

This case was written by Dr. Stephen Greymorning for the purpose of entering the 2000 Aboriginal Management Case Writing Competition.

**TITLE: HINONO'EITIT HOOWU'-ARAPAHO LANGUAGE LODGE:
A PLACE FOR OUR CHILDREN, A PLACE FOR OUR HEARTS**

Preface

The issue of the loss of Indian languages is of grave concern as it impacts all Native speaking communities in North America. If measures are not taken to pass Native languages on to younger generations, it has been estimated that by the year 2020 as high as 85% of all Native languages now spoken in North America may have slipped into extinction.

In 1976, the Arapaho of the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming began taking steps toward language preservation by introducing Arapaho language classes into the schools curriculum. By 1982 languages classes had been successfully integrated into the school system from kindergarten through to grade 12. Yet by 1986 it was observed that these classes had little to no impact on slowing the rate of language loss. In December 1992 I left the University of Alberta, where I was teaching for the School of Native Studies, and took a 2 year position to try and have an impact on generating new language speakers. The following represents a time line of program initiatives and activities from 1993 up to the present.

ARAPAHO LANGUAGE IMMERSION

TIME-LINE

September 1993: Half day kindergarten immersion class established in the Wyoming Indian public elementary school. Immersion class is presently operating.

January 1994: Pilot preschool immersion class runs 8 hours a week from Jan. to May.

February 1994: Test voice dub samples for the adaptation of Bambi in Arapaho.

June 1994: Final edits completed on Bambi in the Arapaho language.

September 1994: Preschool immersion class implemented. It runs approximately 15 hours a week from Sept. to May.

November 1994: The adaptation of Bambi in the Arapaho language was premiered by Disney Studios at a Theater in Lander, Wyoming.

September 1995 to May 1996: First full day language immersion preschool class established.

September 1996: Second full day language immersion preschool class opened at Lower Arapaho.

March 16, 1998: Pilot project, Mother/Toddler language class, implemented at Ethete, Wyoming.

June 1998: Language immersion class at lower Arapaho lost due to inability to secure funding.

September 1998: Federally recognized nonprofit organization, Hinono'eitiit Hoowu', established for purposes of generating funding opportunities for language program.

October 1998: Stipend implemented into Mother/Toddler language class to try and stimulate more parental involvement.

January 1999: Mother/Toddler language class discontinued due to inability to sustain interest.

September 1999: Master - Apprentice language mentoring class implemented.

Y2K: Presently there is 1 kindergarten immersion class, 1 preschool immersion class, and 1 Master-Apprentice Arapaho language immersion class operating on the Wind River reservation.

Case Background History

The Arapaho community on the Wind River Reservation has long been concerned about the rate of language loss. Due to influences of Missionary Boarding Schools, Arapaho people were schooled to believe the Arapaho language would hinder their children from becoming valued "American" citizens. This resulted in Arapaho people not speaking Arapaho to their children and English becoming the standard language of communication, which led to the steady decline of Arapaho as a spoken language. Currently, on the basis of James J. Bauman's "A Guide to the Issues in Indian Language Retention," Arapaho is identified as a language in "decline."

As a language in decline, it is necessary that it be restored to its former vitality if it is once again to be healthy. The situation of the Arapaho language is such that while there are about 1,000 fluent speakers left, with the exception of one person all fluent speakers are over the age of 55. In 1976 community members took steps toward keeping the language viable and established a number of language and culture programs for youth and adults within the school system. In 1992, after observing that the language was still declining, measures were taken to bring a new vitality to the language. While continuing with adult and youth language programs the community endorsed a more intensive

language restoration method which sought to bring about new speakers of Arapaho through a language immersion process targeted for 3 to 5 year old children.

Current Language Status

According to the Arapaho Office of Tribal Statistics, as of January 1997, approximately 5,000 enrolled Arapaho people were living on the Wind River Reservation. Arapaho language instruction was formally introduced into the school system in 1976. Presently Arapaho students from Kindergarten to grade 12 receive Arapaho language instruction as part of their school curriculum. On the basis of language assessments it has been estimated that some 2,570 people possess a limited Arapaho vocabulary (defined as 20 or more words), while some 1,076 have no real speaking ability (defined as less than a 20 word vocabulary). Though many of the people in this group can comprehend a fair amount of what is said in Arapaho, English is the only language spoken. Of the remaining 1,354 people, about 1,000 claim fluency in Arapaho.

