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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Los Angeles

Washiw Wagayay Maṅal: Reweaving the Washoe Language

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in American Indian Studies

by

Caitlin Aimee Keliiaa

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Washiw Wagayay Mañal: Reweaving the Washoe Language

by

Caitlin Aimee Keliiaa

Master of Arts in American Indian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Pamela Munro, Chair

The Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California is a federally recognized tribe that seeks to revitalize its Washoe language through the *Washiw Wagayay Mañal (WWM)* language program. The Washoe or “Washo” language is a severely endangered indigenous language. To date most speakers are elderly and it is believed that there are twenty or less fluent speakers. Despite the odds, the *WWM* seeks to proliferate the Washoe language and re-integrate Washoe where it once thrived—in the community.

This thesis is based on multiple research trips to Nevada where I attended weekly language classes and interviewed *WWM* students, staff and teachers, Washoe community members and professional linguists. My research is a linguistic history of Washoe tribal members, descendants and their drive to save theirs and their ancestors' language. The examination includes analysis on the colonization of the Washoe language, a history of Washoe linguistic work, a review of Washoe language ideologies, a history of the once thriving Washoe

Immersion School, as well as an account of current *WWM* language revitalization methods and tools. Included is an analysis of heterographia (multiple orthographies) and community response to program methods.

It is clear the Washoe people value their heritage language. They see it as an inherently connected extension of their being and identity. Currently, however, the issue at hand is pondering how best to endeavor language revitalization. Community members and the *WWM* are at a critical juncture on determining best practices. There is a great deal of energy on the topic with a call for reform and a new progressive approach to challenge language death. In the face of language death, the Washoe people have taken a proactive stance.

The thesis of Caitlin Aimee Keliiaa is approved.

Mishuana R. Goeman

Paul V. Kroskrity

Pamela Munro, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

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Introduction.

*Huŋa me heši*¹

Because [Washoe], it's who we are—where we come from and we're just different from everybody else. You know, everybody's different. One little part of that difference... See right now we got some of our land, some Washoe speakers and we've still got some of our customs, we still practice and we want to expand on that. Make it bigger. Spread it out.²

- Steven James, Washoe tribal member, August 2, 2011

On a cool August afternoon in Dresslerville, NV, I met with elder Steven James, a passionate language activist and teacher for the *Washiw Wagayay Maŋal* language program. We met in the language office, a portable, singlewide modular building with an aged yet prominent sign in the front, declaring in capitals, *Washiw Wagayay Maŋal*—“the house where Washoe is spoken.” We met to chat about his experience with the program and his lifelong passion for the Washoe language. This was the beginning of my research journey on the topic of Washoe language revitalization—however, the root of this project started much earlier in life.

As I child I was exposed to Washoe in my grandparents' home. My grandfather, a fluent Washoe speaker, taught my sisters and me Washoe words when we were children. I can vividly remember declaring “*wí:gi!*” and pointing to my eye. Our daily lessons covered body parts and sometimes kinship words, though my Yerington Paiute grandmother almost always insisted on Northern Paiute terms.

Our attempts to learn the language did not hide the fact that Washoe and in fact Paiute too are endangered languages. My grandfather understood the impending demise of his native language and before he passed away, he made it a point to record as many Washoe words and

¹ “Hello” in the Washoe language.

² Steven James Interview.

phrases he could remember. In my adulthood, I recollected my days of counting “*lák'a?*, *hésge?*, *hélme?*...,”³ and I wanted to learn more. In the fall of 2010, I attended my first quarter at UCLA as an American Indian Studies Masters student. I enrolled in Pamela Munro's American Indian Linguistics 114 course to satisfy my desire for Native language exploration. In this course we learned *Chikashshanompa'* or the Chickasaw language from elder and native speaker Catherine Willmond. Throughout the course we were required to study another American Indian language in conjunction with Chickasaw. My first attempt to study Northern Paiute was challenged by the fact there was no recommended Northern Paiute grammar. And so I began on a new path that has lead me to this thesis, a history of Washoe language revitalization, a community story of survivance, sovereignty and a linguistic history. In this work, I articulate language revitalization as a process of decolonization. That is a process that counters the colonial framework and allows the proliferation of the Washoe language. And more than anything, I unfold the rich history of Washoe language revitalization.

Linguists estimate that the world will lose as many as half of its languages by the end of the 21st century.⁴ Washoe is certainly one of the languages on this list. The loss of language curtails cultural and linguistic diversity. As such, many effected communities across the globe have engaged in various language revitalization strategies. In the face of language death, the Washoe Tribe has taken a proactive stance. The goal of this project is to examine the success and efficacy of the *Washiw Wagayay Manal (WWM)* language program. Factors such as boarding school era politics, colonialism, nationalism and language shift have all contributed to the reason why Washoe has become an endangered language.

This research will allow the *WWM* to reflect upon its program's methods and will

³ “One,” “two” and “three” in the Washoe language.

