

I Don't Want Our Language to Die Indigenous Language Revitalization, Survivance, and the Stakes of Building a Moral Community

An Ethnographic Introduction: Dancing to Honor
 the Past, Present, and Future

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We sit around a table at the university cafeteria, enjoying our lunch together. Then, all of a sudden, the elder announces that she would like to have dancers at the honor dinner tomorrow night. Word quickly spreads across the lunchroom. Soon a practice session is organized, and several women have committed to dancing. The elder is pleased and agrees to help teach the dance during the practice session.

Later that afternoon, the women assemble in the longhouse on campus. The elder scans the room until she finds suitable instruments. She uses a spatula and a cardboard box as a makeshift hand drum. Upon testing out her new “drum,” she explains the legend that accompanies the song she will be singing, and she reminds the women of the dance steps for the Farewell Dance. The legend that she shares is place-based, reminding us of our surroundings and the legendary beings who shaped the world before our time, from the ocean to the Columbia River Gorge to places in between. This particular legend explains the formation of Beacon Rock, a prominent landmark that stands next to the Columbia River.

As elders do, she explains how she learned the song and dance. She tells a story of when she was a young girl, perhaps fourteen years old, when

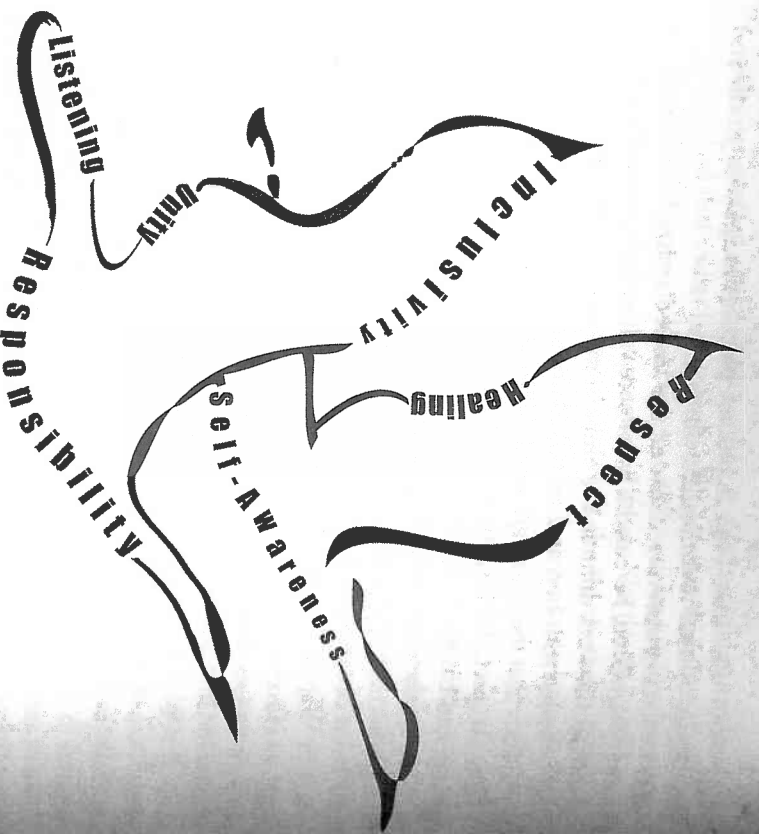


Figure 2. Wapato Indian Club model. (Drawing by Michelle M. Jacob and Christopher J. Andersen)

contribution of recognizing young people’s leadership and the importance of the body as a liberatory tool for critical awareness, leadership development, and decolonizing praxis.

This model provides an example of a decolonizing praxis that emphasizes the importance of the local context and the connection to place-based teachings. It encourages all peoples to build a relationship with the special beings/relatives with whom they share the land. According to indigenous teachings, the Creator has placed important teachers, like the swan, in our presence, and we have the honor to learn from these beings/relatives. The model I provide here demonstrates the importance of an indigenous place-based paradigm for learning and teaching.

she and her friends were asked to do the Farewell Dance at the longhouse. The young women were selected to do the honor of bidding the guests a safe journey home. The elder remembers the occasion fondly, and through her storytelling, she connects generations of storytellers, singers, dancers, and guests.

After this storytelling, the elder reminds the women that they need to practice. The women line up and begin the dance. Several rounds later, the women agree that they feel ready to dance at the important dinner tomorrow night. At the dinner, two men will be honored for their support to the Northwest Indian Language Institute and the summer program designed to help train tribal language teachers. The elder's singing and storytelling, and the women's dancing, will be special offerings of thanksgiving for all of the support that the entire community has provided.

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Settler-Colonial Violence and Language Loss

This chapter addresses contemporary language revitalization efforts on the Yakama Reservation and focuses on the activism involved in building a partnership with the Northwest Indian Language Institute at the University of Oregon. The activists' work is a response to a realization that language loss is one of the most important contemporary issues facing indigenous communities today (Meek 2010; Silver and Miller 1997). I draw from interviews with seven people involved with the partnership to analyze how their efforts validate the importance of indigenous survivance, build a moral community, and contribute to our understanding of indigenous decolonization efforts.

A century after the Yakama Treaty of 1855 was signed, Yakama peoples continued to grapple with social, political, and economic forces that brought sweeping changes. In the 1950s, many Yakama families continued to participate in our people's traditional economic activities, including seasonal rounds of hunting, gathering, and fishing. However, these traditional activities were, more and more, being juggled along with efforts to be "modern." This ability to merge traditional and contemporary economic practices was a phenomenon that took place across Northwest tribes (Raibmon 2005). Working in the canneries and agricultural fields, and sending children to the White man's school, became a larger part of the typical Yakama family's life. These social changes had implications for

our community's "language ideologies," which Field and Kroskrity define as "beliefs and feelings about language . . . language shift and language death" (Field and Kroskrity 2009, 4).

Ultimately, we can trace the roots of our language loss back to a history of policy-making designed to destroy Native languages, cultures, and peoples in a process that Teresa McCarty refers to as "social architecture" (McCarty 2011). In the federal policy era of "termination" and with the continual assault upon indigenous people's lives and rights, Yakama people made difficult decisions about how to raise their children, including whether and where they should attend school, and which language or languages should be spoken at home. Interviewees shared family stories about how this era was a time when elders and parents began refusing to speak our language to children, thinking that it was better for the younger generation to learn the "White man's" ways, with the hopes that they would escape some of the brutal hostility, discrimination, and violence that was widespread in Indians' lives, both on and off the reservation.

These examples of political and social injustices help illustrate the many social forces that are at work in Yakama peoples' lives. Sometimes it is a difficult question for outsiders to understand: "Why are indigenous languages dying?" The answer lies tangled within the social context and struggles that represent indigenous peoples' efforts to maintain their traditional land bases and cultures. As Field and Kroskrity acknowledge, "Language ideologies are thus grounded in the social distribution of both indigenous social inequality and the differential impact of colonial and postcolonial contact experiences" (6). These difficult decisions provide important context for understanding how government policies (energy, education, economic) are far from simply detached bureaucratic decisions. Rather, policies have a deep impact on Native communities, at times shaking the social order at its very foundation. As McCarty articulates, "[p]olicy is not a disembodied thing, but rather a situated sociocultural process—the complex of practices, ideologies, attitudes, and formal and informal mechanisms that influence people's language choices in profound and pervasive everyday ways" (McCarty 2011, xij). Thus, state- and federal-level educational policymakers who privilege English-only and English-dominant educational policies are actually contributing to a "form of linguistic and/or cultural genocide" among indigenous peoples (Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar 2010, 12).

