

## **Coeur d'Alene/Snchitsu'umshtsn language revitalization efforts in a public high school in past and present context**

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Members of the Coeur d'Alene tribe of Idaho have organized multiple revitalization efforts for their ancestral language, Coeur d'Alene or Snchitsu'umshtsn, through the local schools and community. The current high school language program has grown out of past experiences, using the lessons learned to establish effective teaching practices and policies to bring Coeur d'Alene language education to future generations. Speakers, educators and anthropologists have learned to negotiate state and local bureaucracies and to integrate the language program into the public school and local community to promote its lasting success. Key components include daily participation of an elder speaker, Foxfire-style teaching practices, production of standard texts, official accreditation, and links to college/university level language instruction. The program has now been in place for 5 years but continues to face challenges.

### **1 Introduction**

The Salish language in question, Coeur d'Alene or Snchitsu'umshtsn, in pre-contact times had speakers numbering in the thousands. These numbers had begun to drop even before the advent of extensive direct contact with whites that came with the Jesuit missions to the Inland Northwest. The Coeur d'Alene population was decimated by an epidemic in the early 1800s followed by another shortly after contact with Hudson's Bay Company traders in the 1830s. Jesuit priests arrived in the 1840s and established a mission among the Coeur d'Alene. The early priests used the Coeur d'Alene language until the mission moved from the Cataldo, Idaho area to DeSmet, Idaho in 1877 and boarding schools were established.

With the schools came the anti-Indian language policy and very quickly the younger generation lost Coeur d'Alene language skills. From the 1950s on only a handful of children in each generation have grown up speaking the language. Currently, there are fewer than 10 children learning enough Coeur d'Alene at home to qualify as semi-fluent speakers. A few more are learning some words and phrases from their families. Those who attend the tribal school, which runs from kindergarten through eighth grade, learn a bit more Coeur d'Alene from a computerized version of a homestudy course developed by tribal elder and linguist Lawrence Nicodemus (1975b) and from some work in the classroom. Given these conditions, Coeur d'Alene could be moribund as a first language for this generation.

Coeur d'Alene language preservation and revitalization attempts begin with Reichard's (1938) fieldwork in the 1920s. She recorded legends (Reichard 1945a) in

Coeur d'Alene and English in an effort to preserve traditional stories. In the 1930s Nicodemus (1975a, 1975b) traveled to Columbia University and stayed for 18 months to continue linguistic work with Reichard. In the 1940s, Nicodemus published the *Morning Star*, a local newspaper for Coeur d'Alenes in the armed forces in World War II, which included some columns on the need to preserve the language. Language revitalization heated up again in the 1970s with the publication of dictionaries (Nicodemus 1975a) and the first text book on the language (Nicodemus 1975b). The 1980s saw the publication of workbooks (Palmer, Felsman and Nicodemus 1985; Palmer, Nicodemus, and Connolly 1987; Palmer, Nicodemus and Felsman 1987) for Coeur d'Alene language instruction. Coeur d'Alene Tribal Resolution 215(94), Language Preservation Project--Tribe Department of Education, was adopted on June 23, 1994. It mandated that all tribal employees learn the Coeur d'Alene language and called for weekly language lessons to facilitate this. Coeur d'Alene language classes for tribal employees were taught in 1995 and 1996 pursuant to this resolution. Development of a two year series of secondary school level Coeur d'Alene language courses began in 1995 (Nicodemus, Wagner, Hess, and Allen 1996 and 1997; Nicodemus, Hess, Wagner, Matt, Sobbing, Allen 2000 and 2001). These courses were first offered in 1996 at Lakeside High School in Plummer, Idaho. That same year saw the first college level course in Coeur d'Alene language taught at the DeSmet, Idaho branch campus of Lewis-Clark State College. Language revitalization efforts increased from the 1970s through the early 1990s and with funding from tribal gaming money on the rise. This trend continues in the 2000s. A tribal language center is adjacent to the tribal council offices. This facility produces language materials and coordinates community and employee language programs. The Coeur d'Alene language courses at the high school and college levels continue today, though all face constant challenges.

