ATALM/AILDI Pre-Conference Summit Report

The Indigenous Languages Survival Kit: Identifying the Essential Components

October 9th, 2016
Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa
Gila River Indian Community, Phoenix, AZ

A TALM
Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, & Museums

The Indigenous Languages Survival Kit: Identifying the Essential Components

ATALM/AILDI Pre-Conference Summit Report
October 9th, 2016

The **American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI)**, in conjunction with the **Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM)** held a language summit prior to the 2016 annual ATALM conference. ATALM solicits proposals for summits that address issues, concerns, and initiatives specific to sustaining and advancing Indigenous cultures. AILDI's accepted summit proposal was entitled, <u>The Indigenous Languages Survival Kit: Identifying the Essential Components</u>. The summit sought to identify, through facilitated discussion, the essential components needed to help sustain the transmission of tribal language and by extension, traditional knowledge and culture. Participants broke down the issues related to language loss before defining solutions and recommendations. The issues, presented as questions, served to facilitate the discussion. Developed by AILDI staff and instructors, the questions included:

1. What is internalized colonialism and how does it manifest in your language program?
2. What does commitment have to do with language revitalization?
3. How do you navigate local politics surrounding language?
4. How does a tribal community define successful language learning?
5. How do we talk about language (with youth/within the community/with other agencies and organizations)?

By bringing issues to the surface and providing a space to share and discuss the limitations and successes of local language work, it was hoped that the recommendations made by participants could be used as action steps in prioritizing language work in tribal communities.

Approximately 100 participants, ranging in age, professional and community experience, and tribal affiliation contributed to the interactive discussions. Their interest in the survival of Indigenous languages was the common denominator. The resulting discussions were then multi-faceted and brought different perspectives to the table underscoring that language cannot be contained in just one program but rather that language is holistic and can affect all levels of tribal society.

Overview of Language Summit

The opening remarks described the summit as a working session designed to be participatory, fun, non-judgmental, and inclusive of all thoughts and opinions even if participants did not work "directly" with language. The summit organizers conveyed to the group that the overall purpose of the summit was to honor our languages and to promote radical hope for language continuance.

The participants were asked to choose the question that they wanted to discuss and to join that table for facilitated conversation. The groups were asked to converse, identify a follow-up question for the next group and to summarize their final thoughts. The day was structured for participants to have a chance to sit in on at least three different group conversations. When it was time to end the discussion and move to another table, participants engaged in a modified version of musical chairs. When the *waila*, or traditional O'odham social dance song ended, participants needed to be at their next discussion table. The upbeat music contributed to the lively nature of the discussions.

The final group conversation summarized the issues that had been discussed throughout the day and to share the recommendations and next steps that had been identified to the larger group. Note taking was provided by table facilitators. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to write down lingering questions, thoughts, ideas and suggestions at each table that may not have surfaced during the facilitated conversation. The table notes were compiled into the following word cloud.

Questions, Discussion and Recommendations

Question 1. What is internalized colonialism and how does it manifest in your language program?

Conversation around this question evolved from first defining "what is colonialism" to suggesting ways to manage its influence with regard to language work. These included discussions and personal oral histories related to the boarding school experience which figured prominently in tracing the genesis of attitudes articulated as: judgment; individual internalization that English is better; and personal, internal struggles related to loss of identity.

The education system imposed upon tribes from the federal government was a topic mentioned repeatedly. Boarding schools were cited as having created a generational "mindset" that does not value Native languages. This attitude, coupled with the education system of assessment, standards and justification of students and teachers, was described as tribes "maintaining the discourse of colonization" thus, still affectively "following the colonizers." It was also noted that the education system has tribes "serving other people's way of teaching."

Education and Christianity were mentioned as another kind of colonialism. One person noted that there were a lot of fundamentalists in their community. As a result, there was a clash between Christianity and traditional ceremonies—family against family. This conflict interfered with the learning of language and culture. In tribal belief systems, language is not separate from spirituality, home, and family.

"language is not separate from spirituality, home, and family"

The role of tribal political leaders was also mentioned and cited as one way that colonialism manifests in language programs. Political leaders promote discord regarding language by judging speakers, families and dialects while not being speakers or advocates of language themselves. Tribal leadership sets the tone and determines whether language is a priority or not.

Looking forward...

Having defined colonialism as a tool of oppression, and acknowledging that its influence remains pervasive, the groups shared that individuals can meet colonialism on their own terms. Suggestions included: establishing a safe zone for language; making use of technology as a tool to help language education and awareness; change the mindset of colonialism, re-introducing creation and other origin stories rooted in tribal culture.