⁴ Krauss, Michael. "Classification and Terminology for Degrees of Language Endangerment." *Language Diversity Endangered*. By Matthias Brenzinger. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter, 2007. 1-8, Print.

document language revitalization efforts that can benefit similar Indigenous movements. This project has taken advantage of a rare opportunity to begin a new upsurge of Washoe research. In regards to language revitalization, it is necessary to take advantage of the moment. This project accompanies some of the many more recent movements across the United States in Native American language preservation. This thesis may be able to inform similar movements locally and globally. To date, nothing has been written on Washoe language maintenance and revitalization making this project quite unique. This thesis research will be an important contribution to the area of Washoe studies and thus to American Indian Studies and Indigenous cultural revitalization movements.

The work that the Washoe community once did and still continues to do is a significant contribution to the field of Indigenous language revitalization movements.

Research Goals.

This case study will examine the Washoe Tribe's language revitalization efforts as through the *WWM* language program. First, I will examine the history of the Washoe including the linguistic elements of this unique language and how Washoe was affected by local methods of language eradication. I will juxtapose this with an examination of the current state of the Washoe language. Clearly, the odds against Washoe language survival are vast. Yet in Native communities across the country there is still hope. Following the background analysis, this thesis will examine the roots of the *WWM* language program—the immersion school that started it all, in conjunction with community language classes. Since its inception this program has transformed from the short-lived immersion school and classes into weekly classes held in Washoe's four distinct colonies.⁵ Classes are available for all ages from Alpine County, CA, to

⁵ Reno Sparks is considered a fifth community, though the *WWM* does not manage any language classes at this

Carson City, NV. This thesis will also specifically analyze Washoe language learning and the student perspective.

In terms of program effectiveness, it is critical to understand the student population and how students respond to the instruction. It is also imperative to be cognizant of community response to and attitude towards Washoe language preservation. I will examine Washoe language ideologies and present a kind of linguistic history of community members. In section six of this thesis, I will examine the challenges affecting the *Washiw Wagayay Manjal* language program and propose potential program improvements, based upon community response. The conclusion will reflect upon the future of the program and the preservation of the Washoe language. The whole of this thesis will address the following queries: How does the *Washiw Wagayay Manjal* language program function and what do current students gain from instruction? What does the program's curriculum look like? What are the instructional methodologies or pedagogy? What is the perceived community impact? Why do Washoe people want to save the language? What does the Washoe language mean to tribal members and unenrolled descendants in terms of identity? I explore the triumphs of the community's revitalization efforts and language learning methods and discuss the barriers that are counterproductive to language preservation. This research will allow the Washoe Tribe to reflect upon its program's methods and showcase effective language revitalization strategies that can benefit similar Indigenous language initiatives.

Methodology.

This thesis is the result of multiple trips to Nevada to conduct interviews, attend language classes and analyze learning materials and pedagogy. These trips took place in July and August

location. Its establishment as an official colony of the tribe is disputed.

of 2011 and January, February of 2012. Many of these trips coincided with significant cultural events; such as the *Wa She Shu It Deh* festival at Lake Tahoe in the summer of 2011 and the Fifth Annual Red Hoop Round dance in February of 2012. I initially met and interviewed the staff at the *WWM* language program, Lynda Shoshone and Mischelle Dressler. I also spoke with elders and instructors of the language program, Steven James and Melba Rakow. Additionally, I interviewed students and former participants of the *WWM*. Aside from my first trip, during all other visits to the community I attended multiple weekly *WWM* language classes. I met students and conducted snowball sampling where I was referred to other helpful individuals to interview. For individuals who I was unable to meet in person, I conducted phone or e-mail based interviews. All quotes and information within this thesis not otherwise attributed result from these interviews. I conducted interviews with two kinds of participants, Washoe community members and students of the *WWM* and those working with the language in a professional capacity. In total, I interviewed nine community members and two professionals.

For the Washoe community members, I mostly met in their homes on the reservation or in language classes. I interviewed participants in regards to their experience learning the language, whether or not they had speakers in their family, their personal fluency and what influences them to continue learning. Within this category of participants I examined two kinds of individuals, those who are learning Washoe as a second language and native speakers who continue to maintain fluency. Some of these interviews with community members also examined the functions of the program, its history, how it is funded, what materials are available and so on.

For the community members I interviewed, all were or had been involved with the language program or immersion school either as employees, volunteers or students. For interviews with professional linguists, I spoke with well-known and foundational Washoe

language scholar, William H. Jacobsen, Jr., who has worked on the Washoe language and with the community for many decades. I also interviewed Alan Yu, Director of the University of Chicago's Washo Project, a digital Washoe language revitalization tool. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a linguistic perspective on the program and understand new developments in the field.