## **2 Current Coeur d'Alene language revitalization efforts**

### **2.1 Community and employee programs**

The Coeur d'Alene Tribe has for some time been involved in attempts to revitalize its language. Efforts have been made by Nicodemus and other tribal members. The work of Nicodemus, his mother Dorothy, and Tom Yell resulted in the production of Reichard's (1938) grammar and a collection of stories in Coeur d'Alene and English (Reichard 1945a). Reichard (1945a) analyzed the structure of Coeur d'Alene stories and published a collection of them in English, but the Coeur d'Alene versions have yet to be fully translated and grammatically analyzed.

Attempts were made to teach Coeur d'Alene at Eastern Washington University (Feathers 1971) in the 1970s. These courses ended after a few years. The system in place required the elders teaching the courses to develop lessons, manage the classroom, grade the students, and deal with university bureaucracy, as though the elders were fully familiar with university policies. The time and energy spent on non-teaching tasks became overwhelming.

Nicodemus (1975b) published a home study course for tribal members and interested others to use on their own. The materials are still very valuable because the

course has both a text and a set of tapes. Many tribal members have learned some Coeur d'Alene from the course. The tapes and text, along with the workbooks (Palmer, Felsman, and Nicodemus 1985; Palmer, Nicodemus, and Connolly 1987; and Palmer, Nicodemus, and Felsman 1987) were used in development of the present Coeur d'Alene language revitalization programs (c.f. Nicodemus, Wagner, Hess, and Allen 1996, 1997 and Nicodemus et al 2000 and 2001).

Efforts in the 1990s were spurred by the Coeur d'Alene Tribal Resolution 215(94) "Language Preservation Project--Tribe Department of Education." This resolution states that "...Our Coeur d'Alene language is in danger of being permanently lost within a few short years without drastic, intense programming to save it...", that to save the language it must be used in the community, that the elders must be part of the program, and that "...the Coeur d'Alene Tribal Council does hereby mandate all tribal employees to learn the Coeur d'Alene language..." Resolution 215(94) includes provisions for classes to be taught during the work week and backs this up with a \$5000.00 appropriation to the Department of Education to fund these classes.

To comply with this mandate, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe Department of Education began gathering language data at the elders' luncheons and teaching employee classes. The lunches were difficult to maintain because of the time out of work at the Department of Education taken to cook and serve. The lunches did yield a great deal of linguistics data, stories related to the language, and boarding school experiences of the elders. Phrases generated at the lunches were used in employee classes. The employee classes involved teaching a few phrases each week that would be useful in daily office encounters. Some examples follow:

huy chii'nukhwsh	Come in (second person singular)
huy chiinneptul	Come in (second person plural)
Ku te chiche'	Where were you
Ni ku'p wllim	Do you have money (second person singular)
Chn chee silel	I overslept

The hope was that these phrases could be incorporated into the casual conversations people commonly have in office situations.

Only four or five new phrases were added each week, but if one did this for a year, that would be over 200 total phrases. However, the course did not achieve this result. Attendance dwindled, people who had missed class needed review or dropped out, and it was difficult to schedule a time and place convenient to all tribal employees who wished to come. The employee course was restarted several times with new systems for rewarding or requiring attendance.

The Coeur d'Alene Department of Education took a "Language Survey" in 1996 to gather information to improve implementation of language preservation programs like the employee classes. Many respondents felt that having only Coeur d'Alene tribal members teaching would improve the courses. While non-Coeur d'Alenes were never the official instructors of the employee classes, I did occasionally fill in for the regular instructor and non-Coeur d'Alenes were certainly present as observers and advisors to the

instructor. Often, the non-Coeur d'Alene presence was greater than the Coeur d'Alene presence in the class sessions.

Though the weekly employee classes ended, this is not a "failure." Members of the team who worked, and work, on the high school program learned some language and grammar at the employee classes and portions of the teaching materials were adopted into the high school syllabus. Most importantly the high school teaching team, whose members have included a certified secondary level language teacher, tribal elders, linguistic anthropologists, community members and Johnson-O'Malley coordinators; learned about appropriate approaches to language instruction. It became clear that orality was a priority, use of a standardized alphabet was encouraged, and that one must at all costs avoid alienating the students with over technical/linguistic explanations. Most of these approaches are common to standard high school second language courses but with more focus on orality and cultural sensitivity to the materials. It was also clear that the language material must at all times be relevant and useful. Students want to use their new language skills immediately.

