired result is a partnership between researchers and speech communities in jointly planned and jointly beneficial projects.

In our work, the collaborative nature of effective curriculum design means that it necessitates a team of, for example, language program staff, elders, topic specialists, linguists, curriculum writers, school district representatives, teachers, parents and students. Cooperation and communication are essential throughout the process, and team members respect each other's views and contributions to the team. So, while NILI staff may be seen as the outside academic curriculum and documentation "experts", this is no more important than the knowledge and expertise the speech community partners bring, whether that is about the language to include, specific processes related to the topic, or the best way to engage middle-school students. We note as well that these divisions between groups are not clear cut; one of this paper's authors and many of the curriculum developers named below are both academic and speech community experts, and we increasingly work with, train, and learn from people who are members of both academic institutions and speech communities.

The ITL curriculum we develop is typically based on materials that have been collected with the goals of documenting and describing a language as well as revitalizing and teaching it. We discuss the use documented materials in curriculum development for each project below. Language documentation and language teaching go hand in hand in our work, and by acknowledging that at the project outset, we end up with rich materials that support multiple users (see also Jansen & Beavert 2010; Yamada 2011).

Before we turn to look at three examples of how place-based curriculum is contributing to language revitalization, we address teaching contexts in the Northwest.

### 3.3 Oregon and Washington teaching contexts

Linguists and curriculum developers need to know what kinds of programs are in place or desired in the area when assisting to develop classroom materials or deciding what sorts of documentary materials can support teaching. Some teachers and classrooms adhere closely to a second language communicative approach based on comprehensible input. Their goal is day-to-day communication in the target language. In some situations, the goal of teaching language and culture is to strengthen self-esteem and provide a heightened awareness of culture, place, and history. Teaching may focus more on learning vocabulary and phrases for situations of deep cultural relevance – for example, words and phrases that are used in religious ceremonies or while gathering food. The desire and ability to use technological aids for language learning also varies by teacher and available technology.

Many Northwest teachers are working to incorporate immersion teaching into their classrooms. A traditional model of immersion in which students meet for a day or half-day and everything in the classroom happens in the target language is not realistic for all Northwest language situations: presenting rich content and culture requires a higher degree of fluency than many teachers have. In classrooms on the Yakama Nation, for example, language teachers are typically language learners, younger adults who have a strong commitment to their language and the energy to teach it. Their challenge is to keep at least a step ahead of their students, providing a language-rich classroom environment given their own level of proficiency.

The benefits of using immersion techniques for a shorter time are available to less than fully fluent teachers. In these situations immersion teaching calls for a strategy of beginning with using the target language perhaps 15 minutes at a time and increasing from there. Hinton suggests that a teacher who is learning her own language while she is teaching it focus on learning various components of a lesson. If a teacher learns the lesson elements – not only the new and review material presented in the lesson but also greetings, classroom management vocabulary, and informal patter – she can have an immersion classroom (Hinton 2003:80). Another technique uses specific activities to stretch what teachers do know. Zalmi Zahir, in a Lushootseed immersion and methods class taught at NILI's Summer Institute, demonstrated for teachers how nothing but counting from 1–10 could be a ten minute activity that maintained student interest throughout with song, humor and physical movements.

Oregon and Washington State Departments of Education acknowledge that Native languages are under the scope of tribal governments and offer special certification for Native language teachers. In both states, the tribes determine who should be credentialed to teach language in public schools. Teachers must meet

a tribally determined level of proficiency in the language, but are not required to complete a university-level teacher training program. These certification programs allow for Native languages to be taught in public schools and give tribes the authority over their own languages. Elders without formal schooling can teach in the classroom and younger teachers, who are often not able to leave their communities for a four to five year course of study, can maximize precious and limited time with their elders. However, a drawback is that teachers with a native language teacher license may lack teacher training and ongoing professional development opportunities.

Teaching and learning situations in the Northwest range from formal classroom settings to informal in-home language learning. Some teachers see their students five days a week, others only for a half-hour a week. Although what is presented in this paper is based on teaching language in classroom situations, this is not the only context for language revitalization. The material is adaptable to other learning situations, such as home and Master-Apprentice settings and community programs. Curriculum developed using the Identity Through Learning framework supports all of these teaching contexts.

#### 4. Curriculum examples: Basketry, plants, canoes

This section discusses three place-based language-teaching units that represent the Identity Through Learning framework. For each, we give an overview of the project, then discuss its goals and objectives and the resulting products.