In regards to analyzing learning materials and pedagogy, I personally attended language classes to understand how it felt to be a student. I likewise took homework assignments with me and checked the progress of my work. For classes, I learned through the two methodologies of the program's regular instructors. Overall, there are two versions of orthographies, or writing systems, utilized by the community. One weekly class uses an informal "syllabic" orthography, a roman written system based on the syllables of the language. Syllable breaks are marked with a hyphen. The other included an orthography akin to that of Jacobsen's and Yu's. I examined both methodologies and the students' reaction to both approaches. At the main *WWM* office, I examined and collected language materials from the now defunct immersion school and current classes. Some newly adapted material emphasizes language learning rather than simply words on a page. It is helpful to the emergent speaker, intuitive and well organized to assist with language learning.

Because I interviewed only current or former participants of the language school, certainly many tribal opinions are left out. This thesis in no way attempts to represent all Washoe language ideologies or those of individuals who do not or have not participated in the *WWM* or immersion school. For these opinions, I recommend viewing the survey conducted by the tribe,⁶ a sample of opinions gathered from the community.

⁶ At the time of my research, the Washoe Tribe conducted a language survey. Though I briefly refer to this survey, its purposes for satisfying a language grant proved less appropriate for the scope of this thesis.

Section 1.

*lák'aŕ*⁷

The Maker of All Things was counting out seeds that were to become the different tribes. He counted them out on a big winnowing tray in equal numbers. West Wind, the mischievous wind, watched until the Maker had divided the seeds into equal piles on the basket. Then he blew a gust of wind that scattered the seeds to the east. Most of the seeds that were to have been the Washo people were blown away. That is why the Washo are fewer in numbers than other tribes.⁸

- Jean Dexter, Washoe tribal member, February 2, 1975

In order to learn about the Washoe language, one must first learn about the Washoe people and their culture. The Washoe people have lived at *Da ow a ga* or Lake Tahoe and surrounding regions since time immemorial.⁹ The Pine Nut Hills marked the furthest eastern boundaries. The western front cradled the Sierra Nevadas and the north reached as far as Honey Lake. To the south lay Sonora Pass. In aboriginal times, the Washoe were divided into three distinct communities, *Wel mel ti* to the north, the east central *Pau wa lu* in Carson Valley and further south were the *Hung a lel ti*.¹⁰ The Washoe people found themselves positioned at the borders of the states of California and Nevada. Relying on the seasons as life cycles, the Washoe took part in hunting, gathering and fishing.¹¹ Traditional foods enjoyed were pine nuts, acorn, antelope, deer, rabbits and other small game.¹² As recognized by scholars nearly a century ago, the Washoe language spoken by the Washoe people is of a distinct linguistic family unrelated to those of the territory's surrounding tribes.¹³ This observation has maintained, making the Washoe

⁷ "One" in the Washoe language.

⁸ Jo Ann Nevers, *Wa She Shu: A Washo Tribal History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Printing Press 1976), 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰ It is significant to note that in my conversations with Jacobsen, he insisted that the latter be spelled *hang a lel ti*, meaning the "mouth" of something.