A new program has been developed for employees and community members and the high school teaching team continues to learn from that program. It is known as "Keepers of the Language." The program coordinator for the tribal language center runs the program. Participants are organized into teams. All meet once a week over supper at the casino conference rooms or another community area. Language units are prepared and presented in a cooperative and non-threatening manner. Teams compete for group rather than individual rewards. Ages of participants range from junior high school students to the elderly. Some lessons the high school program hopes to take from this program is the multi-age groups, friendly cooperative competition, and the continuing emphases on orality and relevance. Language units are tied to seasons and holidays occurring at the time they are presented. Any food terms used in the lessons are used to plan menus served at the meetings. All dialects and variations of the materials are accepted. Each unit ends with a language tournament and prizes. Prizes are not all based on memorization of language. There is some chance element involved and this allows all to succeed at some level. The success of this program is seen through the on-going participation, the greater number of elders who come on a regular basis, and the fact that a wide range of community members, Indian and non-Indian, young and old, all feel comfortable attending and participating.

## **2.2 Academic language programs**

There are currently no employee classes, though some employees are taking the Coeur d'Alene language course offered through Lewis-Clark State College (LCSC) and North Idaho Community College (NICC). This course was originally offered in 1996 at the DeSmet, Idaho satellite center of LCSC which is on the reservation. It is currently offered at the casino conference center. This course is taught by Raymond Brinkman, a linguistic anthropology doctoral candidate from the University of Chicago employed by LCSC to teach this course. Brinkman is also employed by the Coeur d'Alene Tribe Department of Education as a linguistic consultant. The college level Coeur d'Alene course is offered for college credit and, obviously, costs as much as any other course at

LCSC. The incentives of college credit for their own language and having spent a great deal of money on the course, have kept students enrolled and attending regularly. Support is being garnered to keep the course going. This course is more technical and text based and efforts are made to keep it coordinated with the high school level courses so that students who wish to may take a full four years of the language.

My primary involvement is with the high school level course. Development of this course began in fall 1995 and teaching began in January of 1996. The fifth offering of the two year series was just completed in March of 2001. The course is a team effort in development of materials and in classroom instruction. Lawrence Nicodemus, tribal elder and linguist, was involved in development of each lesson, provides pronunciation modeling for the classes everyday while adding stories and information to the course. Dianne Allen, director of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe Department of Education, organized the effort and brings in language and cultural materials as well as assisting with classroom instruction on occasion. She also spends time seeking funding to maintain the course and train instructors. Reva Hess, Lakeside High School instructor in Spanish, English and now Coeur d'Alene, was crucial to the overall design of lessons and worked with Nicodemus everyday in the classroom. She took the college courses and enough independent study credits to become the first teacher ever certified in Coeur d'Alene language instruction. She took care of presentation of the material, grammatical explanations, field trips, grades, classroom control, and everything else that is usually expected of a high school teacher. She also assured the room was comfortable and coffee was ready for Nicodemus and any other elders or guests who would participate from time to time. My role as linguist was to plan the order of presentation of grammatical elements for the courses, continue to develop lessons with Nicodemus, and assist with classroom instruction when necessary. Other Department of Education employees have assisted with particular lessons, the incorporation of cultural material, and organizing cultural events for the students. Elders not on the teaching team have contributed tribal history, stories, and general support. Community members have come to teach traditional Coeur d'Alene skills.

In the first offering of Coeur d'Alene, about one week was allowed for each lesson. The lessons were organized into units with four lessons per unit. Each unit covers a grammatical issue such as subject pronouns for intransitive sentences, transitivity, possessive pronouns, and completive aspect. Every lesson begins with an example conversation demonstrating the grammatical point to be covered, followed by a vocabulary list, translation exercises, grammatical information, grammatical exercises, and a creative component such as writing a new conversation or a letter to Nicodemus. Every day begins with Nicodemus pronouncing the example conversation one sentence at a time and students repeating after him. Sometimes he will expand on the sentences, mix up the order, or explain the stems and affixes in some of the words.

After conversation practice, the students work on vocabulary, exercises, or the grammar portion of the lesson is presented. The remaining part of the class time, often as much as half of the period, is spent on individual and small group work on the exercises, creative component, or long term projects. The students do much of the creative component working with each other and with Nicodemus with minimal

assistance from the non-Indian members of the team. This is not by requirement or design, but by preference of the students.