Activists involved with the Yakama-NIIL partnership recognize the importance of Yakama views helping to shape policy. One interviewee, Patsy Whitefoot, is a Yakama tribal member who works for the Toppenish

School District on the Yakama Reservation. She also helps coordinate several drug and alcohol prevention initiatives for youth on the reservation. Patsy is a nationally recognized leader in Indian education efforts, serving as the past president of the National Indian Education Association and the Washington Indian Education Association. She has been involved with the Yakama-NILE partnership, and in her interview, she mentioned the importance of language, identity, and history. Her words remind us of the stakes of language revitalization:

We all are working toward the common goal of raising healthy children, and working toward community wellness is what I think makes a big difference in trying to maintain who we are in terms of sovereignty and our treaty, but also in terms of our language, and our tradition and our culture . . . helping our children to be able to identify with their heritage and who they are.

Patsy reminds us that one of the major stakes of decolonizing work is to protect the identities of indigenous youth. She links our people's collective well-being ("community wellness" and "sovereignty" in her words) with children's ability to have healthy indigenous identities. In her work with young people, Patsy sees how they struggle to build healthy identities. Young people too often suffer with substance abuse, self-harm, and a lack of self-esteem. Yet Patsy also knows that being strongly rooted in one's indigenous culture (language, tradition, and culture—as she states) helps serve as a protective factor for youth. Thus, language revitalization work is inherently decolonizing, as it allows greater access to language knowledge and use for future generations, and provides the opportunity for young indigenous people to develop healthy identities.

Indigenous Resistance and Its Complications: Language Survivance

Several interviewees spoke about the direct link between government policies of assimilation and our people's language loss, a result of settler colonialism that activists are mindfully working to resist. Greg Sutterick, a Yakama tribal member who has dedicated his life to preserving and revitalizing our tribe's language, spoke to this point as he recounted the historical narrative of language loss within his own family. Greg began his grassroots language revitalization work when he was a young adult, and

has spent nearly twenty years working closely with and learning from our revered elder and master speaker, Dr. Virginia Beavert, Tuxámshish.

In Greg's narrative, there is an implicit reference to what Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran have noted as the "soul wound" of colonialism, resulting from intergenerational historical trauma (Duran 2006; Duran and Duran 1995). If that wound is not healed, then it will persist and worsen across generations. I examine social problems in terms of language loss being evidence of a soul wound, with language revitalization efforts as an expression of healing those wounds. For example, in Greg's interview he discussed the language knowledge gap within his own family, which is tied to the legacy of historical trauma and the Indian boarding schools. Greg's father attended Indian boarding school, where he was taught that Indian traditions were evil. His father internalized these teachings and hesitated to engage in cultural traditions, including speaking the language. As a result, Greg only learned a limited Ichishkin vocabulary as a youth. When he was a teenager, Greg talked with his great-grandfather about the language. His great-grandfather, an Ichishkin speaker, explained to Greg, "You know, they really tortured us at the boarding schools for speaking the language, and that's why I never wanted you to learn. Now I wish I would have taught you, but it's too late."

The words of his elder stuck with Greg. He grew up being aware of the damage and trauma that the boarding schools had inflicted upon his family. Then, as a young adult, he had the opportunity to begin taking language classes from Virginia Beavert, our tribal elder who had written the first practical dictionary of our language, and completed the first comprehensive dictionary of Ichishkin in collaboration with Sharon Hargus at the University of Washington (Beavert and Hargus 2009). In recognition of all of her work with the language, Virginia was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Washington. Additionally, she earned her PhD in linguistics at the University of Oregon at the age of ninety. When Virginia offered introductory Ichishkin classes at Heritage University on the Yakama Reservation, Greg and his friends, Roger and Rose, whom I will quote later, found themselves in her classes together in the 1990s. They continue to study with Virginia, extending their learning time outside of the classroom and into their homes, together in the mountains, at community events, and at ceremonial gatherings. Virginia and her students have worked, over the years, to brainstorm, develop, and revise curriculum, attain formal education, and engage in significant community outreach. They have collaborated to create tapes and CDs of language lessons and recordings to distribute within the community. In these

ways, this small core of activists has helped to subvert the colonial assimilationist agenda designed to eliminate our language. Their work to recover, reclaim, and revitalize our language is a powerful form of resistance to the ongoing effects of colonialism.

Intergenerational Responsibility and Indigenous Resistance

Indigenous resistance movements place a strong emphasis on intergenerational responsibility. Indigenous scholar Taitake Alfred discusses this phenomenon in his study of indigenous activists and leaders. who told him, "Our youth always need people to look up to, because if you don't have people to look up to, you don't have any idea about where you want to go with your life. If you see a strong role model in front of you, it leads you in a good direction. You always need people to make pathways for you to follow" (Alfred 2005, 260).

Indigenous resistance is inherently intergenerational. Without the guidance of elders, younger generations will not have a pathway to follow. These intergenerational connections are important for all aspects of culture, and especially so for language, due to the predominance of the English language among American Indian children, families, schools, and the broader US society. Some indigenous language scholars have identified the US educational policy of "English only" as a form of subtractive education that harms all peoples and results in ethnocide, linguistic genocide, and ultimately, a crime against humanity (Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar 2010). Part of this destruction is due to the devaluing of elders in contemporary indigenous societies. Jeffrey Anderson writes about the implications of elders losing their high status, noting the "elders were once the center of all ideological production, including ideologies about language, culture, and religion" (Anderson 2009, 58). Thus, contemporary efforts to revitalize our language represent an important form of indigenous resistance.

Resisting the effects of colonialism is nothing new for Yakama peoples. In the introduction to this book, I provided several historical examples of Yakama peoples who dared to challenge the system, holding the US government accountable for violating our people's rights and lands, and for threatening our cultural well-being. Yet efforts to resist the ongoing effects of colonialism continue to be undermined by the overall lack of resources within Indian country. Grassroots activists acknowledge this dilemma, noting

that relying on federal funds, or the leadership of the tribal government, are not, in and of themselves, sufficient answers to our peoples' language loss problem. Thus, there is a strong need and important role for grassroots activism in the struggle to protect and revitalize indigenous languages. A reliance on governmental institutions will not solve our problems for us.

There are varying reasons why tribal and non-tribal governmental institutions, whether political or educational, fail to serve Indian peoples' needs. As George Castile points out in his critical analysis of the history of Indian self-determination, "So long as tribal governments must rely on the federal government for the vast majority of their funding, there must inevitably continue a pattern of federal oversight, hence some degree of 'paternalism'" (Castile 2006, 117). Castile states that self-determination, within a contemporary context, really means *self-administration* of federally funded programs. Such an approach is clearly limited, with significant resources spent simply trying to follow or demonstrate "compliance" with bureaucratic governmental regulations, rather than addressing community needs from an indigenous perspective. Other scholars have noted that tribal governments are simply overwhelmed, or stretched too thin, by "functional overload," as community members expect timely solutions from a tribal government structure with limited resources and heavy demands (Cornell 2007). Again, the overall lack of resources, along with the tedious oversight and regulations attached to the limited federal funding available, creates a sociopolitical context in which the hard work of language preservation and revitalization is often marginalized.