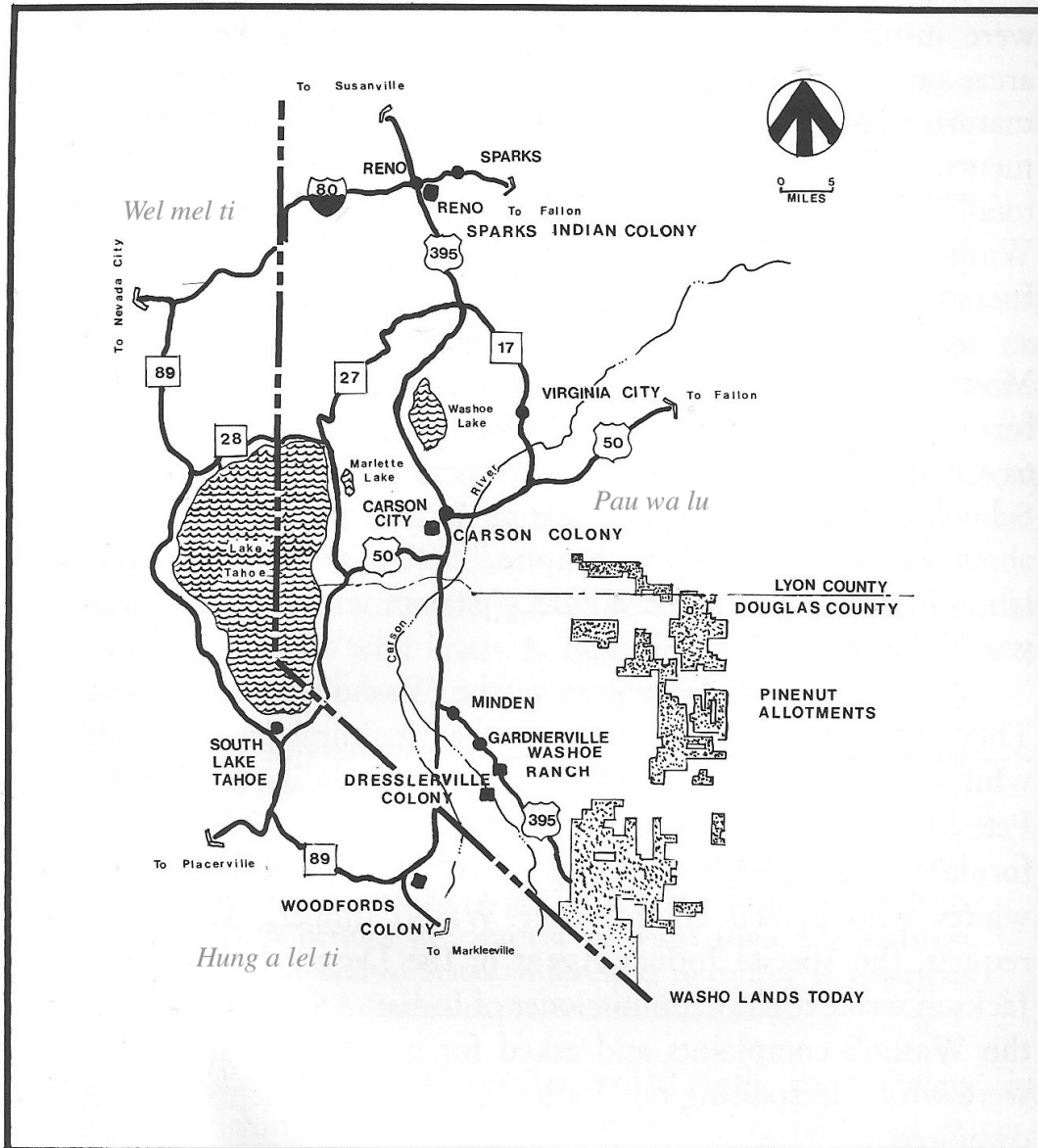
¹¹ Jo Ann Nevers, *Wa She Shu: A Washo Tribal History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Printing Press 1976), 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11-14.

¹³ S.A. Barrett, *Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee: The Washo Indians* (Milwaukee: Order of the Trustees 1917), 5.

language a linguistic isolate.¹⁴

Map of Washoe Territory – Figure 1.



A map of current Washoe colonies and their regional ancestral communities.¹⁵

True to the creation story, the Washoe people are smaller in numbers than most federally recognized tribes (unlike the neighboring Paiutes) and do not maintain numerous bands. The

¹⁴ Jacobsen Jr., William H. "A Grammar of the Washo Language." Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1964. Print.

¹⁵ Originally published in Jo Ann Nevers' *Wa She Shu: A Washo Tribal History*. I edited the image to include the ancestral regions. To ensure accuracy for the latter, I referenced the Washoe Tribal History Booklet.

modern day Tribal Council grew from the main three traditional Washoe communities to accommodate the “colonies” now situated on and off trust land. The twelve-member Tribal council consists of representatives from all of the Washoe “colonies,” Carson City, Stewart, Dresslerville, Woodfords (often referred to as *Huŋa a lel ti*) and Reno-Sparks Colony, as well as two off-reservation delegates.¹⁶ The Washoe tribe consists of approximately 1,550 enrolled tribal members, one-third of whom reside off-reservation, a third within their ancestral territory, and another third in the San Francisco Bay Area. The tribe manages a range of programs to “encourage the preservation of Washoe culture and traditions,” such as the *Washiw Wagayay Manjal* language program, four Head Start schools for all community children, an Environmental Protection Department, a series of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs in California and Nevada, the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, the Washoe Police Department and the Washoe Health Clinic.¹⁷ Economically the tribe relies on government funded grants, the Washoe smoke shop, a gas station and the tribally-run Meeks Bay Resort on the west shore of Lake Tahoe.

The Language.

The spelling “Washo” is frequently employed by linguists and anthropologists to refer to the heritage language. Similarly, most research from the first half of the twentieth century refers to the people themselves as “Washo.” Contemporaneously, the academic term for the language remains “Washo” and the term for the tribe or people is “Washoe.” For Washoe tribal members and descendants, “*Wašiw*” or “*Washiw*” are other means to express the native name of the language. The spelling “*Wa:šiw*” reflects William H. Jacobsen, Jr.'s orthography, as will be

¹⁶ Jo Ann Nevers, *Wa She Shu: A Washo Tribal History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Printing Press 1976), 91.

¹⁷ “Washoe Tribal History Booklet” 2010, Washoetribes.us 17 Oct 2010
<http://www.washoetribes.us/images/washoe_tribe_history_v2.pdf>

discussed later. “*Waš́:šiw*” or “*Wa she shu*” refers to “Washoe people” as a group. Officially, the tribe officially employs the term “Washoe.” For the purposes of this thesis, I will use “Washoe” in reference to the language and the people.