Emerging questions: Can you develop a curriculum that is not colonized? Can your language (program) be taught unstructured?

Major Issues: Defining the term "internalized colonialism," implementing language instruction without colonial influences, fear of moving on (progress), and taking on leadership roles

Next steps: Identifying ways to keeping our values intact, being the role model that we want to be in the community

Question 2. What does commitment have to do with language revitalization?
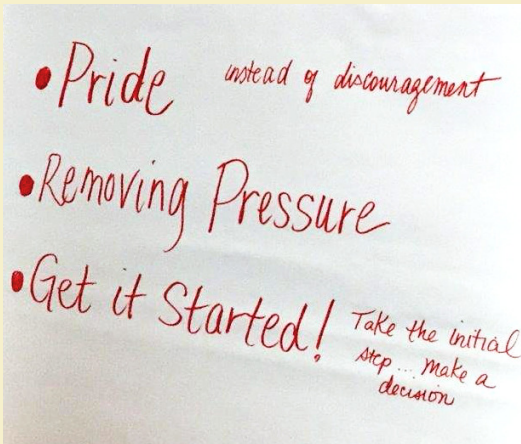
The first group to address the question readily identified that coming together as a community without the interference of personal and tribal politics is the first step needed to begin to get people interested in, and committed to, language use and revitalization. The group cited that a demonstration of the "commitment of the heart" is central to showing that language, culture, health and community are all connected. The summary of the discussion provided by the group included practical ways to begin community commitment including: finding leaders in peer group to get involved, make a plan, chart and nurture progress, include everyone (elders, youth, children, parents), teach motivation, establish relationships in the community, be a role model. The group came up with the following questions for session two: How do we move to next step with all the stakeholders? How do we work with resistance? How do we motivate people?

> *"How do we work with resistance? How do we motivate people?"*

The group discussed resistance as ranging from elders wanting to be compensated for their knowledge, tribal government not prioritizing language, too distracted with life, not enough resources for teachers and language learners, language and cultural knowledge hoarders, and linguistic purity. Overcoming resistance begins with awareness, choice and taking action.

> *"Overcoming resistance begins with awareness, choice and taking action."*

On a practical level, the group discussed that having a light heart, positive attitude and encouragement along with a plan that includes long and short term goals is needed. This discussion raised other questions: What does it mean to be committed? Whose responsibility is that? How do you institutionalize commitment? An underlying theme that came up in the groups was that commitment begins at home, it can be individually driven, and should be transformational (inner and outer). They also emphasized that it is a process.

Looking forward...

The group focused on communicating the value of language as a way to increase awareness and commitment. Effectively conveying the benefits of language was also recognized as being a political tool. Suggestions for why learning heritage language is valuable included: connection to ancestors, insight into worldview, a strengthened and/or awakened identity influences how you think—Indigenous thinking.

Emerging question: How do we get past negative talk?

Major issues:
- Transformational leadership at both individual and organizational levels
- Goal oriented planning that leads to Action
- Developing language learning resources for all levels of language knowledge within a community
- Balancing integrity with adaptation

Next steps:
- Set individual politics aside
- Be positive
- Value emerging speakers

Question 3. How do you navigate local politics surrounding language?

This particular topic did not resonate with the group and, as a result, a second table devoted to this question was not needed after the first session. This lack of interest may well have been an indicator in itself, signifying that politics, while it plays a role in language revitalization, does not lend itself to a language centered discussion, at least for this particular group of participants. Other than doing annual reports to the council, it seems many language programs are fairly autonomous in a certain way, possibly because so many tribal leaders do not speak the language. Language may not be a priority for many tribal leaders considering the multitude of things they need to deal with.

The group's discussion identified a number of areas that contribute to lack regarding language. These included: little to no support from leadership, local disagreements about language use, dialect and teacher qualifications, conflicts between communities and lack of policies. The group suggested that the language needs to be valued more by tribal leaders and communities and that a choice needs to be made to "commit to retaining culture and language identity." It was also suggested that language needs to be made more visible. Reference was made to try to use recent language declarations (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action) as tools to implement action. There was reference to the recent Navajo elections and the language proficiency issue and how tribes are inconsistent in what they want to require in their leadership.