Nothing the scarcity of resources on the reservation, and the limited leadership and support from both tribal and local educational institutions, grassroots activists created a strategy to work with "whomever wanted to help" and "had a good heart to help." This meant working largely outside of the tribal government structure. The lack of material resources available on the reservation led language activists to partner with educational institutions and linguists who *did* engage in culturally appropriate, sensitive, and enthusiastic outreach with tribal peoples. For example, Sharon Hargus, Janne Underriener, Joana Jansen, Scott Delancy, and Bruce Rigby were mentioned as academic linguists who were committed to supporting indigenous communities' language revitalization. These academics are part of a larger network of linguists who have helped to shed light on the importance of indigenous language preservation and revitalization, with several examples of scholarship and nonprofit work that supports

community language work.¹ Some of this work was funded by the National Science Foundation or the Administration for Native Americans, but oftentimes activists have paid for their travel, tuition, and other costs out of their own pockets. Sometimes the most supportive institutions were over a thousand miles away, which meant that tribal peoples had to leave their families, homes, and jobs to pursue the opportunity to learn about language revitalization issues and methods that could serve their home communities. For example, Roger Jacob Jr. credits the University of Arizona American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI), and the fellowship he received to attend the institute, for helping him understand the urgency of protecting and revitalizing the language:

I'm down there [with Virginia], we were down there as a pair . . . I think there were ten pairs. There were twenty of us. And we were representing the Yakamas. You know, it was competitive and they made us really feel like it was an honor to be selected. And it was down there that I learned that our, that Ichishkin, our Yakama language, was endangered, more so than salmon or steelhead or spotted owls. There are fewer Ichishkin speakers, or Yakama speakers here on our reservation than spotted owls, and we're a timber tribe. At the time I had a master's degree in resource management and worked for the Yakama Nation in resource management, and so I was able to make that connection and that is the first time, I'd been studying the language for years, and would just kind of do my thing, and the light came on, and it was, "Holy moly!" This thing is endangered and it is important, just how biological diversity is something you know, that is good, and you know, we should be trying to protect, we need to be doing the same thing for these languages, and then this language that I was studying, and could read and write and was getting better at speaking all the time, was one of those. It was worse than spotted owls, and salmon, and the steelhead. It was really eye opening for me.

Roger's experience at AILDI helped him make a connection between his natural resources management background and his work with Ichishkin. Drawing from an environmental protection framework of needing to

¹For example, see Barbra Meeck's (2010) book. Another example is the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival, which builds upon Leanne Hinton's renowned work in master-apprentice language learning (Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival 2012).

"protect endangered resources," Roger recognized the intense political and economic mobilization that occurred to save precious natural resources (birds and fish). He connected this mobilization of resources to "protect what is important" to the survival of his indigenous language. In doing so, Roger began to realize how crucial his work with the language was, so that he could serve as an advocate to help ensure the language survived. Roger's analysis of the need to mobilize resources to protect what is valuable resonates with contemporary indigenous human rights discourse. In chapter 4, I discuss the stakes of cultural revitalization in terms of access to culture and language as a right. Roger's narrative helps to together the important perspectives of language conceptualized as a both a right (that should survive for future generations), and as a resource (to be drawn on because of the unique cultural and scientific knowledge embedded in the language) (McCarty 2011). Roger, and his tribal people, benefited from the University of Arizona's outreach to him, and the applied linguistics framework that Roger learned helped further spark his interest and cemented his commitment to continuing to work toward revitalizing the language.

Virginia also noted the importance of universities doing partnership work with tribal peoples to support language revitalization. In her interview, she discussed the significant outreach of the University of Oregon Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI), and explained how it led to a long-term partnership in which both the university and tribal peoples benefited through language revitalization efforts that were dedicated to practical and applied work:

MJ: So how did you get started working with NILI?

VIRGINIA: Janne Underiner [NILI Director] sent me a letter and she wanted to know if I would volunteer to help out in developing something for Indian education over there [at the University of Oregon] on the culture level. She needed a resource person. And so I told her that I would gladly do it. So I went over there. Whenever they had a meeting the Warm Springs and the Umatilla came, and each tribe, and the Nspeelam Indians and the Grand Ronde. They didn't have anyone from Yakama except me. So I sat in the meetings and helped out. And I became more interested in what they were doing. The people that were involved were so enthusiastic about developing materials for the tribes that it was commendable. Because those tribes now are using those materials. And the training that they gave them during the summer, you

know the teachers, they invite the teachers to come in and do you know, they have workshops to attend, how to develop their training as teachers, how to develop their own curriculum, and how to teach it. And all of those things, you know, that the teacher would need. So this is very important. And I'm glad that I started, and this was way back, in 1998, too . . . it really makes me feel glad to see so many Yakamas coming now to the workshop . . . And we're training other people to become more professional over there. And we've enticed two young men to come to the university to actually get their professional degree. And one has graduated. And I have one more left, and I have two girls, apprentices over there, they're not Yakamas, but they're going to be linguists and they're going to go out to the reservation and help out, whichever tribe is interested in them later on. And so that is how I'm working. I'm too old now to actually go out and do any fieldwork, so what I do is just kind of stay put and have everyone come to me, you know. I'm not much into technology anymore. So I just let the young people do the technology work. And I provide the language and knowledge about my culture, but I don't want anyone to believe that I know everything. I only know what I learned in my childhood through my grandmother, great-grandmother, and my mother, and my father. My father was a full-blood Indian who never went to school, and so was my mother. My mother never went to school either, but they were raised in the old way.

Virginia's narrative shares that her involvement building a partnership with NIIJ has focused on fulfilling practical needs within tribal communities (training people how to teach the language) and accessing the resources of the university to benefit tribal communities (degree programs that produce linguists who can serve tribal communities), and combines traditional forms of knowledge with the technologies of the university (humbly drawing from the teachings that her elders provided to help students who are learning language structure and documentation). Virginia is a renowned tribal elder and a master speaker of Sahaplin, yet she also brings an attitude of humility to her work. In her narrative she refuses to be called an "expert" and insists that all she knows is what her traditional elders taught her. Virginia's expertise, however, is invaluable to Leishkin learners, who need the cultural teachings to fully understand and grasp the intricacies of the language. Many Yakama elders who hold the

traditional teachings have passed on, which, along with dramatic social changes, has left a cultural knowledge gap.

In his interview, Roger spoke of the social change and the resulting decline of language use that he has witnessed over the past forty years. He discussed the stakes of such changes in practical, applied, and spiritual terms. I asked him what language loss means to a community. He responded:

Language is the *foundation* of culture, and without the language, what kind of tribe are you? Without the language, all the priorities, all the things that made you that tribe, your ancestors, all the things that you ate, places that you went, the foods you gathered, materials you gathered, the medicines, all of that, that can really only be truly expressed in the language and that's what makes you unique as a tribe. Otherwise, things are getting pan-Indian or just all washed out, and being American. That's really where the rubber hits the road in terms of trying to hold on to your true tribal identity, I mean, I think could only express it in the language. What are your priority foods? Why are you still here today? How did your people stay alive? When they got sick or when somebody was going to give birth, how did they carry these things out? Or burials, ceremonies, name givings, trading, weddings, the things that were prioritized and used and the terminology and all that, it's expressed in the language.

In his response, Roger questions whether a tribal community could meaningfully exist without the language, noting the many forms of knowledge contained with the language. He links this cultural knowledge to the survival of the people. Within Roger's narrative is an emphasis on the value of applied knowledge. His words urge readers to think about practical questions, to remember the traditions and seek out the knowledge and teachings of the older generations, so tribal peoples can confidently answer questions like "What did our ancestors use to survive?" Such teachings are important to Roger because of his understanding that the current generations would simply not be here without the knowledge, wisdom, and teachings of the past generations. Roger's analysis of the importance of language and culture is an expression of what Gerald Vizenor (2008) has termed "survivance." Vizenor defines survivance as "the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb 'survive, to remain alive or in existence,' to outlive, persevere with a suffix of survivancy" (19). The examples Roger discusses help us understand the breadth and depth of the

meaning of cultural survivance within contemporary indigenous communities. His narrative reminds us of the stakes of cultural revitalization work: individual cultural identity, collective tribal identity, and rites of passage and ceremonies that teach us how to survive as Yakama people—these important lessons are all contained within the language. Thus, the survival of Ichishkín is necessary for the survival of Yakama culture and people.