In an Internet article (<http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/askncbe/faqs/20natlang.htm>) titled "How Many Indigenous American Languages are Spoken in the United States? By How Many Speakers," researcher James Estes reported that the number of Arapaho speakers are approximately 1,038, this includes approximately 20-30 speakers of Southern Arapaho in Oklahoma. All fluent speakers are over the age of 50, and there are no fluent speakers between the ages of 1 - 40. The youngest known fluent speaker is a 47 year old woman. Because Arapaho children between the ages of 5 and 18 receive Arapaho language instruction in school, about 1,200 people between the ages of 5-20 possess a limited Arapaho vocabulary. Of those between the ages of 21 and 30, about 138 people have no speaking ability at all and about 690 possess a limited Arapaho vocabulary. Of those who range between the ages of 31 and 40, about 420 have no speaking ability and about 360 possess a limited Arapaho vocabulary. In the 41 to 50 year age range, about 420 people have no speaking ability, 470 possess a limited Arapaho vocabulary, and another 27 possess a marginal speaking ability. Between the ages of 51 and 60 about 74 people possess a speaking ability that borders conversational. Among approximately 1,000 fluent speakers of Arapaho, there is about a 45:55 per cent ratio of men to women.

A special comment needs to be made about children between the ages of three to four. As a result of the Arapaho language immersion program, that has operated from 1994 to present, approximately 20 children in this age bracket are now demonstrating a language use that has not been seen in children in the past 40 years.

Levels of Fluency:

The first group of fluent speakers falls between the 51-60 year age group, and number around 480. Because these people only use Arapaho within a limited range of every day experiences, a significant amount of vocabulary has been forgotten and is no longer in use. For instance, although many of the people in this age group can easily converse in Arapaho, many can no longer name things like body parts, animals, or other elements that surround them. They have thus been identified as having a diminished level of fluency. In

the 61-70 year age group about 65 people are marginally fluent and about 349 people are strong fluent Arapaho speakers. Within the 71-80 year age group, there are approximately 83 fluent speakers, and 22 people above the age of 81 are fluent speakers. Among the last 3 age groups, represented by people over the age of 71, because Arapaho speakers can spend as much as 90% of their day speaking English, a lot of words are no longer present in their working vocabulary.

The places where Arapaho is primarily spoken is at ceremonies, funerals, and pow wows. In addition to these places Arapaho may be used to varying degrees within many households, depending on who is speaking and being spoken to. Other places where Arapaho is being used is by language instructors in the schools, and to a limited degree by those children currently being taught Arapaho in the language immersion class. With regard to the Arapaho immersion classes, an impact that the Arapaho language immersion preschool classes have had has been an increase of Arapaho being spoken within the homes of children participating in the immersion project.

Rate of language loss:

Because more than 450 fluent speakers are over the age of 65, it is estimated that if steps are not taken to fortify the number of speakers, in another 10 years almost half the number of Arapaho fluent speakers will be dead. The Arapaho language is thus at a critical point and it is crucial that language restoration efforts demonstrate an effect on slowing and eventually reversing the rate of language loss.

Inhibitors and problems facing previous language restoration efforts:

The short fall of the Wyoming Indian public school system's efforts to teach the Arapaho language rests with the fact that almost all language classes meet 75 minutes per week. Over the course of a school year this amounts to only 45 hours of language instruction. With the implementation of an immersion kindergarten class, Arapaho instruction was extended to 2.5 hours of Arapaho language instruction per day. Over the course of a 180 day school year this means that the children in this class could receive as much as 450 hours of Arapaho language instruction during the course of a school year. With the kindergarten immersion class in place there was a new expectation that children could potentially achieve an age appropriate level of fluency by the end of the school year. For the children outside of this immersion class, about the best the other Arapaho language classes could hope for was to function as a language maintenance program, provided children were going to those class having already obtained a speaking ability. Since no children were able to speak Arapaho, then logically it made sense to try and get children fluent before they entered kindergarten. If this could be achieved then the language program within the school system could function to maintain, and perhaps even expand on the children's Arapaho language skills. With this realization, the goal then became to create an Arapaho language immersion preschool.

