Kekoa Abreu

Professor Samuel Campbell

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**From Hawai‘i to Nevada: Preserving History Through Language**

Rarely do we ever give language enough credit for influencing the way we think, communicate, and function in our various communities. Often, many indigenous and Native communities are underrepresented and lack financial government support. Because of this, these communities are classified to have endangered languages and are therefore at a high risk of being entirely lost in the next few decades. The question is, what will become of these vulnerable groups’ languages, and how can institutions of education help them. After recent systematic changes, an almost extinct Hawaiian language was brought back into formal classroom settings that allowed the Hawaiian culture to thrive. I noticed that these opportunities aren’t present at my current college for the Native Washoe Tribe, which should be an extremely integral part of higher education considering that the school is built on Washoe land. Working to provide Washoe language and cultural courses at SNU is essential for all involved communities to thrive and can be modeled after the successes of Hawai‘i’s culturally immersive language programs.

The ban of the Hawaiian language in schools disconnected the community from their culture. It was easy to see this after comparing the community’s connection to language before and after the Annexation in 1898. In 1841, the Kingdom of Hawai‘i formally introduced Hawaiian medium education in over 1000 schools with the help of missionary non-natives who were convinced that the Hawaiian people could be made literate within their already established language. According to the University of Hawai’i, at this time of formal Hawaiian medium education, “... the Hawaiian literacy rate was estimated to be more than 90%.” The white minority on the islands saw that this introduction of Hawaiians to literacy was detrimental to their own influences on local politics and land ownership, and so over the following forty years, they would make education a central role in removing Hawaiians from places of political power. After forcefully and illegally seizing control of the Kingdom, Sanford B. Dole and American businessmen replaced Queen Liliʻuokalani’s established education system with an English and westernized emphasis, purposefully leaving out the Hawaiian language and cultural components. The then Republic of Hawai‘i discouraged the use of the language in schools, which eventually led to 1920 ban of the Hawaiian language. The young schoolchildren were disciplined for breaking this rule, and according to Carl Kalani Beyer in the 45th Volume of The American Educational History Journal, corporeal punishment was inflicted upon anyone who disobeyed the orders. This led to the eventual decline of the language being used at all, parents becoming too fearful to teach their sons and daughters their own native tongue. In 1985, it was estimated by the University of Hawai‘i that “...only 32 island children under the age of 18 – including the [children] on the island of Ni‘ihau – spoke the language.” The Hawaiian people at this point were lost, and within a generation the language nearly went extinct along with the entire culture associated with it.

The counter-hegemonic movement in Hawai‘i led to the revitalization of the language and eventually the culture of the Hawaiian people. The 1960s Hawaiian Renaissance Movement was driven by activist groups that called upon the Hawaiian people to engage in the legislative actions to meet their personal needs. Hawaiian churches, university students, and native-blood families all participated in efforts to reinstate practices of native culture, language, and sacred lands. In Kalani-Beyer's *Counter-Hegemony in Hawai'i: The Success of the Hawaiian Language Immersion Movement,* Hawaiians’ attempts to gain reparations from the US Government concerning the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom closely resembled other people of color’s means of activism. Beyer writes, “In some ways, the Hawaiian Renaissance Movement emulated the Civil Rights Movement of African Americans and Latinos, especially in its commitment to religion and non-violence.” A key sponsor of Hawaiian literacy was a 1970s talk show host named Larry Kimura of the *Ka Leo Hawai‘i,* who interviewed various native speakers who spoke on their relationships with the language and views on the culture. In an article written by Sara Kehaulani-Goo of MPR News, she writes about hearing the radio station and the effect it had on her as a Native Hawaiian. “That voice of an elderly Hawaiian woman was that of my great-grandmother, Martha Kekauililani Kahanu Iwanaga, speaking her native language on a Honolulu radio program more than 40 years ago. The first time I heard the CD recording, it sent chills down my spine.” Kehaulani-Goo continues to write about Kimura’s talk show being a peaceful and effective means of getting anyone with a radio and a passion for the Hawaiian culture fired up about the limited opportunities for the language to be taught in schools. Hawaiians began rediscovering a heritage that they had always been missing, and in unprecedented waves, the culture returned into the community. Chanting, music, hula, and other customs of the Kingdom of Hawai’i became mainstream roles that pushed forward the Native agenda, but the most necessary component of the culture, the Hawaiian language, would need more legislative assistance to move forward.