While such narratives emphasize the practical and applied vision of education, Roger also elaborated on the spiritual significance and importance of cultural revitalization education. He stated:

Once you start doing ceremonies in English, I mean even like a salmon. We're considered a salmon tribe. Sometimes when you go to a feast in the longhouse, and show respect for that fish that is responsible for us being here to this day, how many people even understand that? We respect that, and we have a ceremony and give it heightened importance. In English you would try to say we recognize it as a communion food and we have a special name for it, like the everyday name for salmon would be *nusuz*, and then when you take it into your body and really show it respect and give thanks for it, and recognize how important it is and take it in as a first food at the *káatham* (longhouse) and you would refer to it or hear it referred to as *Waykáanash* (sacred name for Chinook salmon). And it's not done all the time, and people are forgetting that. Pretty soon it will just be something in a can that you buy at the store. Pretty soon it won't even be that. They'll just be eating McDonald's, or white bread and bologna. What kind of tribe is that?

Roger links language survival with the survival of our tribal peoples, as the knowledge systems contained within Ichishkín are important from a natural resources perspective, a nutritional perspective, and a spiritual perspective. When language use and practice are diminished, the spiritual power and abilities of our people are likewise diminished, raising questions about identity, culture, and language practice. Roger's concerns with survivance are similar to the questions raised in Sheilah Nicholas's study of Hopi language practice, when one of her tribal elders asked, "How are you Hopi if you can't speak it?" (Nicholas 2011, 53). The very survival of the people depends on the survival of the language. This worries Roger, but his work to revitalize the language is a powerful example of healing both on the individual level as well as on the community level. He shared

that his work with the language taught him many things, but most of all, how to "be a better person." Ultimately, the struggle in which indigenous peoples engage to protect our bodies, lands, foods, and traditions is about helping us to live up to our fullest potential as indigenous peoples. Roger's narrative helps teach us that indigenous languages hold within them the culturally based teachings for accomplishing this.

Rose Mary Miller also viewed language revitalization as crucial for our people's survival and well-being. In her interview, Rose shared that she started learning the language as an adult. Her work with the language was inspired by her own settler-colonial-imposed knowledge gap, which she linked to the boarding schools:

I didn't start language classes again with Virginia until the early 1990s . . . I always wanted to learn my language. Mom chose not to teach us the language. She went to the boarding school and didn't want to do that.

Rose's family was wounded by the boarding school experience. Because of the messages that her mother had internalized from the government boarding school experience, her mother did not teach Rose the traditional teachings or use the language within their home. Rose's mom had done so because of a belief that her daughter could not be "successful" within US society if they spoke their Native language. Rose's mother was trying to protect her daughter from the harsh treatment she witnessed at the boarding school. As a result, the assimilationist agenda of "detrabalizing" Indian children is enforced, which was the top priority of the Indian boarding schools (Lomawaima 1994). Yet Rose did not accept that assimilation was the only option. Rose felt called to learn the teachings and to embrace her Native identity. She turned to other family members who helped her learn some of the traditions. She shared: "I always wanted to identify with my Native culture. I started hanging out with my cousins." This strong sense of identity is what led Rose to Virginia's language classes as an adult. Now, over twenty years later, Rose is an active member of the decolonizing movement to revitalize the language, serving as a language teacher within the public school system on the reservation. She is helping to fill the knowledge gaps of the younger generations. Her presence and her classes help to decolonize the settler-colonial education system for the next generation. Rose considers her work with the students to be part of the language revitalization activist movement because she connects our people's survival with the knowledge and use of Ichishkín. She discussed this point in terms of our treaty:

A lot of our treaty is based on our culture. If we lose that, the government can abrogate our treaty. Our people can't survive without the treaty. We'd lose our land base. Too many terrible things would happen. I've always wanted to push the language.

Rose engages in language revitalization as part of a broader vision to protect our people. She views our peoples' rights and healthy survival as *dependent* upon our knowledge and use of Ichishkín. Carrying on the teaching and learning of Ichishkín, then, is central to indigenous survival. Rose clearly articulates that our people will be weakened without the language, our culture, and treaty rights. The primary way that Rose engages in cultural survival work is through her teaching language classes. Rose teaches within the K-12 public school system and at community classes within the housing projects on the reservation. Rose credits Virginia and NILI with her growth as a teacher over the years. Virginia "insisted" that Rose attend the NILI Summer Institute, according to Rose. At NILI, Rose learned teaching methods and applied linguistics that have helped her excel as a language teacher, earning her an Educator of the Year award (Washington State Indian Education Association 2012). Rose continues to attend the NILI Summer Institute, and she sees her skills growing each year. Teaching is inspiring and fulfilling for Rose. She views language learning as important for everyone, articulating an inclusive vision of decolonizing work. Rose shared:

We are interested in teaching people at all levels. We are not looking just to teach educated people. We want everyone to know it is important to have our language. And to help them discover that sense of identity, that being a Yakama is important. We want to get everyone interested in it.

Rose and Roger now work within the public school system on the reservation, teaching language to elementary, middle, and high school students. In this way, they are actively seeking to address the soul wounds that have stripped our people of our language use, knowledge, and traditions. They extend the benefits of the Yakama-NILI partnership to a broader group of tribal peoples by implementing what they have learned at NILI into classrooms on the reservation. This is an applied example of decolonization that actively subverts a settler-colonial education agenda that, historically, has forbidden the teaching of indigenous languages and traditions within the schools. Rose and Roger are leaders in this effort, humbly

following in the footsteps of elders such as Virginia and Patsy, who tirelessly work to ensure the language and cultural teachings continue to be shared across the generations.

Unanimously, the people I interviewed stated that their work with the language was important because of the intergenerational responsibility that is inherent within our culture. In short, they were actively working to revitalize the language because of instructions that elders had provided. And, they felt a responsibility to learn and teach all they could so that the future generations would have a greater connection and sense of empowerment with their language.

For example, I asked Virginia how she got started doing her work with the language. She shared:

Well, I got started when my stepfather asked me to continue his work. He was involved in developing, well, I guess his thought was to develop a dictionary of some sort, you know, so he started out by training five women, five Indian women. And he was still on the Tribal Council, matter of fact, he was the Chairman. He used to take time in the evening to teach five women how to read and write the language after he got together with Dr. Rigby [a linguist], and he learned how to read and write the alphabet. So that is what he was teaching the women. But I wasn't involved at all. I had my own occupation. I was a medical record librarian and I worked in the hospital. I worked in Sunnyside and that's where I lived. I'd come home now and then and visit and you know, and he got sick. He had a heart problem. And he got worse and worse and finally he told me, "I would like you to take up my work. Go back to school and get a degree in anthropology and continue my work." Evidently, he was told that the only background you could have for that would be anthropology and I didn't care for anthropology at all because of the stigma, you know, at that time, where people were digging Indian graves and the Indian people were very unhappy about it, and so was I. And, I kind of struggled with it. I didn't want to. But he kept it up and finally he got really sick. And he gave me a very serious talk about how people are only talking English now and later on there won't be anybody talking Indian anymore. I got to thinking about it because we all spoke Indian at home, everybody. And well, I finally did go back to school in Ellensburg at Central Washington University and I struggled with it. I mean my attitude about anthropology didn't help. But then I began to get acquainted with people who helped me.

In Virginia's narrative, she acknowledges the difficulties involved with seeking out training to become skilled in documenting, preserving, and revitalizing one's indigenous language. Although she was a fluent Ilishikim speaker, she still struggled with seeking out a formal university education, but persisted because it was part of the instructions her stepfather provided to her. Virginia did not have the typical "traditional" college-age student profile. She was a military veteran, was already in the full-time workforce, and was the first generation to attend college in her family. She remembers the difficulties involved in going to college and doing a course of study she did not completely understand. Yet she persisted because of her stepfather's serious talk about the ways our language was threatened. Virginia's narrative has an urgent message about survival—"people are dying anymore"—and she realized it would take a tremendous effort to disrupt the pattern of language loss and assimilation among our people. Virginia trusted in the words of her beloved elder and, perhaps ironically, started taking university classes in anthropology, a discipline fraught with assimilationist and settler-colonial projects. Although she struggled to accept this challenge, Virginia persisted on the difficult journey and eventually found people who understood her educational mission and supported her work with encouraging words and helpful networking connections. Ultimately, Virginia refined her skills in formal linguistics, and she completed her stepfather's work on writing a practical dictionary of the Yakama language (Beavert and Riggsby 1975). This lengthy document served as the basis for emerging language classes in and around the reservation. Countless photocopies circulate among tribal peoples and scholars interested in our language. In discussing this landmark document, Virginia is always quick to credit the vision and work of her stepfather, who foresaw the difficulties of our people to keep our language.