##### 4.1 Grand Ronde Basketry: Place, community and voices – intergenerational learning

###### *Overview:*

The Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI) was awarded a grant from Spirit Mountain Community Fund (SMCF) in 2008 to support the development of basketry curriculum for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR) and other tribes of the Northwest. *Basketry: Place, Community and Voices* is a multi-disciplinary, year-long unit on basketry of the Grand Ronde people. It met the need for place-based curriculum at CTGR's Preschool, Kindergarten, Chinuk Wawa, After-School and Title VII programs as well as the Tribe's Library by providing curriculum and instruction that focuses on the resources and people of the Grand Ronde community.

As mentioned earlier, NILI began working with CTGR on culture and place-based curriculum in 2000 as a means to revitalize the world views and associated

lifeways of the Tribe. What we learned from our earlier projects was that more participation from tribal elders and community members was needed at the curriculum planning stage. So for this project staff from the Cultural Resources Department, the Chinuk Wawa program, the After School program, and the Tribal Library as well as community elders and basket weavers participated in planning, developing and teaching the curriculum. The intergenerational relationships fostered by the project provided opportunities for elders to share their knowledge of culture and place directly with students. The project team consisted of: Connie Graves, Dolores Parmenter, Tony Johnson, Kathy Cole, Bobby Mercier, Marion Mercier, Jeanne Johnson, Judith Fernandes, Janne Underriner, Henry Zenk and Margaret Matthewson.

Resources collected in earlier linguistic and anthropological projects were important to the project. Some of the material Dr. Henry Zenk, the Tribe's linguist, recorded in 1981 with elders included information about gathering areas, material/hazel processing for weaving, using baskets in gathering, and tools for basket making. We relied on language documented by Tony Johnson, then the Tribe's Cultural Education Coordinator and Zenk for development of the curriculum. They, as well as the teachers, transcribed the curriculum and stories in Chinuk Wawa.

*Goals and objectives:*

The project goal that emerged from our community meetings was to immerse Grand Ronde community children (and others) in a learning environment that centered on hazel and juncus basketry and that reflected the language and values of the Tribe. Curriculum was taught at the Tribes' Preschool, Kindergarten, After-School and Title VII programs as well as at two workshops that focused on family learning. The main objectives of the project were for students to understand that baskets are an important part of Grand Ronde culture; to know that juncus and hazel are used in creating traditional baskets; to identify different weaving materials in situ and in class, and be able to name them in both Chinuk Wawa and English; to explain in Chinuk Wawa various stages of the weaving process.

The curriculum met Oregon State standards in math, science, social studies, history, art, and literary arts. Dependent on the extent of prior language and cultural experience, we expected that each student would increase skills (proficiency) in the following ways: (1) develop better small motor control; (2) gain knowledge of (or be able to identify) (a) where on the reservation to collect materials, (b) how to process cedar; (c) the stages of weaving; (d) design elements; (e) functionality; (f) cultural role of cedar/basketry in general; (g) the distinction a basket weaver holds in the Grand Ronde community; (h) the cultural and historical role of an artist in the Grand Ronde community.

Judith Fernandes, NILI's head teacher trainer and curriculum developer, worked with the team to establish the curriculum's targeted learning skills in the following areas:

*Math* – Counting weavers; Counting sticks needed for a weaving project; Understanding concept of “every other one”; Geometric basket designs; Estimation; Even and odd numbers.

*Social Studies and History* – Use of baskets in earlier times; Current use of baskets; Basket weavers past and present; Influence of outside communities.

*Stories and Literature* – Pictorial biography of Hattie Hudson, a basket weaver. We go gather, a story about giving back to nature when taking from it; Basket woman (traditional story).

*Art and Music* – Symmetry; Form and function; Traditional design; Present day design; Gathering Song.

*Science* – Where, when and how to harvest; Charring sticks for bark removal; Best management practices for guaranteeing future harvests; Leaching; Boiling; Dyeing; Processing materials; Qualities of good basketry materials; Experimenting with materials.

#### *Products:*

The products that resulted from the project were a multi-disciplinary, year-long unit on basketry of the Grand Ronde people that consisted of twenty lessons. The unit was piloted and then revised. Six story books on gathering and basketry were written and illustrated by community members.

