

**TESTIMONY OF TERESA L. MCCARTY
PROFESSOR AND DEPARTMENT HEAD LANGUAGE READING AND CULTURE
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA; CODIRECTOR AMERICAN INDIAN LANGUAGE
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**

BEFORE THE SENATE INDIAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ON S. 2688; NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGES ACT AMENDMENTS OF 2000

Ten years have passed since Congress approved the Native American Languages Act. As codirector of the American Indian Language Development Institute, I have had the opportunity to work with many of the teachers, parents, and students in programs authorized by this Act. I also have conducted research on the impacts of these and other indigenous language education programs over more than 20 years. My purpose in this statement is to convey what we know from research, and the implications of research for the proposed Native American Languages Act Amendments of 2000. Specifically, I will address two questions: What do we know about the efficacy of indigenous language revitalization/maintenance programs in promoting students' language development, their literacy in one or more languages, and their academic success? Second, what do we know about the efficacy of these programs in promoting indigenous language revitalization? I will conclude with several recommendations.

Dr. Michael Krauss of the Alaska Native Language Center reports that 175 indigenous languages are still spoken in the United States, but by fewer and fewer children all the time. The great irony is that even as 'indigenous children come to school knowing more English, they are likely to speak a form of English modified by the structures, sounds, and me patterns of the heritage/indigenous language, and to be identified as "limited English proficient." These students are forced to walk between cultural worlds: They are under intense pressure to abandon their indigenous identity and culture, yet they are stigmatized as "deficient" by the English-language schools they attend. Educational statistics speak painfully of the costs of this situation: Indigenous students are heavily over represented in special education programs, and they experience the highest school failure and dropout rates in the nation. Thus, despite the transition to English, indigenous students are not, on the whole, doing better in school. This situation, and the threat of 'tam' language loss, have motivated creative new approaches to indigenous education which emphasize immersion in the heritage/Native American language. Heritage language immersion is the approach proposed in S.2688.

Heritage or second-language immersion involves sustained instruction in the heritage language over a period of several years. Typically, all instruction during the first years of school is provided in the heritage language, with an English language arts component introduced in the second or third grade. Based on the theory that abilities developed in one language transfer readily to another (and there is considerable empirical support for this),¹ heritage language immersion uses

¹For information on the interdependence of languages in second language learning, see J. Cummins & M. Swain (1986), *Bilingualism in Education: Aspects of Theory, Research and*

the second/heritage language to develop students' critical thinking abilities, English fluency and literacy, and proficiency in the heritage language. This type of immersion incorporates the local culture into the curriculum in academically challenging ways. It requires the active co-participation of children's families, something we know enhances learning for students regardless of race, ethnicity, or social class.

There is strong cross-cultural evidence supporting the effectiveness of second-language immersion schooling. Second language immersion has been implemented in Canada, for example, since 1966. There, native-English speaking children are immersed in French upon entering school. Longitudinal studies have shown that using French as the sole medium of instruction facilitates children's acquisition of French without causing any detrimental effects to their English development or their general cognitive and social development. In fact, on achievement measures—including standardized assessments of English these bilingual students outperform those in monolingual English classrooms. Researchers attribute bilingual students' superior performance to the greater cognitive flexibility associated with knowing more than one language.² Indigenous immersion schooling in the United States was pioneered by the Hawaiians with the introduction of the 'Aha Punano Leo (Nest of Voices) preschool in 1983. Today, the opportunity for an education in and through Hawaiian extends from preschool to graduate school, and approximately 1,800 children have learned to speak Hawaiian through immersion schooling. In a long-range study of Hawaiian immersion, student achievement equaled or surpassed that of Native Hawaiian children enrolled in English-only school—even in English language arts.³

One of the best documented immersion programs on the mainland is at Fort Defiance, Arizona. When the program began in 1987, less than a tenth of the five-year olds at the school were

Practice (London & New York: Longman); F. Genessee, Ed. (1994), *Educating Second Language Children: The Whole Child, the Whole Curriculum, the Whole Community* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press); and F. Grosjean (1982), *Life with Two Languages: An Introduction to Bilingualism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

²For more on French immersion in Canada; see W.E. Lambert & G.R. Tucker (1972), *Bilingual Education of Children: The St. Lambert Experiment* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House); and G.R. Tucker (1980), "Implications for U.S. Bilingual Education: Evidence from Canadian Research," *Focus*, 2, pp. 1-4. For additional data on bilingualism and cognitive functioning, see J. Cummings & M. Swain (1986), *Bilingualism In Education: Aspects of Theory, Research and Practice* (London & New York: Longman).