At the heart of each language revitalization activist's narrative is an unwavering dedication to the practical, to the applied. Virginia shared with me that she learned her practical approach to language revitalization work from another elder. Early in Virginia's involvement as a leader in these efforts, she was at an indigenous language conference. She spoke freely to the group about the challenges of doing this work, the lack of resources, the numerous barriers, and so on. Then, one elder jumped up, pointed at her, and let her know how much potential she had, how important her work was, and gave her a simple message that Virginia has forever carried with her. That message was "Just do it!" When Virginia tells this story, she giggles with delight, remembering that elder jumping and pointing at her.

She said it startled her, but she knew he was right. Doing the work was what mattered. This message represents the spirit of her work. She told me, "Ever since then, I've been trying to do it every way I can." Virginia was one of the few interviewees who was not averse to the term "activist" in describing her work with language and culture. When I asked her why she considered herself a language revitalization activist, she simply responded, "I don't want our language to die!"

Virginia's approach to language revitalization is rooted in her strong belief that tribal peoples themselves must take responsibility for upholding our traditions. She believes we cannot rely on government entities, including tribal governments, to solve our problems for us. Virginia's leadership in the language revitalization movement is rooted in what Begay, Cornell, Jorgensen, and Pryor have identified as the most valuable contribution of Native leaders: imagining a new situation to believe things can be different, and then working to make things different (Begay et al. 2007). Virginia served as an elected official to the Yakama Nation General Council for many years, but now in her "retirement years," she prefers to work at the grassroots level: teaching classes, mentoring younger people who wish to learn the language (adapting master-apprentice methodologies), writing (lesson plans, stories, legends, and new entries for the next version of the Ichshikim dictionary), and being willing to meet and share materials with anyone who has a genuine interest in learning the language. The grassroots approach that Virginia embraces is particularly important because of a general lack of formal institutional support for language work. Indigenous language revitalization efforts are usually poorly resourced, with activists scrambling to seek support from their tribes, educational institutions, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. Oftentimes, these agencies and institutions have little or no formal support to offer. Virginia talked about these challenges, noting that she had to seek support outside of her tribal government structure. This decision was difficult, as Virginia was raised in the traditional way, and some tribal elders believed the language should not be spoken, taught, or shared with outsiders. Virginia shared how her work with non-tribal peoples caused some conflict within her family:

My mother didn't really approve of that [working with non-tribal peoples], until she went to the university in Canada with me. She went along to buy herself a Canadian blanket. And so she said let's take my motor home and go up there, because Sharon [linguistics professor at the University of Washington] and I were scheduled to

do a demonstration. Well, she listened, and half of the audience was Indian and the other half was linguists. Canadian Indians came in and talked about the problems they were having, losing their language and their culture, and they needed help and things. Then the linguists were discussing, you know, how to strategize academia on trying to help the tribes at that time.

And my mother was sitting in her wheelchair and she had her head hanging way down like she was asleep. And then Sharon and I did our part of the demonstration about what we're doing to try to help you know, things to get going.

And we did my part and she did her part and we kind of put it together and how we're trying to do this. I talked about how the language was, the alphabet was developed and the man that helped us moved to Australia. And then my stepfather died and that kind of left the work undone. And how he made me go back to school and try to pick it up again and how Sharon had trained me to use the computer and the font, and everything in the computer. [I shared how] I was trying to do it and I discussed that with them, and told them this is how they could do it—to demonstrate how *they* could do it. And then Sharon did her share on how she was trying to help me. And how the university was getting involved and helping, you know, not helping, but giving her support to do it. And so we were putting all this together and then how it could work. The other linguists started talking about how it could work with the Canadians, you know.

After the presentation we had lunch and I took [my mother] back to where I got her an apartment on the campus. Then she said, “Well, I never realized how important this work was that you’re doing.” She said, “From now on I’m going to support you and help you out, you know, when you need help.”

Virginia’s mother was initially unsupportive of Virginia’s work with non-Indian linguists. However, after attending a conference in which she began to understand the critical nature of Virginia’s work, she changed her view and offered support and approval. This story is deeply meaningful to Virginia, as she had, before that conference, struggled with the conflicting messages she received about the important language work that she was doing. On the one hand, her stepfather had “made her” go back to school to be formally trained in linguistics, so that she could partner with linguists in order to save the language. Yet on the other hand, her mother disapproved and refused to help answer questions that Virginia had when

she was doing her work with the language. After the conference, Virginia’s mother’s heart softened. Being in that auditorium, seeing how special and useful Virginia’s work was, not only to her own people, but to the First Nations people who looked to her for guidance, Virginia’s mother realized that her daughter’s work indeed merited as much support as possible. Her humble message to Virginia was, “I’m going to support you and help you out.”

This gesture of support was important emotionally, but also practically, as Virginia’s mother knew things that could help Virginia’s work by laying out some of the background to specific terms within the language. Virginia shared the meaning of this:

Because before that [time when Virginia’s mother was supportive] I would ask her questions and she would say, “Well, you’re the expert!” You know, “you should know.”

Then after that [conference in Canada] she would elaborate on some things that, well, you know, I’m just like the rest of the young people. I know some things, but I don’t know the background to how this came about! You know, the *old* background. Well she helped explain some of these things to me, the way she was told.

And so that’s why I always say I don’t know everything. And you know, and it just gives me incentive to go out and activate as much interest as possible.

As the leader of the Ichishkin language revitalization movement, Virginia serves her people with a strong sense of humility. She is always quick to remind people that she does not “know everything” but she only knows “what her elders taught her.” In this way, she claims her rightful leadership role, but she also refuses to be “the” authority, leaving space for other elders and adults who wish to also serve as leaders. This tradition, of claiming one’s knowledge, rooted in the teachings of one’s elders, is a proud and strong indigenous epistemological tradition, yet it resists the Western tendency to equate leadership and knowledge with a totalizing knowledge discourse (Jacob 2012). Virginia’s leadership provides an example of what indigenous legal scholar Rebecca Tsoie (2007) has termed an “intercultural framework” that honors group-oriented and collective ownership, as Virginia insists that she is not all-knowing, nor does the knowledge originate with her, but rather she is simply the holder of knowledge that her elders shared with her. Virginia’s humble attitude reminds us that indigenous knowledge systems are rooted in the group’s collective past. As such,

Virginia refuses to claim that she speaks for all people, or that she knows everything about Ichishkín. She is, however, quick to share stories and teachings with students and people who are eager and sincere about wanting to learn. At her core, she is a loving teacher who has a very practical approach to doing her work.

Building a Moral Community

Within the narratives about the Yakama-NILI partnership is a rich understanding about the stakes of building a moral community that is centered on meeting tribal peoples' needs. For example, Greg shared the importance of NILI in sparking his imagination about collaborative work that could make an impact in Ichishkín language preservation and revitalization. Speaking about the first time he attended the NILI summer institute, he shared:

That's where I met Janne Underiner, Scott Delancy, all the people down there, and I really, that's what really got me interested in University of Oregon down there because they were doing a lot of stuff. I met a lot of people besides myself and Virginia that were really interested in revitalizing, preserving the language. And a lot of people who were interested in helping us, so we had people who taught us how to do teaching methods so that, when we teach in the community, we could do a better job. We had people showing us how, teaching us linguistics, and for some people this is like elders and stuff, coming with the language, or coming to NILI, and you know, they are starting to learn about linguistics. They are completely fluent in their language, but they didn't know how to describe some of the rules, or you know, "Why is this showing up now, but it's not showing up there?" "Why does this sound change when it used to be this sound?" And those are stuff that you don't know. It's internal, internalized, and you can't really explain it unless you're a linguist and you know these linguistic rules. So they helped the elders with that. And you know we also learned about databases and storing our recordings and for ways to do that type of stuff and how do you utilize technology and so that whole experience, I did that [attended NILI] two years.