State of the Washoe Language.

Washoe is a language once strongly spoken in California and Nevada in the area centering on Lake Tahoe and extending about 140 miles between its northern and southern extremities.¹⁸ The language is still spoken today, though not nearly as frequently as in the last hundred years and certainly not as robust. According to Alan Yu, head of the Washo Project at the University of Chicago, Washoe is a severely moribund or endangered language. According to Leanne Hinton's *Flutes of Fire*, in 1993, it was conservatively estimated that Washoe had only about 25 fluent speakers.¹⁹ The Washo Project suggests that there are 13 elderly speakers.²⁰ The *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* online edition describes a much more dire situation, listing Washoe as having 10 or fewer speakers. The website notes that all speakers are elderly and the language is nearly extinct. This estimate is quite real—most of the fluent Washoe speakers are in fact elderly, and in the last ten years, many have passed on. An elder I spoke with estimated that there were only about six fluent speakers. A younger source seemed to believe that the number was much higher, likely in the 20s. Another speaker in the community created a list of living speakers (inaccessible at the time of research) that referenced a similar count. Each is confident that the amount is much higher than six or ten for that matter. As such, my research leads me to believe that the actual number of fluent speakers²¹ is somewhere between 10 and

¹⁸ Jacobsen Jr., William H. "A Grammar of the Washo Language." Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1964. Print.

¹⁹ Hinton, Leanne. *Flutes of Fire: Essays on California Indian Languages*. Berkeley: Heyday, 1994, 32. Print.

²⁰ "The Washo Project." *The Washo Project*. The Washo Project, 2008. Web. 12 May 2012. <<http://washo.uchicago.edu/intro/history.php>>.

²¹ That is the ability to speak smoothly and capably in conversation, storytelling etc.

perhaps 20 speakers.²² Once this valuable human intellectual resource is lost, it is almost surely irreversible. The loss of language curtails cultural and linguistic diversity and is felt among multiple Indigenous populations. As such, many effected communities across the globe have engaged in various language revitalization strategies.

In the face of language death, the Washoe Tribe has taken a proactive stance. Factors such as boarding school era politics, colonialism, nationalism and language shift have all contributed to the reason why Washoe has become an endangered language.

On Language Death.

Language death is a serious issue. Not until recently did the general public begin to realize the drastic speed at which languages across the globe are falling to extinction.²³ In the last five hundred years about half of the world's languages have disappeared.²⁴ Currently, some estimate that as many as fifty percent of the world's languages are endangered, with an overwhelming majority at risk of extinction.²⁵ With this drastic prospect at hand, the questions remains, what is lost when languages die? In the documentary film *Voices of the World: The Extinction of Language and Linguistic Diversity*, David Crystal raises the question, “What would the world have lost if your language didn't exist?” The following analysis attempts to answer these questions in regards to a linguistic perspective and the survival of the Washoe language.

From a linguistic point of view, language death is a loss in linguistic diversity. It is a loss of culture and linguistic complexity. For the Washoe tribe, the death of the Washoe language would mean the degradation of Washoe culture and heritage. Nettle and Romaine assert,

²² It is important to note that any estimate of fluent speakers may vary on the definition of “fluency.”

²³ Mithun, Marianne. "The Significance of Diversity in Language Endangerment and Preservation." *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*. By Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley. Cambridge [England: Cambridge UP, 1998, 7. Print.

²⁴ Nettle, Daniel, and Suzanne Romaine. *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 2. Print.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

“Linguistic diversity then is a benchmark of cultural diversity. Language death is symptomatic of cultural death: a way of life disappears with the death of a language.”²⁶ It is certainly true that if language allows us to understand the intricacies of the mind and each unique way of seeing life, then it must also be tied to culture. Whether we look at Washoe, Paiute or English, it is easy to see that different languages package concepts differently. These different packages reflect an array of diverse ways to see the world. Language not only is the mode of speech within a given community, it embodies human capacity and thought. As put by the late Kenneth Hale, “[L]anguage—in the general, multifaceted sense—embodies the intellectual wealth of the people who use it...Some forms of verbal art—verse, song, or chant—depend crucially on morphological and phonological, even syntactic, properties of the language in which it is formed. Quite literally art and cultural expression could not exist without the language.”²⁷ Arguably, cultural expression and art may live on without the language, but the death of a language institutes a great challenge to cultural proliferation. Accordingly, language is intellectual wealth and in this sense the Washoe language is Washoe intellectual wealth—a link to or map of Washoe culture, its epistemologies and life ways.