The role of government-supported immersion programs played an integral role in the reestablishment of the Hawaiian language. Without the momentum of support from Hawaiian activist groups, the Department of Education in Hawai’i wouldn’t have been able to formally propose the current means of education for Hawaiian language in the public school system. In 1978, the Hawaiian Education Committee passed Article X: Section 4. “The State shall promote the study of Hawaiian culture, history and language…in the public schools,” (Hawaiian Dept. Of Education). This event now allocated government funding and support towards Hawaiian culture and language, and established multiple programs including the Hawaiian Education Programs Section and the formal Office of Hawaiian Education. This foundation eventually grew into K-8 learning opportunities that led to high schools and finally into institutions of higher education. According to the University of Hawai’i Foundation, as many as 24,000 households now use Hawaiian as a dominant language, and “... A handful of children in the first Hawaiian immersion classes in the 1980s has grown to more than 2,500 students annually enrolled in the 11 preschool and 21 immersion and charter school sites. Another 8,000 study Hawaiian language in other higher education settings each year.” Those numbers continue to grow with each passing year, and the Hawaiian culture has flourished because of this. In addition, the reintroduction of these programs has also created a multitude of job opportunities and economic stimulation in the fields of education, cultural excursions and immersions, and tourism. This proves further that allocating resources to indigenous and endangered-language groups is a brilliant approach to revitalize entire communities.

The same approach can be taken to providing resources and funding to other indigenous groups, such as the Washoe tribe of the Lake Tahoe area. The land that Sierra Nevada University is built on is sacred Wa She Shu grounds, and it is appropriate for the college to offer instructional courses. According to the Nevada Indian Commission, there are as many as 1500 registered Washoe members in the nearby communities. The nearest school that offers a form of Washoe education would be Stewart Indian School located in Carson City. Given that this school opened last year in January, their materials and knowledge would be very accurate and contemporary to incorporate into a curriculum here at SNU. In my primary research, I conducted a survey to gain a contemporary view on endangered languages and the need for greater support for them on institutional and government levels. The survey had 40 participants of varying ages, backgrounds, and relationships with endangered or vulnerable languages. 58% of respondents agreed that institutions should help assist communities in immersion and language programs, especially if they played a role in that groups’ language becoming vulnerable in the first place. The remaining 42% responded yes, but because languages should be offered regardless of the language being 'common' or 'endangered'. Overall, all survey respondents reached a unanimous view, that higher education should be offering least commonly taught languages for the sake of being identified as a place of learning. These findings further advocate for indigenous and Native people’s cultural and language programs.

Moving forward with Washoe cultural courses and immersion programs is an attainable goal, as seen in the successes of the Hawaiian programs that were created. As an outsider of this Washoe community, it would be inappropriate for me to dictate what the program at SNU should look like for the Washoe Studies courses. However, in terms of immersion programs, I have in the past been a part of a Kamehameha Ho‘omāka‘ika‘i Summer Studies, where I was fortunate enough to study my culture and learn ancestral ways of agriculture, dance, and language. My experience in this week-long program allowed me to connect with my heritage in a way that I had never perceived before. Although this opportunity was four years ago, the values and concepts I had learned stuck with me more than the content of most of the four years I spent in high school in general studies. I found that the most effective way for me to connect with the cultural content was a fully immersive learning strategy. As opposed to a formal teaching method from textbooks and written papers, I was knee deep in the physical world in the realms I was learning about. Whether that was raking banana leaves off the King’s path, or learning sacred chants in botanical gardens, the connections I made with my culture was through mind, body, and soul instead of through Quizlet flashcards. At SNU, I would be petitioning for a similar format of immersion over memorization for Washoe leaders to best connect with students.

The framework for this program at the university would revolve around the impact of hands-on learning while still qualifying as an academic course. A document written by Richard Littlebear and Alicia Martinez titled *A Model for Promoting Native American Language Preservation and Teaching*, provides insight to an actual project conducted for Indigenous languages and studies. The model that was created by the Interface Alaska Multifunctional Resource Center was to support Native Americans through successful classroom strategies and teaching techniques while maintaining a primarily oral approach. This study would play a central role in the logistics and formal steps that would need to be taken for this program to meet curriculum requirements. Although people who would oppose this program may suggest that SNU doesn’t have a large enough group of interested students to enroll in these studies, I would argue that by having this program established, the college would be attracting a new demographic that we are currently lacking at the moment. Not to mention, on campus groups such as Climate Alliance and Social Justice Club have already expressed interest in helping give a platform for Washoe voices. So, in the best interest of the growth of the college and for the opportunities of students at SNU, a Washoe studies program should be implemented into the curriculum.

At the end of the day, providing platforms and support for indigenous communities in the realms of language and culture is an essential aspect of the progression of society. Within a few generations, these native perspectives will face extinction, robbing the world of insightful relationships of nature, universal understandings, and with each other. In an article written by Scott Richard Lyons, rhetorical sovereignty can be described as “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires.” This best describes the avenue that Hawaiians were able to take in their reclamation of culture and rights. The Washoe community should also be given the same respect and resources in SNU’s academic setting here in Incline Village. A proverb that has been taught to me from my grandmother best describes our relationship with our language as Hawaiians. I ka ‘ōlelo ke ola, i ka ‘ōlelo ka make, in language there is life, in language there is death.

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