"commit to retaining culture and language identity"

There was much discussion on how politics, played out by leaders and community, can create obstacles to language revitalization. There were very few examples of how local politics have been *navigated* to achieve results in language work. Concerns were about the lack of clear steps an individual or group can take to go about working with the language within a tribe (for instance, what office or committee to go to get guidance or permission).

Looking forward...

The group made the following suggestions: change policies; find a middle ground in the language; accept change in the language; have more communication and meetings like this one (Language Summit) within our own communities; students and teachers make it happen.

Major issues:
- Politics is everything
- Tribal leadership complacency
- Politics has no place in language

Next steps:
- Communication strategy is needed
- Increase the value of language
- Use language for policy/declarations/state of emergency
- Leadership needs to become aware of the status of their own language situation

Question 4. How does a tribal community define successful language learning?

The group began by identifying examples of successful language learning. These included: All generations, old and young are speaking the language; language instruction begins in the home, is taught in school and reinforced at home; language teaching is designed for all learners using all available resources including technology; language learning should include practicing culture as well as commitment. The group also included an underlying issue of what to do if the home is dysfunctional, implying that success starts at home.

The group discussed the standard of measurement should not reflect education standards but a more Indigenous standard. For example, what is needed to be a good hunter? Standards should meet the needs of the local community. Language learning should take place outside the classroom in the community and it should be a life-long learning pursuit. When language starts at home there are no standards. The group discussed how it is important to de-colonize the concepts of school which includes a self-examination as well. It was noted that language revitalization is for ourselves.

"we should strive for progress not perfection in language learning"

The group also discussed different ways that language can be taught and regarded in the community. A language learning place (sacred) can be established in the home. Tribal administration can set policy that rewards language learning, for example, if language is not learned, no per capita will be released. "Cultural hoarders" should be encouraged to share their knowledge. The group mentioned several times the importance of integrating tribal culture and language. An example was given that fluent speakers do not know how to express or speak about culture (mythology, creation story, etc.) and young people know the cultural stories but not the accompanying language. Related to that, the group mentioned that the type of language being taught should be more than just one word but should include ethics, philosophy and cultural practice. Success will vary depending upon the tribe and the tribe will determine what is successful

for themselves. It was also mentioned that we should strive "for progress not perfection" in language learning.
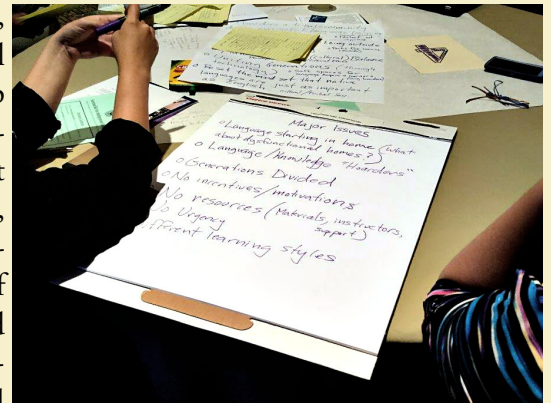
Looking forward...

The group concluded that a philosophical change has to occur to shift the mindset that English is better than Native languages.

Emerging questions: What is the standard of measurement for successful language learning? Whose success are we defining?

Major issues: There is a mindset that English is best, language learning should start at home, there is a divide related to language evolution and generational shift, no motivation, different learning styles, fear of judgement/making mistakes, lack of language use in home, no intergenerational transmission, merge language and culture, create awareness and change attitude

Question 5. How do we talk about language (with youth/within the community/ with other agencies and organizations)?

The discussion began by identifying barriers to learning and speaking language. Some of these included lack of value for the language stemming from the boarding school experience, not enough time allocated for language learning in schools, lack of community involvement. When language is talked about, many times it reflects a negative tone. The group provided examples of how language learners are dismissed by fluent speakers when they are unable to grasp language, and different dialects are not respected. The group spoke of "segregation" and "closemindedness" towards different Native languages that are expressed within tribal communities. Despite the negative attitude and lack of community involvement, the group spoke of the main reasons why language should be taught and talked about. The group indicated that identity, culture, spirituality, and personal meaning are tied to language and that this should be emphasized when talking about language. Several times it was voiced that "we should talk **in** the language not just talk **about** it."
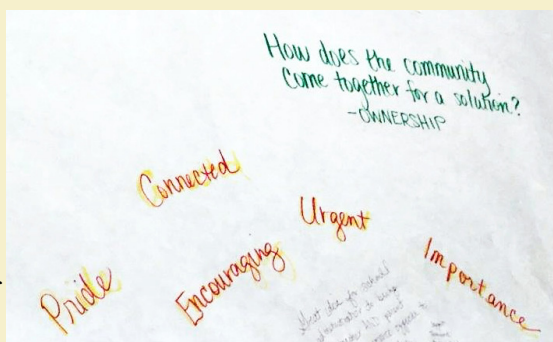
"we should talk in the language not just talk about it."