Greg's comments clarify the importance of having a critical mass of people who are dedicated to language revitalization. Within the summer

institute, Greg saw that the focus was on developing and providing tools that tribal community members needed to do the language work themselves. Thus, at the heart of the partnership effort is the goal of tribal self-determination. This model of education inspired Greg to follow the lead of his elder, Virginia. Greg is now also enrolled in the doctoral program in linguistics at the University of Oregon. Like Virginia, Greg is focusing his dissertation on Ichishkín. Their scholarship will add to our assets in the movement to revitalize our indigenous language.

The Yakama-NILI partnership was initially built around the NILI Summer Institute, a two-week intensive course hosted on the University of Oregon campus. In my interview with Dr. Janne Underiner, the director of NILI, I asked her how the Summer Institute got started. Her comments make clear that tribal people's vision of community empowerment is what guides all of the work. Janne shared that the formal beginning of NILI could be traced back to a meeting between tribal community members and University of Oregon linguistics graduate students and professors. She shared that at the meeting, tribal peoples expressed their needs:

They wanted within their communities more language classes, community language classes, language taught in schools or Head Start programs or developing more community schools. So we met with them and then we started NILI that summer.

I asked Janne about the actual process of starting NILI. She insisted it was an uncomplicated process, relying only on sincere outreach among existing networks of tribal peoples, careful listening to tribal community needs, and dedication to actively addressing those needs. I asked her to share more details. She responded:

Well, really we sat for one day, we convened, I don't remember the date but it was in May and we really listened. And I was the note keeper and I was nervous because I knew I had to just get it right, about what people's needs were. I mean it was really, it was actually that simple . . . at this kind of symposium or gathering. All these folks came together . . . Warm Springs and Umatilla . . . And Wendell and Thomas said, "Let's do it" and "Let's get it going." And so we did. I mean we listened to them. We made it happen.

The first NILI Summer Institute took place in 1996. The foundational meeting that Janne describes above took place in May, and the Summer

Institute took place that same summer, less than two months later. After listening to tribal people's needs, Janne took the lead to organize support for the Summer Institute on campus, getting support from summer housing programs, instructors from the linguistics department, and support from diversity and equity offices. Working with a shoestring budget, Janne found a way to host the institute and charge modest tuition and room and board charges, which attendees paid for out of pocket or with support from their tribes. I asked Janne how she was able to pull together a Summer Institute in just a few weeks.

MJ: So you organized that quickly?

JANNE: We did. Because those of us that, that really had an applied specialty had taught language and had taught second language acquisition which is what we thought folks needed, and taught teaching methods. And some of us had taught linguistics so it's not like we didn't have that expertise that we were really able to do that. And the first year, well, for the first many years, we went three weeks . . . I won't say it was unorganized because it was actually very organized but we were so inexperienced.

MJ: It sounds very grassroots, right? Not bogged down with university bureaucracy.

JANNE: It had *nothing* to do with university bureaucracy. The tribes wanted it. We said we're going to do it . . . That was what, fourteen years ago now . . . There were thirteen of us [that first year], more than I thought would come. And it was fabulous . . . mostly folks in their forties, fifties, and sixties that wanted to learn more about how the language worked and how they could teach. All of them had been teaching at some point. So you know, that is exactly what we did. We had dinners at my house. We had meetings at my house. We learned how to make fry bread [laughter].

MJ: There was no NILI office then or anything?

JANNE: No.

After the initial start of the Summer Institute, Janne began assessing ways it could be improved, to better serve tribal peoples' needs:

So I went out and met more with the tribes. I mean something worked and we were together and it was actually really a wonderful experience and it was heartfelt if it was anything. I mean, it took two

years to learn that folks don't really need a theoretical class in second language acquisition. It's not what folks that want to be language teachers really need to get themselves going. They really need to know how to develop materials and what teaching techniques work in different situations. They just really need this nice package, or these tools, or whatever that they keep in their pockets that they can pull out and go, "This is what I need now." And it's really what NILI needs to be about and what it's morphed into. So the following year, almost everybody who came the first year came the second year with an addition of a few other people.

Janne took on the main responsibility of planning and coordinating the Summer Institute. She was supported by a part-time graduate teaching fellowship position, which she was grateful to have, but many people realized that in order to sustain and grow NILI, a greater level of support was needed. Janne shared some of the complications of running the institute without strong structural support:

So that was clearly the motivating factor in us really working to look for funding and write grants and, because, once I graduated I was basically the joke at the university, with even the president was, I mean NILI was basically the back seat of my car. I mean, it was my car or it was my dining room. Those of us at NILI would affectionately call it 113-B or something in the EMU [student union building], which was the center building. We would always sit at this one table on the south side in the EMU, because it has this beautiful window that looks out onto the trees in this little park area there, it's just pretty every season. And then there's this little closet that's there, it's marked 113-A or whatever it is. That was the joke, the NILI office was in the EMU [in the common area] right across from [the utility closet] 113.

Janne shared that NILI, in her opinion, was "started by the tribes." She insisted, "We didn't start NILI. We were here at the university . . . we listened . . . and some of us just really didn't walk away from it." NILI eventually was able to move out of the "imaginary office" at the student union building. In the 2006–2007 school year, NILI was provided office space in a university-owned house adjacent to the campus. Clearly, a long-term commitment to developing and sustaining tribal partnerships is an

important part of NILL's model. This community-based vision guided the work of NILL regardless of the amount of resources the university provided.

Another major aspect of the NILL model is the recognition that supporting tribal self-determination means having tribal peoples present within the partnership. Evidence of a successful partnership means Native peoples will be on campus, accessing the resources of the university for their own growth and development, with the goal of benefiting their home tribal communities. Janne reflected on this, sharing the two most important developments on campus: 1) the structural support of developing a director's position, to ensure the long-term viability of NILL, and 2) supporting Native graduate students. Janne views the presence of Native graduate students as key to the success of their partnerships. One of the most significant accomplishments is the fact that NILL helped to recruit and retain Virginia Beavert to reenter school at the University of Oregon, to earn a PhD in linguistics. Janne shared her view of the significance of having a revered elder as a valued partner, graduate student, and mentor:

I feel like in her being here she has the ability to help us mold, help us explore, help us figure out better ways to work with the tribes and be better nurturers and providers and professors and teachers and instructors and all of that for Native students. And I think the larger picture is for all students. Because she's very much that way. She's very inclusive.

Janne's quote reflects the humility that is woven throughout all of her work at NILL. Janne holds a PhD in linguistics, is the co-founder of NILL, and serves as the director of NILL at the University of Oregon. Rather than viewing tribal peoples as "lucky" to be able to access the resources at the university, she sees herself as fortunate to work with and learn from them. Within her quote, there is a deep sense of responsibility toward the tribal peoples who choose to work with NILL.

Roger reflected on the significance of a university reaching out and truly valuing the presence of a tribal elder:

I mean if the University of Oregon can make Tuxámshish feel comfortable and get her to go there, I mean it was easy for me . . . I mean, those people at Oregon, whatever they're doing, I haven't put a whole lot of thought into it, but if other universities are serious

about it, well there's a model. And it's not just you know the institution it's the people and you've got to know how to act. That NILL, it's not just there in Oregon where we go to them. They come here. I would say . . . probably about monthly . . . they come here and they train our people, how to be teachers and hopefully how to record. They write the grants and I help write the grants now, because they trained me . . . Hopefully if we have people that have a solid understanding of the linguistics and know what some other model programs are doing out there we can get things turned around.