Every attempt has been made to include plenty of variety in the course. Visits from local crafters, field trips, and long term projects help with this, but we hope to do more in the future. Hess' teaching approach, allowing for a great deal of individual expression and a variety of work styles among the students, has been ideal for this course.

The team approach to teaching has relieved Nicodemus of many of the more mundane tasks of teaching and has allowed non-speakers to participate with the teaching. Each team member brings different skills to the course and the students exploit these. My role is to provide some grammatical information, Nicodemus is the vocabulary and pronunciation resource, Hess provided explanations in plain English of the grammatical issues and creative ways to remember the material. Allen is a popular motivator when she attends the class and participates in special events at the school.

In March, 1997, the first class of students completed Coeur d'Alene level I and Coeur d'Alene level II at Lakeside High School. They were instrumental in development of the course as they were often doing lessons that had been completed minutes before the bell rang to start class. These students were diligent in their search for errors made by the teaching team. Many offered excellent suggestions for ways to improve the lessons.

Of the eighteen students who began the first offering of the level one Coeur d'Alene language course, only three were left at the end of level two. Many left the course due to scheduling difficulties and time conflicts with courses required for graduation. Those who stuck it out were employed immediately upon completion of level two, to assist with level one and to participate in development of more language materials for the Department of Education. This immediate return on their educational investment is a nice motivator for future language students and it demonstrated the utility of the course to the current students in level one.

Hess, Nicodemus, various community members and the students all continued to produce classroom materials to support and expand upon the texts. There are now games similar to "Pictionary," Jeopardy," and "Wheel of Fortune" currently in use. Wanda Matt, the current Johnson-O'Malley coordinator has made a variety of documentary style videotapes of elders sharing cultural knowledge as well as written up cultural information to accompany each lesson. Gary Sobbing, a graduate student from Iowa State University, put each lesson on CD for those days when Nicodemus cannot make it to class or for use at home. Summer of 2001 will see the production of an integrated teaching manual listing resources, activities, contact people, and other useful information to go along with the texts and course materials.

A teaching innovation during the 2000-01 school year which met with great success was having the high school students prepare and teach language lessons to young children in the local head start program. The high school students found they had to really learn the material before they could present it. They became creative in their presentations often producing picture books, color-by-number sheets and props for use with the young children. This innovation is helping to incorporate the multi-generational aspect which has been key to the success of "Keepers of the Language."

Over its 5-year lifespan, the high school Coeur d'Alene language program has grown considerably. The first offering of Coeur d'Alene I had 18 original students which dwindled to 8 by the end of the year. Some were advised out, some lost patience with the level of participation in course development that was required, and others dropped for personal reasons. By the end of the first offering of Coeur d'Alene II there were only three brave souls left. The second offering of each saw a high retention rate in Coeur d'Alene I, higher registration and retention rates in Coeur d'Alene II as well as a drain from the French and Spanish courses also available at the school. By the end of the third year it was clear that the small school, only about 150 students in 9-12, could not support enrollment in all three languages. French has been dropped.

### **3 Present challenges**

While the current Coeur d'Alene language revitalization efforts are hardly the first, each attempt contributes data and materials for future attempts. The present programs include more age groups--kindergarten, high school, and adults--than the previous programs included at any one time. Past experiences have been drawn on for materials and for techniques as well as examples of what did not work. This has not guaranteed success, or even existence, for the programs. Constant budget struggles at the Lakeside School District threaten the future of the high school Coeur d'Alene language course, but perhaps the greatest threats are the reliance on so few qualified/willing instructors. Nicodemus is 93 years old. He participates fully at this time, but the program cannot continue to count on that level of involvement for many more years. The certified instructor passed away and there is no other single person presently qualified to replace her. These, in addition to a complete turn over in the administration from the time when the course was implemented, threaten the continuing existence of the high school program. To maintain stability during this transition period (which is inherent to any revitalization program) other team members are working to make the administration aware of the options in Idaho for teaching an accredited course without a teacher specifically certified in that topic area, to find qualified and willing instructors with the time available to assist with the course, and to get the materials available catalogued and filed in a manner that can be useful to any instructor who may walk into the course.

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