Four step-by-step pictorial books on juncus and hazel location, gathering, processing, and weaving were created in both Chinuk Wawa and English. Also, two community weaving workshops were video recorded. A portable educational box containing all materials from the project was assembled. All materials are housed at the Tribe's Library, Cultural Resources Department and at NILI. (NILI's website at [pages.uoregon.edu/nwili/resources/curriculum](http://pages.uoregon.edu/nwili/resources/curriculum) shows additional curriculum examples.)

## 4.2 Tamaníksh: Yakama Nation Natural Resources catalog and curriculum

### *Overview:*

A curriculum project underway for the Yakama language (a dialect of Ichishkiin or Sahaptin, here referred to as Ichishkiin) revolves around *Tamaníksh*, plants for food and medicinal uses. The place-based curriculum development is a component of an ongoing interdisciplinary effort to support resource management, language documentation, and language revitalization. The project began in 2005 with a grant to the Yakama Nation from the United States Forest Service to investigate ways to assess and improve forest cultural resource management. The project

included gathering input from two groups of people with Yakama forest management experience and cultural resource knowledge: Yakama elders with extensive forest cultural resource utilization experience and Yakama Indian and non-Indian resource managers employed by the Yakama Nation or Bureau of Indian Affairs. A common concern shared among Yakama elders and resource managers was a lack of identification and management of culturally significant plants and areas. It was also noted that elders learned about resources in the Ichishkíin language, and therefore the Ichishkíin language holds information and recollections in a way that the English language does not. Most of the elders responded to survey questions in Ichishkíin. The 2009 final report (Jacob 2009) called for the development of a Yakama Nation Resource Catalog in Ichishkíin and English. This catalog simultaneously strengthens natural and cultural resource management and supports teaching and preserving Ichishkíin.

With additional funding from the National Science Foundation and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the catalog is now being expanded and teaching materials are being developed. Partners include the Yakama Nation Division of Natural Resources, the Yakama Nation Language Program, the Yakama Reservation Wellness Coalition, two high schools on the Yakama Reservation, and NILI. Team members are elders Átway Tayúyapam (Hazel Watlamet), Tuxámshish (Virginia Beavert) and Kusúmwhy (Levina Wilkins), along with Michelle Jacob, Roger Jacob, Joana Jansen, Rose Miller, Greg Sutterlict, Janne Underriner and Zelda Winnier. Classroom students at the University of Oregon have developed catalog materials; students and volunteers in tribal classrooms and Yakama Nation language program apprentices have been involved.

The materials used in the curriculum and collected for the resource catalog meet the needs of both language education and language documentation. On the classroom side, developed activities and curriculum richly support student learning. On the documentation side, materials collected contribute to the goal of having “a representative and lasting multipurpose record of a language” (Himmelman 2006: 1).

*Goals and objectives:*

The curriculum addressed in this section is intended for high school language students, 14–19 years of age. They are first-year students of Ichishkíin at one of several high schools on the Yakama Reservation, at Level One (beginner) proficiency based on the Northwest Indian Language Benchmarks (NILI 2008). Most are Yakama Nation members or of Yakama descent; some are non-Indian or are affiliated with other Northwest tribes. The ten-week unit (some already developed and some in planning stages) is intended for a classroom language learning setting, although we anticipate that the lessons will be useful to teachers and learners in other contexts as well. The curriculum includes elder visits

to the classroom, audio and video materials, field trips, and family interviews. Hands-on activities include gathering, processing, and preparing plant materials at the proper seasonal times. Students will also produce materials for the Yakama Nation Natural Resources catalog, adding to the database of described resources for cultural resource managers and future language learners. The unit also supports subsequent units that focus on Longhouse and Sweathouse. As students progress in their language ability as well as their knowledge of the resources they describe, they will revisit and expand catalog entries.

For the students, objectives include: recognize culturally significant plants; recognize significance of plants to the Yakama people; say 2–3 Ichishkíin sentences about a relative's practices around root foods; describe environments of 5–6 plants; name places where these plants grow; read, write, understand and say plant gathering and plant processing/preparation vocabulary and sentences; construct a catalog entry of a culturally relevant plant with picture(s), recording of an elder, and sentences.

#### *Products:*

The developed curriculum involves audio, video, and visual materials. It also includes lesson plans for each day of the unit. Language teachers are often also language learners, and so vocabulary related to classroom routines is part of the lesson plan. Teachers also relate that they are typically pressed for time, so having a prepared lesson plan with daily goals and scheduled activities assists them in adapting the materials to their classroom and learners. In addition, the inclusion of the lesson plans supports early-career teachers and language teachers without formal training. The output from students and classrooms further supports and expands the catalog of natural resources, providing materials for other students as well as resource managers.