Clearly, much of a community's contributions to the world depend greatly on the language. Without language, the methods, purposes and means for these cultural expressions may be jeopardized. Some believe that the loss of the language is the loss of a nation. The late Maori leader Sir James Henare maintained, “the language is the life force of our Maori culture and *mana*. If the language dies...what do we have left to us? Then I ask our people who are

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ Hale, Kenneth L.. "On Endangered Languages and the Importance of Linguistic Diversity." *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*. By Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley. Cambridge [England: Cambridge UP, 1998, 163-91. Print.

we?”²⁸

Nettle and Romaine cite the example of Native Hawaiians who for thousands of years, built upon fishing knowledge passed down orally over the generations.²⁹ Culturally, Native Hawaiians knew so much about how and when to catch fish, which was assisted by the language. They had specific words for identifying the stages of fish development, which are completely foreign to English. A little over two hundred years ago, Native Hawaiians likely knew more about fish and marine life on their shores than do scientists today.³⁰ Since the arrival of Captain Cook, Native Hawaiians have lost much of that traditional knowledge. From an intelligent and comprehensive fishing culture, it is significant to contemplate what Native Hawaiians now lack culturally in the face of language death. Without the language it is difficult (albeit possible) to continue cultural practices such as fishing or song or dance. It seems highly plausible that without certain words Native Hawaiian fisherman may not be able to utilize the traditional fishing methods integral to their culture. As such, the degradation of language is degradation of the culture. Considering Henare's take on language as an extension of culture, where might this leave Native Hawaiians? Where would this potential language loss leave the Washoe people?

²⁸ Nettle, Daniel, and Suzanne Romaine. *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000, 23. Print.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Section 2.

hésgeɽ³¹

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its chains and emptying the native's head of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.

- Franz Fanon on the logic of Colonialism

In the general scheme of colonization, Indigenous communities across the globe have suffered a great deal of cultural trauma, language loss and in some cases language death. For Native American communities, factors such as boarding school era policies and nationalism have all contributed to language shift and heritage language attrition. It is critical to focus this lens on examining colonial instruments specific to the Washoe and great basin people. The following section examines the local effects colonialism and the colonial tools inflicted upon Washoe people and their future generations. It includes perspectives from community members who have experienced these colonial methods. This serves as a background into understanding the over-a-century's time of Washoe linguistic degradation. I will examine the overlapping forces that effected Washoe people, their language and their relation to Washoe land, mind and body. This section comments upon the structure of invasion. It is crucial to understand what Washoe people have endured under settler colonialism to understand how far they have come and will continue to grow. The term settler colonialism has a multi faceted definition, though in the context of this piece it is identified as the replacement of aboriginal Washoe values including the replacement of the Washoe language with English. Scholar Patrick Wolf quite succinctly asserts, “Settler

³¹ “Two” in the Washoe language.

colonialism destroys to replace.”³² Wolf furthers, “[I]t erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.”³³

As previously mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the Washoe people have lived at *Da ow a ga* or Lake Tahoe and surrounding areas since time immemorial.³⁴ They took part in hunting, gathering and fishing and enjoyed traditional regional foods like pine nuts, acorn, antelope, deer, rabbits and other small game.³⁵ The traditional lifestyle that the Washoe enjoyed for ages dramatically changed in the advent of the new frontier.

As anthropologist Warren d'Azevedo argues, the Washoe offered minimal resistance to intruders.³⁶ Unlike their advantageous neighbors to the east, the Washoe did not adopt horses for hunting or warfare as the Paiute did.³⁷ D'Azevedo paints a picture of an ensconced Washoe community that fled to the hills to carefully watch wagon trains, only making themselves known when large settler groups established permanent homes in Washoe territory.³⁸ Washoes were perceived to be of no immediate threat to settlers, and they were ignored and forgotten. The resistant neighboring Paiute and Shoshone were deemed aggressive and preoccupied Indian Agent reports, thus receiving much more attention from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.³⁹

Settler Invasion.

By the mid nineteenth century, white immigrants had officially invaded Washoe territory and in 1849 many trading posts spotted the area. The intruders decimated the environment,

³² Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (New York: Routledge 2006) 388.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Jo Ann Nevers, *Wa She Shu: A Washo Tribal History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Printing Press 1976), 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-14.

³⁶ Warren d'Azevedo, *Anthropological Papers: The Washo Indians of California and Nevada* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press 1963), 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

destroying pine nut trees, grasses, game and fish that the Washoe depended on. Settler colonialism is a logic that relies on the need for more land. As a consequence, Indigenous modes of production were curtailed.⁴⁰ As western expansion drew the Washoe farther from their ancestral ways, a severe disruption affected the community. In this disruption of the land followed a disruption of the body, wherein Washoes could no longer solely rely upon foods they once depended on. This physically alters the Washoe genetic for generations to come. This is an example of the biopolitic of control, that is the political power and control on all aspects of life. In this specific case, the biopolitic controls the Washoe body. These modes of colonization predominate Washoe biology. The land and the Washoe body continued to suffer the consequences of settler invasion.