³For more on Hawaiian immersion, see the chapters by S. Keahi (2000) and K. Silva (2000) in *Indigenous Educational Models for Contemporary Practice*, M.K.P. Ah Neo-Benham and J.E. Cooper, Eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum). See also W.H. Wilson (1998a), "I Ka Olelo Hawai'i Ke Ola, "Life Is Found in the Hawaiian Language'," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 132, pp. 123-137; and Wilson (1998b), "The Sociopolitical Context of Establishing Hawaiian-medium Education," *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 11, pp. 325-338.

considered "reasonably competent" Navajo speakers.⁴ At the same time, many of the English monolinguals were identified as "limited English proficient." With strong administrative and parental support, Fort Defiance launched a voluntary Navajo immersion program that included initial literacy in Navajo, then English, and math in both languages. The program placed a heavy emphasis on language and critical thinking.

By the fourth grade, Navajo immersion students were performing as well on tests of English as Navajo students in non-immersion (monolingual English) classes. Immersion students did better on assessments of English writing, and were substantially ahead on standardized tests of mathematics. On standardized tests of English reading they were slightly behind, but catching up. In short, program co-founder Dr. Wayne Holm reports, these students were well on their way to accomplishing what had been claimed: that they would acquire Navajo "without cost"--that is, by fifth grade they would be doing as well as Navajo students in non-immersion, English-only classes.⁵

Not only did the Navajo immersion students perform well in English, when tested on Navajo language measures they outperformed their Navajo peers who had been placed in non-immersion classes. Navajo students in non-immersion classes actually performed lower on tests of Navajo than they had in kindergarten. Here we clearly see the powerful negative effect of the absence of immersion schooling, and conversely, its positive effect on maintenance of the heritage language as a second language as well as on students' acquisition of English and math.

Immersion programs also have been documented for the Mohawk, Mississippi Band of Choctaw, Northern Arapaho, Blackfeet, Yup'ik, various California tribes, and Cochiti Pueblo.⁶ Like the

⁴Data on the Fort Defiance immersion program is from A. Holm & W. Holm (1995), "Navajo Language Education: Retrospect and Prospects," *Bilingual Research Journal*, 19, pp. 141-157. For studies of other successful Navajo language maintenance programs, see G.S. Dick & T.L. McCat (1996), "Reclaiming Navajo: Language Renewal in an American Indian Community School," in *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas: Language Planning from the Bottom Up*, N.H. Hornbergs, Ed. (Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996, pp. 69-94); A. Holm & W. Holm (1990), "Rock Point, a Navajo Way to Go to School: A Valediction," *Annals, AASSP*, 508, pp. 170-184; T.L. McCarty (1993), "language, Literacy, and the Image of the Child in American Indian Classrooms," *Language Arts*, 70, pp. 182-192; and D. McLaughlin (1995), "Strategies for Enabling Bilingual Program Development in American Indian Schools," *Bilingual Research Journal*, 16, pp. 6067.

⁵Holm & Holm (1995), p. 150.

⁶For more on these programs, see G. Cantoni, Ed. (1996), *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages* (Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University Center for Excellence in Education); EA. Hartley & P. Johnson (1995), "Toward a Community-based Transition to a Yup'ik First Language (Immersion) Program with ESL Component," *Bilingual Research Journal*, 19, pp. 571- 585; T.L. McCarty & LS. Watahomigie (1998), "Indigenous Community- based Language Education in the USA," *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 11, 309-324; T.L. McCarty & O. Zepeda, Eds.

Hawaiian and Fort Defiance Navajo programs, these indigenous language programs involve total immersion in the indigenous language and the active involvement of parents. At Cochiti Pueblo, for example, parents are learning Cochiti side-by-side with their children.⁷ In California, many young adults who are working as language apprentices with elderly master-teachers have gained conversational proficiency and even fluency in the heritage language. According to Dr. Leanne Hinton, a linguist at the University of California Berkeley who has worked with the master apprentice teams for many years, this type of immersion strengthens relations between young and old, reinforces family and inter-family ties, supports family and community values, and provides positive role models for children.⁸

Let me now return to the questions with which I began.

To what extent have heritage language immersion programs succeeded in: (1) promoting indigenous students' English and academic achievement, and (2) revitalizing threatened indigenous languages?

When we consider language programs for which there is good public documentation, such as those discussed here, we see students doing exactly what the research predicts. After approximately five to six years, they are, at the minimum, on a par with comparable students in monolingual English classrooms, and they are ahead in math and heritage language development. According to Darrell Kipp, cofounder of the Blackfeet immersion schools in Montana, a two-year study of Blackfeet immersion students showed that they scored above the national average on English language tests. "We want, and we have developed high-level language acquisition skills in our children," Kipp states.⁹ Moreover, there is evidence of social and affective benefits in

(1998), *Indigenous Language Use and Change in the Americas*, Theme Issue, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 132; T.L. McCarty, L.J. Watahomigie, & A.Y. Yamamoto (Eds.), *Reversing Language Shift in Indigenous America: Collaborations and Views from the Field*, Theme Issue, *Practicing Anthropology*, 21; and J. Reylmer, Ed. (1997), *Teaching Indigenous Languages* (Flagstaff S. Northern Arizona Center for Excellence in Education).