We see that this type of curriculum provides a connection to students' culture in a deeper way: they may already go to the Longhouse or ceremonies where they see traditional foods, for example, but they only know what they look like in that one context. They may not be comfortable asking elders for more information when in a traditional setting like the Longhouse. This curriculum provides students an opportunity to learn more about traditional foods, where they are located, how to prepare and eat them while learning and speaking Ichishkíin and becoming more connected to their environment.

### 4.3 Lushootseed canoe curriculum

A Canoe Curriculum for the Lushootseed language and culture (Zahir 2007a, b) is a third example of a place-based curriculum that reflects Identity Through Learning. Lushootseed is spoken in the Puget Sound area of Washington State, through



the Puget Sound drainage area north to the Skagit Valley. The curriculum gives language students a brief introduction to the canoe culture of Puget Salish First People. The curriculum is designed for learners in preschool to age 8. It is a full immersion curriculum; learners may be at any stage of acquisition, but teachers need to be of intermediate-high language proficiency. It was funded by the First Nations Development Institute through its Eagle Staff Program, as well as the Potlatch Fund.

The curriculum is supported by, and supports, the Canoe Journey. Canoe Journey is a yearly event that honors the importance of the canoe in the culture for its use in trade, diplomacy, and social gatherings, and “serves to preserve traditional Northwest Native life-ways and traditions, and facilitates revitalization of language and culture” (Viles 2010: 1). It is also a vibrant example of revitalization. The use of canoes in the region faded with the arrival of white settlers and industrialization. The Canoe Journey, which began in 1989 with only a handful of canoes and tribes, has grown to an anticipated and highly regarded yearly event with up to 90 tribal groups participating and more than 100 canoes. Over the course of 2–4 weeks, canoes paddle along different Puget Sound routes, making stops at reservations and villages along the way, to the final host community. This time offers opportunities for Native language learning and use. (For more information on Canoe Journey as an event that supports language revitalization, see Viles 2010; Zahir 2007a, 2010.)

#### *Goals and objectives:*

The curriculum addresses canoe history; canoe styles and uses; canoe implements and uses; training for paddlers; canoe etiquette; speeches; brief instructions for making canoes. It also teaches cultural values: the importance of respect, strength, prayer, wisdom, courage and humility. Information on the plants, animals, and marine life seen on the canoe journey is also included.

For each unit, student objectives for vocabulary mastery, reading, writing, math, science, song and dance, and gross and fine motor skills are given. The cognitive skills and cultural values and practices that are the focus of the lesson are also laid out. For example, in one unit, students learn that there are different types of canoes in the region, and how these types are different (cognitive skills). They learn the names of the canoe categories and how and where the canoes are used; the concept of ‘place’ in relation to water and how the words describing place are related to water; to recognize places on land from the perspective of being on the water (cultural values). They make paper models of canoes and manipulate traditional toy canoes, and practice entering and exiting a canoe safely and respectfully (cultural practices).

*Products:*

The materials consist of workbooks for educators (titled Journey Curriculum and School Curriculum, available at <http://www.pugetsalish.com/downloads.aspx>) as well as associated hands-on materials, some that the teachers and students create, others that are objects used and seen on the canoe journey. The website also includes transcribed language documentation and photos that support the lessons. This includes canoe terminology originally published in the 1920's.

## 5. Discussion

Each example discussed above incorporates the three elements we see as core to learners developing Identity Through Learning and experiencing their culture, language and land. Basketry: Place, Community and Voices is *community-centered* as it focuses on the resources and people of the Grand Ronde community and it serves all CTGR members, Chinuk Wawa speakers and other learners of Chinuk Wawa by making the curriculum available online. It is *collaborative* as the project staff from various departments as well as community elders and basket weavers participated in planning, developing and teaching the curriculum. Students engage in *experiential* learning as the relationships fostered by the project provide opportunities for elders to share their knowledge of culture and place directly with students. It promotes students experimenting with basketry materials and weaving techniques and experiencing first-hand locating and gathering basketry materials.