The Work of Language Restoration: Taking the First Steps

Starting up an immersion class for preschool children was a major commitment that meant interviewing, hiring and managing a staff, locating a place to hold the class, developing a language curriculum, and purchasing materials and various supplies for the class. Of course all of this meant funding had to be raised to sustain the project for more than a few months. Once these crucial steps had been worked out, the actual first step taken was completing an application for funding from the Wyoming Council for the Humanities. Through discussions it was decided that funding would be requested for a pilot language immersion preschool class that would operate from January to May 1994. By implementing the project in this way, I was relatively confident that I could obtain additional funding from the same funding agencies for the implementation of an immersion class that could operate over the course of an entire school year. The pilot immersion project operated Mondays to Thursdays, two hours a day. The budget requested for the project covered rent, supplies, second hand furniture, and an honorarium for the two Arapaho language instructors. Once funding for the pilot project was secured, the next task was to work out an interview process to get the right people hired for the class.

As my focus was turned to the interview process, I came to realize that fluent Arapaho speakers generally were not speaking Arapaho to children. At first I was puzzled by this, but soon realized that fluent speakers would not talk to anyone in Arapaho if they believed the person they were to speak to lacked the ability to speak back in Arapaho. Although I explained that children would never learn to speak Arapaho if they were never spoken to in Arapaho, it seemed to have little impact. On occasion my encouragement generated some attempts to informally speak to children, but when no response was returned speakers tended to think the exercise was silly. From these early observations I realized that who ever was hired as language instructors would have to be committed to carrying out the directives and philosophy of the immersion project.

Interviews for the immersion class were set up to ascertain whether those interviewed were comfortable working with children, and could competently work in an immersion environment. The first thirty minutes of the interview entailed explaining how the actual interview would be conducted, and then learning what the individual knew and thought about teaching Arapaho through an immersion technique. The interviews were video taped and set up so each candidate would spend about 30-40 minutes in an actual immersion setting with children. Each candidate was handed an outline detailing the activities that needed to be covered, plus the amount of time that should be spend on each activity. All prospective candidates were told that they absolutely were not to speak English to the children. It thus was interesting to see that when actually faced with having to speak Arapaho to children some of the best speakers could not get beyond their barrier of feeling it made little sense to speak to them as if they could understand and answer back. This resulted with some individuals not saying much of anything to the children and mostly speaking to me. As the children became familiar with the routine, when they encountered speakers going silent they would actually clue the person being interviewed in Arapaho of the activity they were supposed to be moving on to. In one example when the person being interviewed fell silent for quite awhile, the children kept saying *niibeethiinikotiinoo* - I want to play, which was the next activity they were supposed to

have been doing. On another occasion when children were supposed to have been told that they were going to eat, the children started repeating "heesneenoo --I'm hungry," because the person being interviewed fell into silence. Even though the children were saying this in Arapaho, it wasn't until I said; Woweetni' nooxowotii - you can feed them now, that anything happened.

After all of the interviews were conducted the video tapes were reviewed and a list was made that consisted of pluses and minuses, representing strengths and weaknesses of how each individual handled each activity. These pluses and minuses were next added up on each individual and the candidates with the best scores were offered the job. Though there was some objection to the interview process, however, because it was clear that everyone interviewed was a fluent speaker, the process held on the grounds that what was determined was how well an individual could work with children in the language.

Walking through the Doors of an Immersion Class Room

The first Arapaho language immersion preschool class met two hours each day, four days a week, from January to May 1994. There were six children in this first class and a language teaching staff of two. The class originally started out in a cafeteria that was used by the Headstart program. Officially the Headstart program was the sponsor of the immersion class. Yet in spite of strong administrative support, it soon became clear that there was little tolerance for another program invading their class room space. After two months the situation had become so stressful we decided we needed to move the class to another location. We soon located a new class room, and though cramped for space, staff and children took little time to settle in and to view the new site as our own.