The group identified various elements to consider to encourage talking about language. These included having community meetings, activities, and other events that would bring the generations together. Some suggestions included demonstrating culture such as singing songs or listening to oral histories. They talked about providing bonuses for language teachers, but eventually decided that this type of incentivizing reflects Western values and doesn't ultimately lead to meaningful change. The group decided that we need to look inward, turning to our specific Indigenous ways of knowing and being to determine the path forward for us and our languages.

More questions were raised: How do we move from talking about the language to speaking it? How do we make language a priority? Do we create incentives or punishment? The Cherokee Nation was mentioned as providing bonuses to language speakers. The group spent some time discussing how to create a positive environment for community meetings, and learning situations.

Looking forward...

The groups concluded that the underlying issue was finding a way to get past all the negative talk and, instead, inspire and motivate people to use the language.

Major issues: Build community collaboration, balance integrity with adaptation

Next steps:
- Set aside individual politics
- Be positive
- Value emerging speakers
- PSA valuing language curriculum

Conclusions

The language summit resulted in the creation of a dedicated space to discuss issues and challenges regarding the teaching, learning and sustainability of our Native languages. The group identified several concrete action steps that could be applied immediately within tribal communities. These included:

- Be the role model that we want to be in the community
- Take on leadership roles
- Be positive
- Value emerging speakers
- Create awareness and change attitude
- Set aside individual politics
- Create a goal oriented language plan that leads to action; and
- Increase communication and have meetings like this Language Summit within our own communities.

AILDI will use the information that was gathered to continue to inform our work and to promote local language revitalization efforts.

AILDI Staff

Ofelia Zepeda, Regents' Professor, Linguistics and AILDI Director
Alyce Sadongei, Project Manager
Audrey Hambleton, Administrative Assistant

Facilitators

Luis Barragan, Senior Curator-Language, Huhugam Heritage Center
Kari Chew, University of Arizona
Schuyler Chew, University of Arizona
Ada Curtis, Educator, Whiteriver Unified School District
Joseph Dupris, Graduate Assistant, Department of Linguistics
Anthony Gray, Cultural Coordinator, Gila River Indian Community
Kevan Joe, University of Arizona
Elizabeth Kickham, Assistant Visiting Professor, University of Arizona
Sheilah Nicholas, Associate Professor, University of Arizona
John Waters, University of Arizona

Registered Participants

Samantha Aguerro, ANA Teacher Trainee, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Melissa Alberts, ANA Teacher Trainee, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Irene Alvarez, Language Instructor, Pascua Yaqui Tribe

Preston Arrow-Weed, ANA Grant Project - Mentor/Master Speaker, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Tara Backhouse, Collections Manager, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

Lambert Benally

Victoria Biddle, Principal capture interactive

Shannon Bischoff, Professor IPFW - Department of English and Linguistics

Patrick Burtt, Student, University of California, Los Angeles

Phillip Cash Cash, University of Arizona

Leilani Chubby, Curator Archivist, Quinault Museum Archives

Mariynn Correa-Sando, Program Manager, Pima Community College

Terry Curley, Language Immersion Technician

Victor Curran Jr., Teacher Trainee, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Jennie DeGroat, Bilingual/Multicultural Instructor, Northern Arizona University

Jonathan Deiss, Citizen-Archivist, Citizen Archivist Project

Yosmay del Mazo, StoryCorps

Ila Mae Dunzweiler, Language Instructor, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Robin Dushane, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Eastern Shawnee Tribe

Arlie Emerson, Language Instructor, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Natalie Enright, Graduate Student, San Jose State University in Master of Library & Information Science Program

Della Escalanti, Language Instructor, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Amelia Flores, Councilwoman, Colorado River Indian Tribes

Caroline Forcier-Holloway, Archivist, Library and Archives Canada

Cris Franco

Melanie Frye, Language Education Specialist, Seminole Nation of Oklahoma

Anabel Galindo, History Instructor, Department of Language and Culture, Pascua Yaqui Tribe

Michael Garcia

Ronald Geronimo, Tohono O'odham Studies Director, Tohono O'odham Community College