The Ichishkíin *Tamaniksh* curriculum is *community-centered*, in that its importance and expertise are rooted in the community. It is inherently multi-disciplinary. Students engage in *experiential* learning, with hands-on components that lead them to come to conclusions about, for example, the way to present their plant entries or the way to prepare a root for storage, then later to revisit the topic. It is *collaborative*, with a broad range of participants, and it supports a number of community goals.

The canoe curriculum is particularly *experiential*. This curriculum stresses that learners will benefit from dynamic teaching: "Have a plan for the day, but if all the children want to do is play with the bailer and the water in the canoe, let them. They're engaged. Interact with them in Lushootseed.... Maybe the canoe rocks. Maybe bailing water makes "rivers" in the ground. Go with it and have fun. Make the experience the curriculum" (Zahir 2007a: 2). It was written with input from elders and community members and is therefore *collaborative*. It is *community-centered* as it is useable by all Lushootseed speaking people. Additionally, it merges to a

more global level with its presence at Canoe Journey, and provides inspiration for speakers of other Native languages to adopt the same model. It is a model of immersion language learning in a particular community setting.

The above curriculum examples illustrate how collaborating with communities on curriculum development yields a richer, more meaningful product. Linguists and documentation experts have much to add to these efforts. Collaboration at the onset of the project clarifies the language community's preferred teaching methods and types of curriculum design, and specifies what types of materials are useful in the classroom, given the language teaching strategies used in the community. It identifies topics that are important to the community, so that thematic units can be the rich basis for curriculum and language documentation. Further, supporting and contributing to curriculum efforts builds relationships. If community outsiders work on language documentation within a framework of respect and support for community goals, and one of these goals is classroom teaching, it is essential to support it.

Although quantitative research of Native student success is limited, ITL is a promising strategy for supporting students in the classroom and beyond. Native students have increased academic achievements when schools and classrooms validate and incorporate their culture (Demmert & Towner 2003; Lipka 2002). A recent report by the National Education Association (NEA) describes successful strategies used by Native educators to improve opportunities and achievements of Native high school students. It addresses the deep sense of place held by many Native high school students, and the importance of teachers understanding the particular context in which they teach. The report also states that an educational approach that "infuses the history, values, and language – ways of knowing- of Native people into the contents of the curriculum, the language of instruction, the delivery of instruction, and the interaction with Native students" engages students and has proven successful at boosting student achievement and retention (2011:23). A focus on Native culture can boost family participation and attendance (NEA 2010).

NILI staff are developing measures to evaluate the effectiveness of culture and place-based curriculum, and language proficiency assessments to measure oral and literacy skills. At the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's K-1 Chinuk Wawa immersion program, initial language assessments are given in the fall and then again in the spring; these address language proficiency. Each place-based unit has pre and post tests to measure content and concept retention. They are limited to five questions developed by the teachers; for example, "Why do beavers have big teeth? Where do beavers live?" Students' answers are grounded in real life experience as they visit areas on the river where beaver dams are located and they examine beaver pelts (which are part of their classroom environment).

Overall, Grand Ronde K-1 teachers prefer informal assessment, that of observing the progress or skill development of their students, as they find it provides more meaningful information about their delivery of the curriculum and unit activities, student grasp of the concepts and student learning styles. Additionally, teachers keep portfolios on each student for documentation of growth and progress. Teachers report that their students are enthusiastic about their learning because it validates the environment and their lives.

Our informal experiences suggest that place-based learning increases community interest and contributes to learners' wellbeing. A continuing interest of the authors is to better understand the relationship between language revitalization and the overall health, including identity and self-esteem of learners. Over our years of collaboration, NILI and tribal programs have witnessed examples of how increasing one's knowledge of language and culture is related to an increase in self-esteem and cultural pride. Elders acknowledge that this association is evidence of the importance of language learning.

In an effort to begin evaluating how place-based education promotes self-esteem, NILI, high school Ichishkiin language teachers, Yakama elders and the Yakama Nation's Wellness Coalition have developed a study to measure whether education rich in language and culture prevents (acts as a protective factor against) drug and alcohol abuse. The study was recognized by the Native American Center for Excellence in 2011, and the pilot at the Yakama Tribal and E.A.G.L.E. high schools in Toppenish, Washington was funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in 2012. A distinguishing factor of our project is that it reflects the values of Identity Through Learning – it is collaborative, experiential, community centered.

These are on-going studies and therefore our findings are pending. It is our hope that the approach outlined in this paper contributes to communities' efforts to revitalize languages and culture, and more importantly, to foster healthy youth through a connection to traditional lifeways.

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