Roger's narrative helps us understand the importance of a university doing community-based outreach and partnership-building. Central to the success of the Yakama-NILL partnership is the fact that university personnel visit and host tribal peoples. NILL personnel are willing to meet community members' needs and allow tribal needs to shape the partnership agenda. Empowering tribal peoples to do language revitalization work is a major emphasis of the partnership. This focus on community empowerment is important within an activist scholarship agenda, a point that I discuss in more detail in chapter 5, when I outline recommendations for university personnel and tribal community members wishing to collaborate on activist scholarship projects.

The Yakama-NILL partnership promotes a vibrant form of community-empowered language revitalization. As such, it is supporting a grassroots effort to revive Yakama cultural traditions. Yet, most interviewees were hesitant to define themselves as "activists," as they were worried that the term would have undesirable political connotations. I asked Joana Jansen, a project coordinator for NILL, if she considered herself a language revitalization activist. At first, she mentioned that the term might be loaded in some contexts, but then she concluded with her own definition of what a language revitalization activist is, which she embraced. She later expanded on her comments to reinforce her point that language revitalization work must be done with love. In fact, Joana views her work as a blessing in her life:

In terms of that word [activist] being used as someone who cares about a language, who cares about the future of the language and who is devoting time and work and energy and love to that language, yes, I'm a language activist . . . And I care about the people. I think when I started I didn't know how much it was about people. I mean,

I look at language and this book is full of language and sentences and oh they're cool and I love them, I can read them and break them down into little pieces. But it's about the relationships and when I started working with NILI, I didn't know that I didn't know that I was going to meet people that were going to change my life, for the rest of my life . . . and that's another blessing of this work . . . to reiterate the privilege and the honor that I have, in being able to do what I'm doing. I feel very lucky and very blessed in this . . . I just feel lucky. It's not something I was looking for, or you know, it's not something I was seeking after or thought would happen but it's just been, it's just added so much richness, to do this work.

One of the lessons of the NILI model is that an indigenous-centered education has benefits beyond indigenous communities. That is, the intellectual project of participating in Ichishkín language documentation and revitalization serves as a scholarly contribution as well as social justice praxis toward building a “moral community” that recognizes the inherent worth of indigenous languages as invaluable contributions to a society that values diverse worldviews (McCarty 2011, 16; Meek 2009, 166–167). Non-Indians who are a part of the Yakama-NILI partnership noted how their lives were changed by working with the language, Virginia, and NILI. The relationships they built with Yakama peoples were some of the most meaningful in their lives. Above I noted that Joana counts her work with Yakama peoples and Ichishkín as a blessing. Similarly, Regan Anderson, an undergraduate linguistics student at the University of Oregon, counts her work with NILI and Virginia as the most significant part of her educational career. She is planning to continue on to graduate school in linguistics, hoping to dedicate her life to Ichishkín revitalization. I asked her how she got involved in this work. She explained that she was feeling lost in her educational pathway, so she decided to take a quarter off to carefully think through her educational options and what she wanted to do with her life. Once she stepped foot into Virginia's Sahapín classroom upon returning, she knew she was in the right place. Regan shared:

I was trying to decide [what to major in]. I took a cultural anthropology class and it kind of opened my eyes to endangered languages, just talking about linguistic anthropology. So I started kind of looking into endangered languages and saw the National Geographic map of the places in the world that there is most need of research, and Washington and Oregon happened to be one of those places. So

I started emailing linguistics people here. And eventually I got Janne's name and heard that Virginia would be teaching Sahapín and I was trying to decide if I should change my major or not from architecture to linguistics. And I actually took a term off, the fall term, to just think about it. And then, I ended up getting Joana's name and emailed her about adding the class [Sahapín 102] late after missing a term [Sahapín 101]. And they let me in and said, “If you can catch up you can stay.” . . . I made so many little flash cards and I labeled [with Sahapín words and phrases] my entire house and my room. Yeah, just walking in and seeing Virginia and Roger and Joana, it just kind of felt like the right place to be, so I worked really hard . . . So that's how it came about . . . I really found my heart here at NILI. And, everybody here is just so kind and the language itself, there's so much kindness in the language that it gets lost in English. And the perspective of it has really touched my heart in a way that I didn't know there was that depth until I started learning this language. And everybody that I've met that's been associated with it has had that kindness, too . . . And so, yeah, it just feels like such important work and that kind of adds to the enthusiasm, motivation, and it just has brought my life so much depth to be part of this. I feel really blessed.

Regan views her work with Ichishkín as a blessing. She shared that learning Ichishkín helped her see the importance of the worldview and the culture that is embedded within the language. Regan looked to a National Geographic map to better understand the crisis of global indigenous language loss. Much to her surprise, she was attending college in one of the regions needing research to help ensure indigenous cultural survival. She felt drawn to learn from Virginia and other students and teachers who were already engaged in building a movement around teaching and learning Ichishkín. In so doing, she learned a new worldview that changed her life. Regan's narrative helps demonstrate the importance of indigenous-centered education and the possibilities for building a moral community. Not only is Regan learning valuable academic skills and a subject matter that empowers her, but she is also learning how to apply these skills in a way that empowers indigenous peoples. In her words, her role in the Yakama-NILI partnership has brought “so much depth” to her life. I asked her to explain this, and she responded:

What gave me the ability to kind of see it was actually just the other day in a Summer Institute language class. Arlita [an elder language

teacher attending the Summer Institute] was talking, and she was talking about redirecting children. And, I think it started because somebody said, "How do you say this English sentence in Ichishkin?" [to reprimand a child]. And Arlita and Virginia both were saying, "You know, we can *translate* your English sentence into Ichishkin, but it won't be true Ichishkin because we wouldn't say that normally. We wouldn't even put that sentence together, really." And it led into an example of when you redirect children, you frame it in a way, you don't say, ["don't do this"]. You say [in a kind voice], "Rather, do it like this" [Arlita demonstrated this with one of the student's children, lovingly stroking the child's hair.] And you are very loving with them.

One of my favorite things about languages is the perspectives that you get, and the world view that you get, and how a culture and people embrace life itself. I just found in this language [Ichishkin], things are framed with such kindness, and you can feel it when you're talking to these people. And Virginia, you know, my first thought was it's just Virginia [who is kind]. And then I meet somebody else and, oh, my goodness, you are the most kind person, too. The deeper I get into learning Ichishkin, and the way that it is structured, it's just softer and more peaceful, and you can't even convey anger in the same way that you can in English. You know, you can definitely get your point across, and there are ways for things, but they're not the English way. And just, see, there's just more, I don't know, a softer embrace of individual people and hearts. And there's just this element of almost collaboration. Yeah, I don't know how to explain it.

Regan's description of what it means to learn Ichishkin is a narrative that is full of gratitude. She struggled to find the exact English words that would convey her sense of respect for her teachers and fellow students. She understands that cultural teachings are embedded within the language. Everyday phrases and instructions are delivered and structured in a manner absolutely distinct from "the English way," as Regan states. Because of the richness of the teachings and the importance of revitalizing this precious language, Regan feels drawn to work with Ichishkin for the rest of her life. This is a bold decision being made by a non-Indian undergraduate student. Initially, Regan's family did not understand her interest in Ichishkin. She shared:

At first they [family members] made fun of me, asking "What are you going to do with an endangered language? What's the point? You can't speak to anyone!" And now they understand and they're all really interested. I think it's opened their eyes, too, to the importance of it. Yeah, so they've come to be really supportive of it.