The rush for silver and gold found in Washoe territory obliged advantageous settlers to cut pine nut trees for timber to build homes and stores.⁴¹ The rapid increase of settler stock raising, seriously depleted and destroyed many of the food sources in the area. The settler colonial method relies on expansion and continued immigration at the expense of Native land and livelihood.⁴² The Washoe body as an extension of the land became colonized. Effectively, Washoe culture began to shift, as the structures of settler colonialism became entrenched. In order to survive, Washoe people accommodated western fashions and lived close to newly established towns where they could find menial jobs at white homes and ranches.⁴³ Because of the dramatic changes to their livelihood, Washoe families were forced to depend on white settlers. These reinforcements of biopolitics of control then also altered the Washoe mind in

⁴⁰ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (New York: Routledge 2006) 395.

⁴¹ Jo Ann Nevers, *Wa She Shu: A Washo Tribal History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Printing Press 1976) 50-51

⁴² Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (New York: Routledge 2006) 395.

⁴³ Jo Ann Nevers, *Wa She Shu: A Washo Tribal History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Printing Press 1976) 53 – 56.

addition to the body. The odds were set against them. Accordingly, they could no longer solely rely on their own devices. Where once existed a freedom to be, settler colonialism erected a new foundation of multiple barriers. One of these barriers was of a linguistic nature, a biopolitic that would effect the Washoe language.

The Currency of English.

Settlers brought with them the English language and structured it into their governing systems. As Washoes became outnumbered in their own homelands, by process they needed to interact with the new world around them. Employment at local ranches required Washoes to work for and communicate with settler families. English became a kind of currency and tool for entering into and participating with the changed landscape. Of course, well before the turn of the century, Washoe families were still able to maintain their Washoe language. English was an additional language they used outside of the home.

Steven James, who was born in 1933, remembers his grandmother who likely grew up in this period of time, “She was one-hundred percent Washoe. She grew up in a White man's world too. She knew how to speak English and knew all his customs. But when she was a little girl, she grew up like a Washoe—Washoe family, Washoe environment.” James' grandmother also learned to interact with the surrounding settler world, “After the White people came over here, she had to get involved with that too—their customs and their language. But she didn't loose the Washoe. The Washoe way. She never spoke English in her house.” James' recollection suggests that his grandmother was forced to “get involved” with the “White man's world.” She had to make a choice about her language, and that was to keep it in the home. Her choice has influenced James to this day and it is why he was exposed to and learned Washoe as his first language. But not everyone had this choice and with the advent of boarding schools, it would be come

generationally difficult for Washoe people to maintain their heritage language.

Furthermore, there is something to be said about the fact that Washoe, as an indigenous language was constructed as and targeted for deviance, just as the Washoes themselves and neighboring tribes had been targeted. Indigenous language was seen as an affront to the doctrine of assimilation and a barrier that needed to be broken. What we do not see in this period of time is an institutional battle against the foreign languages spoken by settlers, such as German or perhaps French. The Washoe language was and arguably still is today seen as attached with the past, being primitive and as deviant. English represented the future of this “claimed” land and the promise of modernity. This highly accepted logic influenced the suppression of the Washoe language and culture. In the next coming years, Washoes suffered further degradation on account of U.S. policies that unraveled kinship systems, language, ceremonies and a number of traditions that Native Americans had maintained for thousands of years.

As a consequence, acculturation began—but not as rapidly as the colonizers anticipated. Culture continued to be passed down within the family structures. Certainly, James' account is indicative of this—his grandmother was able to keep the Washoe language and culture alive within her home. This was not specific just to Washoe people, Native Americans across the country adapted in ways that allowed their culture to live on. This culture was seen as a threat to the American project of assimilation. As a consequence, a new project of cultural elimination was engendered to “fix” this problem. This solution was Indian boarding schools.

Institutional Tools.

The government initiated “educational systems” that Indian Boarding Schools introduced were in no way discrete in their intentions. They were militaristic style schools focused on indoctrinating American Indian youth. The notorious Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle,

Pennsylvania marked the nation's first-ever Indian Boarding school. The school's founder, Captain Richard Henry Pratt boasted its mission, "All the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian and save the man." This logic applied to the whole of Native culture including the language. Pratt led Carlisle as Superintendent from 1879 to 1904.⁴⁴ His legacy supersedes these years and influenced America's numerous boarding schools and the eradication of many Indigenous languages. According to Native scholar Jeffrey Hamley, "Government officials believed that if they carried out the program for boarding school education on a sufficiently large scale it would transmogrify whole tribal cultures and eventually assimilate Indians into American society. The so called 'Indian problem,' centuries old, would thus resolve itself."⁴⁵ Boarding school programming proved desirable to local officials who established a school for the Great Basin Indian population.