Sally Ann Gonzales, Representative, Arizona House of Representatives

Erin Griffin, Dakota Studies Director, Sisseton Wahpeton College

Billie Guerrero, Museum Director, Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribal Museum

Reyes Hernandez, Traditional Arts Instructor, Pascua Yaqui Tribe

Samanthi Hewakapuge, Branch & Systems Librarian, Dine College - Senator John Pinto Library

Victoria Hobbs, Education Administrator, San Xavier District of Tohono O'odham Nation

Dan Hogerhuis

Donna Hogerhuis, Collection Specialist, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe

Mark Holman, Library Director, Sitting Bull College Library

Trinity Honahnie, Parent Liaison, Moencopi Day School

Shelley Hongeva, Cultural Teacher, Moencopi Day School

Aaron Hornbuckle, Chief School Administrator, Moencopi Day School

Harmon Houghton, Publisher, Indian Country Books

Kim Houle, Administrative Assistant, Manitoba First Nation Education Resource Centre

Ray Huaute, Cultural Resource Specialist, Morongo Band of Mission Indians

Lisa Minthorn, Sahaptian Language Technology Specialist, Umatilla Tribe

Trudie Jackson

Penelope Mary Jefferson, ANA Grant Project Manager, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Brooke Johnson, Cultural Director, Native Village of Eyak

Amy Juan, Culture Teacher, Baboquivari High School

Jennifer Juan, Museum Specialist, Tohono O'odham Nation Cultural Center & Museum

Leivallyn Kaupu, Program Specialist, ALU LIKE, Inc.

Debra Keats, Education Assistant / Library, Yerington Paiute Tribe Education / Library Dept.

Manisha Khetarpal, Head of Library Services, Maskwacis Cultural College

Beatrice Lee, Director, San Carlos Apache Language Preservation Program

Colleen Lucero, Museum Collections Consultant- Project Curator, The Hopi Harvey Project

Debra Lucero, Elem. School Teacher/Language Coord., San Felipe Pueblo Elementary School

 Patricia Lumas, Teacher Trainee, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Cheryl Madrigal

Peggy Mainor, Director, The MICA Group

Naomi Manuel, Alu Like, Inc.

Olga McIvor, Researcher Facilitator, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre

Marshall McKay

James McKenzie, Navajo Language Development Coordinator, Center for Dine Studies, Dine College

Paula Mirabal, Assistant Curator, Huhugam Heritage Center

Helen Morris, Director Heritage Program, Chugachmiut

Cordella Nicholas Moses, Curriculum Specialist, San Carlos Apache Language Preservation

Judith Osborne, Language Instructor, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Michelle Pablo- Jackson, Events Coordinator Specialist, GRIC- Huhugam Heritage Center

Susan Penfield

Judie Piner, Administrator of Preservation & Technology, Yavapai-Apache Nation

Lucinda Polk, ANA Grant Project - Mentor/Master Speaker, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Dinah Pongyesva, Library Assistant, Hopi Public Library

Kilia Purdy-Avelino, Program Specialist, ALU LIKE, Inc.

Helena Quintana Arrow-Weed, Professional Development Consultant, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Andrea Ramon, Immersion Language Educator & Trainor

Karen Ray, Cultural Manager, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation

Marilyn Reed, Teacher

Bonnie Roos, Librarian, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe

Mary Beth Rosebrough, Research Coordinator, Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

Alex Sando, Native Artist and Educator, Alex Art

Arlene Sandoval, Director, Pueblo of San Felipe Headstart

Daisy Simms, ANA Grant Project - Mentor/Master Speaker, Quechan Language Preservation Program

Vera Solovyeva, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Cultures of Conservation, Bard Graduate Center

Neebinnaukzhik Southall, Public Relations & Web Coordinator, Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian

Ramona Tecumseh, Librarian, Ira H. Hayes Memorial Library - Gila River Indian Community

Richard Tellez, Yaqui Studies Specialist, Pascua Yaqui Tribe Dept. Language and Culture

Kacie Thompson, Nisqually Tribal Youth Services Librarian,

Memarie Tsosie

Daniel Vega, Director, Language and Culture, Pascua Yaqui Tribe

Samuel Villarreal Catanach, Student, Arizona State University

Lucille Watahomigie, Director, Edward McElwain Memorial Library, Hualapai Tribe

Louis Williams, Library Director, Oneida Nation

Jonathon Wise, Collections Information Specialist – Archives, Canadian Museum of History