The pilot project ended May 1994. After assessing the results it was obvious that two hours a day and four days a week was not enough time to have any lasting impact on the children's ability to converse in Arapaho. Though the class did not produce any new speakers, it did have the effect of producing children with an appreciable Arapaho vocabulary. The children's new found Arapaho verbal skills impressed family members enough for parents to inquire if the class could extend into the summer. A grant proposal was written for a summer program to operate three days a week for three hours each day on a two thousand dollar budget. Unfortunately none of the agencies approached funded the project. In desperation I turned to the parents and instructors themselves. I explained to the instructors that if they would work the summer program at half the hourly income they had received from the pilot project I believed that the parents would agree to make up the rest of their salaries.

On the majority of reservations in the United States unemployment rates are over 75%. On the Wind River reservation the average unemployment rate is about 78%, and during the summer months the unemployment rate may exceed 88%. It was within the reality of this environment that parents made a commitment to pay a summer tuition for their children to attend the language immersion class.

The summer project ran nine hours a week, from June to July, on a \$500 budget. Each parent paid a \$20 tuition fee and the instructors agreed to work for \$5 an hour. These acts of commitment to the project probably represented one of the most significant acts of support ever given to a program on the reservation. Before the summer had ended, the Wyoming Council for the Humanities agreed to fund the project from September 1994, to May 1995, allowing the project to increase its hours from 8-15 a week, and the teaching staff to three. I was still very much aware that the project needed at least thirty hours a week, in order to have any hope at developing speakers, but at least with this increase the language project was moving in the right direction.

With the class room doors open I scheduled regular visits to observe the project's progress. Each time I visited the class, however, I was surprised to hear instructors speaking English. I soon came to realize that although the instructors knew the project's goals they still lacked a firm commitment to the methods of immersion. I constantly tried to convince the instructors of how essential it was to not speak English to the children. From their perspective they rationalized that the children were speaking Arapaho as a result of their using English and Arapaho when they spoke to the children. By April 1995, it was apparent that the goal of producing new speakers among the children was not going to be achieved. The realization made me press even harder for a full day program.

On September 1995, the Arapaho language immersion class was extended to a thirty hours a week, and as a result of grants awarded from the Wyoming Council for the Humanities and the Lannan Foundation, the project entered its third year. The enrollment for the 1995/96 year averaged about twelve children. A salaried Director/Curriculum Developer position was also added to help tighten up on the administrative duties. Though this new position left me fairly confident that we might see a new generation of Arapaho speakers by May, the program year, by the beginning of December I became disheartened when the Arapaho instructors were discovered still using English in the class room. I again spoke to them about the importance of maintaining an Arapaho only language classroom. When I departed it was with the hope that with language instruction having been extended to thirty hours a week, it might make the difference in achieving the program's goal. When the end of the program year arrived, though participating children demonstrated an impressive speaking ability in Arapaho they still had not attained a conversational level.

Intensifying and Diversifying

In December of 1995 I had received a phone call from within the chambers of the Arapaho Business Council. The call was a request to write an Administration for Native Americans (ANA) grant for federal funding for a second language immersion class that would operate in the Lower Arapaho district. I had unsuccessfully written this grant two other times. With this attempt, however, I was determined to write a grant that could not be refused. In all I wrote three grants, one to the Wyoming Council for the Humanities, one to the Lannan foundation, and one to ANA in such a way that they were all integrated. The Wyoming Council's grant paid three instructors for the morning hours of

instruction at the Ethete immersion project. Funding from the Lannan Foundation paid the same three language instructors salaries for their afternoon hours, plus the Director's salary. The Director's position was written into the ANA grant so that he was responsible for both the Ethete project and the ANA project, which also had three salaried language instructors. Writing the ANA grant this way enabled me to show a 50% cash match and also allowed me to keep the total amount requested below half of the \$125,000 maximum amount allowable per project year. All three grant applications were awarded to fund two immersion classes.