Regan recalls the confusion her family members felt about her studying an endangered language, wondering what she would do with such an education. "What's the point? You can't speak to anyone" follows the logic that unfortunately proves true often enough, that endangered languages will die through a process of cultural and physical genocide of indigenous peoples. Yet, through her involvement with a community-based language revitalization project, Regan has learned that cultural survival is possible. This process has helped her transform her educational and vocational pathway, and she is a crucial part of building a moral community within the Yakama-NIIL partnership. Along this journey, she has also helped to teach her own family about the importance of indigenous language revitalization, and thus brought them into the fold of the larger project that builds a moral community concerned with Yakama language revitalization. In the process, Regan has confronted questions about what the role of non-Indians might be for addressing problems rooted in a colonial past. Regan's response has been to support elders and community members, as they define the best approaches for engaging in language revitalization work. Through her involvement, Regan has received a "new perspective," and she feels "blessed" to have learned about the inherent value of Ichishkin as a worldview. The benefits of Regan's indigenous language education helps to demonstrate the importance of an indigenous-centered education for non-Native peoples, and Regan has effectively taught her family members that losing an indigenous language will be a loss to everyone; in Regan's words, her family now understands the "importance of it." The moral community that the Yakama-NIIL partnership provides is one in which all peoples who are concerned about language revitalization can find a place to participate, grow, and learn as a person. As such, the partnership represents a commitment to healing. The language knowledge gaps within the Yakama community are evidence of the soul wound of colonialism, and the strong, empowering efforts of language revitalization taking place are evidence of healing for our peoples. Regan's narrative represents how non-Native students benefit from an indigenous-centered education that is only possible because of the strong partnership between

tribal peoples and universities. This is a point I discuss further in chapter 5, where I propose recommendations for successful partnership-building.

Developing a Culturally Relevant Representation of the Yakama-NII Partnership Model

This chapter has examined the ways in which activists engage in language revitalization within the Yakama-NII partnership. I have developed a list of ten principles that define the essence of the activists' work. Below I provide the list of principles, as well as, in figure 3, a culturally relevant figure that represents the principles as a cohesive whole.

Principles of the Yakama-NII model:

1. Support intergenerational teaching and learning
2. Collaborate to create critical mass
3. Develop practical, applied focus
4. View work in spiritual terms
5. Listen
6. Practice sincere outreach
7. Encourage long-term commitment
8. Support solution oriented Do-ing
9. Support grassroots efforts
10. Aim all efforts at supporting tribal peoples' self-determination

Cultural Relevance of Figure 3

I choose to represent the visual model as a culturally relevant image. *K'úisi* (horse) has great meaning to Yakama peoples. Yakama elders often share stories of the importance of horses to our people's survival. In this book's introduction, I shared tribal histories that explain horses are a gift from the Creator. Today, large herds of wild horses still remain on the reservation foothills, and careful management of them as a precious resource is one of the most important issues facing our natural resources personnel (Yakama Nation 2012). Most of all, however, Virginia Bevert inspired the use of the horse as the basis of the model because of her extensive knowledge of horses and the many stories she tells about this beloved animal.

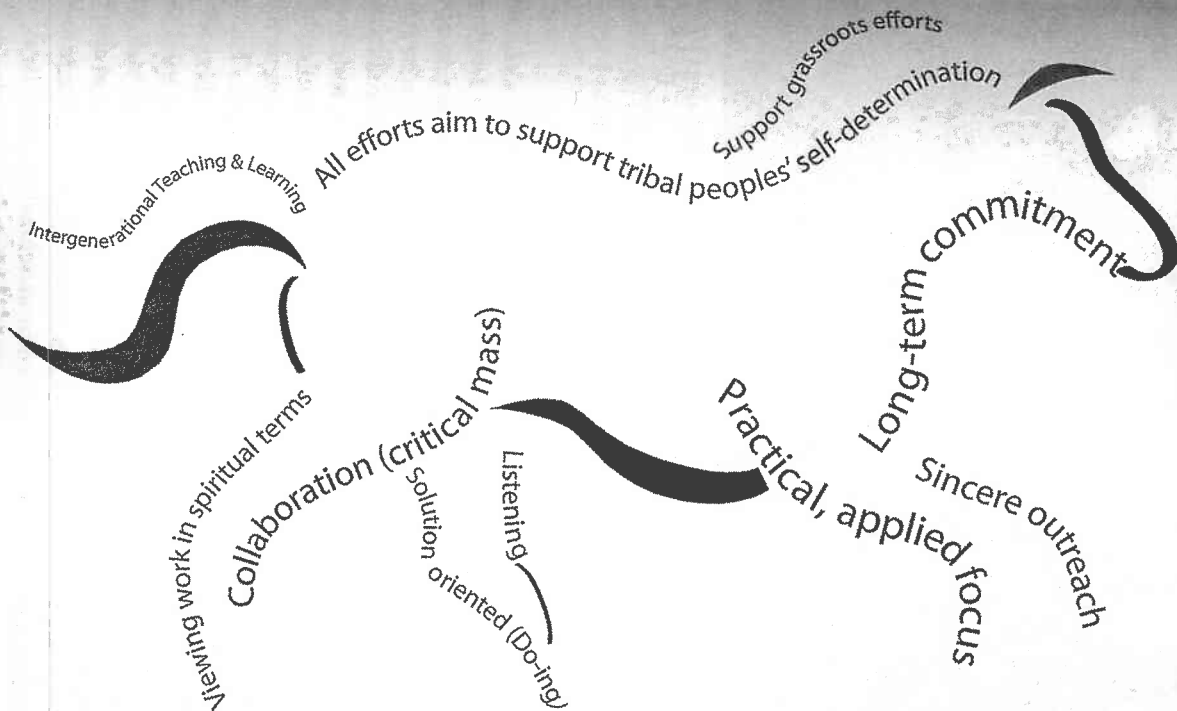


Figure 3. Yakama-Northwest Indian Language Institute partnership model. (Drawing by Michelle M. Jacob and Christopher J. Andersen)



Figure 4. NILLI attendees and Farewell dancers (described in the opening of chapter 2) at the longhouse on the University of Oregon campus during the 2011 NILLI Summer Institute. Three interviewees are pictured, including Joana (third from left), Virginia (fourth from left), and Regan (fifth from left). The author is second from left. (Photo by Christopher J. Andersen)

As the image shows, movement is important in this model. Language revitalization work, like *k'úsi*, adapts and moves through the environment. The essence of this model is rooted in the knowledge gained through the NILLI-Yakama case study, as well as the rich body of literature that has developed around Indian education scholarship over the past forty years, which demands that educational systems recognize the inherent cultural and political rights that indigenous peoples hold. Education systems must value and support tribal peoples' vision of self-determination. The ten principles represented in the model provide insight into how this process can work in a partnership between educational institutions and tribal partners. Yet, not all of the examples of indigenous education activism take place in partnerships with formal education systems. In the next chapter, we will examine a case study of grassroots activism that articulates a model of cultural revitalization outside of the formal schooling system.

CHAPTER THREE

Think of the Seven Generations

Xwayamamí Ishíich

Old Ways of Preserving Fish: An Ethnographic Note about Lessons from the Ancestors

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It is a beautiful late-summer day with clear blue skies and warm, bright sunshine. The sun's rays are so warm and comfortable, it seems almost as if the sun is smiling down upon us. Today we will learn how to care for food as a gift from the Creator, and in doing so, we will understand how much we depend on the sun (*dari*) and the wind (*hulí*). These are the lessons of our ancestors. We are fortunate that elders have carried these lessons and are ready to share them with us. The younger generations are ready to learn and will in turn become the next teachers for the future generations.

We drive up the long, bumpy dirt driveway, careful to avoid the adjacent irrigation ditch that waters nearby pastures. As I look upon the abundant plant life on the shoulders of the deep ditch, my mind drifts; I think back to the countless hours I have spent in the library, examining the archives of local newspapers from over 100 years ago. I recall the dramatic nineteenth century headlines of the white-owned media, which tittered with delight about the riches that could be made if further settlement were allowed onto the reservation. The headlines called for opening the Yakama Reservation, the rich land being "wasted" by "lazy" and "ignorant"