⁷C. Suns, "Community-Based Models for Indigenous Language Revitalization." Keynote Address, 21st Annual American Indian Language Development Institute, June 23, 2000. See also R. Benjamin: R. Pecos, & M.E. Romero (1996), "Language Revitalization Efforts in the Pueblo de Cochiti: Becoming 'Literal' in an Oral Society," in *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas: Language Planning from the Bottom Up*, N.H. Hornbergs, Ed. (Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 115-136).

⁸L. Hinton (1994), *Flutes of Fire* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books); see also Hinton (1998), "Language Loss and Revitalization in California: Overview," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 132, pp. 83-93.

⁹D.R. Kipp (2000), *Encouragement, Guidance, Insights, and Lessons Learned for Native Language Activists Developing Their Own Tribal Language Programs* (Browning, MT: Piegan

immersion schooling: These students know they have succeeded because of, not despite who they are. As promising as they are, indigenous language immersion programs are in a race against time. To quote Northern Cheyenne educator Dr. Richard Littlebear, indigenous languages "are in the penultimate moment of their existence in this world."¹⁰ Let me illustrate this with a recent study by Navajo educator Dr. Evangeline Parsons- Yazzie.¹¹ She found that even in homes where children spoke Navajo as a first language and had monolingual Navajo grandparents, children tended to respond to their parents' and grandparents' Navajo in English. How did their parents, who were bilingual, respond? They switched to English. As early as preschool, children already had into' the societal forces that privilege English and diminish the status of their mother tongue.

Parsons-Yazzie cites English media and the daily association of Navajo speakers with lower-paying jobs as key factors in fostering these language attitudes.

What this study and my own long-term research show is that indigenous language immersion programs in no way threaten the valuation or acquisition of English. Indeed, the pressures on parents and grandparents not to transmit the heritage language are nearly overwhelming. If the heritage language is to have a fighting chance of surviving among the young, parents and grandparents need assistance and support. That is why these proposed amendments are so important. They will extend those practices proven to be effective in promoting both acquisition of the heritage language and English.

While indigenous students contrast with immigrant students in that indigenous students have no other homeland to turn to in acquiring the heritage language, the proposed amendments are not about saving indigenous languages as if they were endangered species. These amendments are about building the intellectual and social-linguistic abilities of indigenous children in ways that strengthen them, their families and communities. These amendments are about restoring wholeness and wellness and integrity to communities whose languages have been forcibly removed. These amendments are about people, and what kind of nation we want to be twenty, fifty, one hundred years from now.

The language choices children and their families make need not be either-or ones; "indigenous" and "modern" need not be oppositional terms. The Native American Languages Act Amendments of 2000 will create new educational opportunities for children to develop their command of the indigenous language while acquiring English and the abilities they need to succeed in the wider world. The provision of such opportunities is one of the foundations of democracy and equality, and that is why these amendments are so needed and deserving of our support. Recommendations

Institute Cut-Bank Language Immersion School, p. 7).

¹⁰R.E. Littlebear, "Preface," in *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages*, G. Canton, Ed. (Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University Center for Excellence in Education, p. xiii).

¹¹E. Parsons-Yazzie (1995), *A Study of Reasons for Navajo Language Attrition as Perceived by Navajo Speaking Parents*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northern Arizona University, Center for Excellence in Education.

for Modifications to S.2688 (suggested modifications are underlined):

1. Sec. 3, Definitions: Modify Section 103 (5) as follows: The term "Native American" means an Indian, Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native, or Native American Pacific Islander.

2. Sec. 4, Native American Language Survival Schools: Consistent with second language acquisition research which shows that five to seven years of cumulative second-language instruction are required to develop cognitive-academic proficiency in a second language, and in order to ensure that Native American Language Survival Schools serve a full range of eligible students, including those with some background in the Native American language who are not fluent speakers, modify Sec. 108, (c), "Use of Funds," (1) (D), "Required Uses," as follows: ensure that students who are not fluent Native American language speakers achieve fluency in a Native American language within five years of continuous enrollment, as measured by locally appropriate language assessments.

Section (c), "Use of Funds," (2) (A), "Permissible Uses": include Native American Language Nests and other educational programs for students who are not fluent Native American language speakers but who seek to establish fluency through instruction in a Native American language or to re-establish fluency, with funding priority to descendants of Native American language speakers;

3. Sec. 110. (a), Demonstration Programs: To encourage additional demonstration sites and ensure their responsiveness and effectiveness in terms of the goals of the 1990/92 Native American Languages Act and proposed 2000 amendments, add Section (e) to include: (1) criteria for becoming a demonstration site; and (2) criteria for evaluation of and continuing status as a demonstration site.