Even though the instructors had been exposed to a number of teaching and immersion technique workshops, it became clear that having a program run six hours a day would not necessarily produce fluency, especially when the instructors' teaching and immersion techniques were not strong enough. What the instructors needed was specific training on the principles and methods of second language acquisition through immersion. If fluent speaking children were going to come out of the program, then an immersion specialist had to be hired to train and guide the instructors on a daily basis. In 1996 I found such a specialist during a trip to Hawaii and negotiated a three month contract with Pueo Pata, a young California Indian who was living in Hawaii and had become a fluent Hawaiian speaker as a volunteer in the Hawaiian immersion preschool. By the end of this three month period the language instructor's had completely committed to using only Arapaho with the children in the language classes. Even still by the end of the project year, May 1997, participating children still had not become conversant in Arapaho. It was back to the drawing board. I decided to travel to New Zealand to look at one of the most successful Indigenous language revitalization programs. Before leaving I wrote a grant to implement a Mother--toddler language project. the project's aims were to provide young parents with the language necessary to care for their child in Arapaho. With this added aspect of the project it was also hoped that adult speakers might be generated, who eventually, could replace current language instructors when they decided to stop teaching.

The time spent among the Maori of New Zealand was truly inspirational. The language and cultural revival efforts had begun in the early 1970s as a result of one Maori man who had been impressed by the Natives tribes of British Columbia while he was earning his Doctoral degree at a university there. When he returned to New Zealand he called many Maori together and devised a 20 year plan. During the course of those twenty years, 1978-1998, the Maori had established some 176 language schools from K-12, about twenty some colleges and two Universities. All of these schools taught through the medium of the Maori language. Education was not the only area targeted during this period. Maori people were groomed for positions in medicine, media, law, and government, where today they hold 12 seats in New Zealand's government. Through my discussions with many of the leaders in this movement, I was continually asked, "Where is the heart of your people?" This was also a question that had been asked of me while in Hawaii. When I returned in December this became an area I began to see as an essential aspect to the success of any language revitalization or maintenance effort.

When the project year concluded, the immersion classes had produced some of the strongest speakers yet. Children were able to express themselves in Arapaho for periods of 30-40 minutes without using English. With these successes I decided to raise funds to get language instructors from both immersion classes over to Hawaii so they could observe first hand the work of very successful programs.

In June 1998, four of the immersion staff traveled to Hawaii, and over a five week period traveled to Punana Leo immersion schools on the islands of Hilo, Maui and Oahu, and took part in a week long language teacher training workshop. When all looked to be heading in a direction that would finally result in the immersion project's first speakers, disaster struck. In 1999 two of the project's major funders withdrew funding that amounted to \$90,000. As a result of this the immersion class in the area of Lower Arapaho was lost, and the project in the area of Ethete was in serious jeopardy of having to close its doors. A General Council meeting was scheduled for April and we were able to get the immersion project on the agenda. At the meeting some 300-400 community members were present. The meeting closed with immersion staff speaking of the project's plight and a plea for support. Right up to the final minutes of the meeting, parent after parent of children from present and past immersion classes poured out their hearts giving testimony of the strength of the project.

In September 1999, the immersion project entered its sixth year with a grant of \$13,500. Not wanting to lose any instructors, the class was dropped down to 5 hours a day. In addition to this the program moved to include an adult language Mentor-Apprentice class that met 2 hours a day in intensive language learning sessions. Of the three language instructors, one was kept as a primary instructor for the preschool class and the two other instructors were switched between the immersion preschool class and the adult Mentor-Apprentice class every other month. While classes continued under this format, meetings were held with the tribal council, and on January 5, 2000, with enough money for only one more payroll, the Council's Heart embraced the language immersion class and picked up 80% of costs to operate the project. For the first time since its inception the project is not facing the threat of ending because of grants not being awarded. With this new found stability Hinono'eitiit Hoowu' (the Arapaho Language Lodge) is planning for the 2000/2001 project year confident that it will bring about our first new generation of Arapaho speakers since the 1950s.