In December 17, 1890, Stewart Indian Boarding School opened its doors in a similar pursuit of Indian assimilation. Stewart is located three miles southeast of Carson City, and was initially intended for Washoe, Paiute and Shoshone students.⁴⁶ It was built eleven years after the establishment of the Carlisle Indian School and followed similar practices.⁴⁷ Within the walls of Stewart, Indian children were shaped to become model citizens of the American assimilation doctrine. Children were taught to revere the American dream, achieve Christian sanctity and prepare themselves for the world as second-class citizens. Calhoun, Goeman and Tsethlikai note that this education revolved around ideas of cult domesticity, which disrupted and reshaped

⁴⁴ Riney, Scott. *The Rapid City Indian School 1898-1933* University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. Oklahoma, 1999, 35.

⁴⁵ Reynolds, Jerry. *Boarding Schools Dismantled Families & Cultures*. Lakota Times News Paper, February 4, 1992.

⁴⁶ Stewart is no longer in operation, yet the original campus is still intact today.

⁴⁷ "Experience American Indian History at Stewart Indian School, in Carson City, Nevada." 2011, Stewart Indian School. 11 Mar. 2011. <<http://stewartindianschool.com/stewart-history.html>>.

Native men and women's roles and power.⁴⁸ They further comment on the reasoning of equal female representation in boarding schools stating, “policymakers knew that destroying girls’ Native languages and cultures would effectively destroy the cultures and traditions of all native nations.” The currency of the English language became a beneficial tool and was perceived as more valuable than Washoe. Quickly, the Washoe language became limited to the home-life and soon it was only marginally used on account of Indian boarding school assimilation tactics. Washoe language and culture was up against the odds.

Many local Indian children were forced to attend Stewart, where students belonged to platoons and companies. For those who were not forced, their families sent them to the school for lack of other resources like food, clothing or even a home—a direct result of settler colonization that limited or abolished the availability of these resources. Washoe parents and children opposed the school that pulled children from their familiar cultural ways and language.⁴⁹ Elder and native Washoe speaker Steven James, his siblings and his parents all attended Stewart. In fact, his parents were some of the first students at the school in the 1800s. As a child, James learned Washoe in the home as Washoes had done for thousands of years, “That's the way it was with all the Washoes. Most of the parents spoke Washoe in their homes and hardly spoke any English.” But the advent of Stewart Indian School significantly altered Washoe culture and language. “After a while, after Stewart got started, they started speaking English. And they started forgetting about their Washoe. That was what...I think the government was after—after our customs and our language. They didn't want us to do that anymore. So they had ways of [dealing] with that, like Stewart. I guess that's why they built Stewart—separate the kids from

⁴⁸ Anne Calhoun, Mishuana Goeman, and Monica Tsethlikai. "Achieving Gender Equity for American Indians." *Handbook for Achieving Gender Equity through Education* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 2007) 523.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

their parents.”⁵⁰

Process of Assimilation and English Only Policy.

In “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” Patrick Wolfe comments on the assimilation process, “...assimilation can be a more effective mode of elimination...since it does not involve such a disruptive affront to the rule of law that is ideologically central to the cohesion of settler society.”⁵¹ Stewart was certainly an extension of this plan for eliminating and transforming Native culture. Indeed, James is right. Through boarding schools, the government was after Washoe customs and language. It did intend to eradicate both for the sake of assimilation. As a consequence, Washoe culture and language suffered a tremendous loss. This was true for Washoes, Paiutes, Shoshones and other tribes. English was forcibly supplanted on the Washoe and Indian children in the schools were taught to devalue their heritage language, thus experiencing the perverted logic of colonialism.⁵²

James remembers that he was not allowed to speak Washoe at Stewart, “They wouldn't let you. They did a lot of uh....I guess it was punishment in a way. They didn't use any force or anything but made you do extra duty. Extra work. It was run like a military base...”⁵³ The degradation of the language and culture was quite effective. So effective that in 1993, when Laura Fillmore began to work with the elders on creating a Washoe immersion school, she was discouraged. Elder Mabel James told her, “You're kind of late aren't you? All those Indians had the Indian educated out of 'em at Stewart.”⁵⁴ Stewart led a legacy of assimilation for ninety years and its effects are still felt today.

⁵⁰ Steven James Interview.

⁵¹ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (New York: Routledge 2006) 402.

⁵² As demonstrated by Fanon in the quote that introduced this section.

⁵³ Steven James Interview.

⁵⁴ Laura Fillmore Interview.

Linguistic Trauma.

These traumatic experiences at Stewart Indian boarding school have shaped the lives of generations of Indian people. In this respect, the structure of invasion was and in a continual process and not a single event.⁵⁵ Specifically, many Washoe families experienced this particular transaction of colonization in regards to continual loss of language and culture. Native scholar Taiaiake Alfred remarks on these cycles of perpetuation, “It’s not just a generational thing either; it’s not just the individuals who actually went to the schools, it’s their entire families.”⁵⁶

Washoe people today are well aware of this phenomenon. Current *WWM* teacher Melba Rakow recognizes the generational loss of language some Washoe elders have experienced. “Jo Ann [Nevers], she's our historian, but doesn't speak any Washoe and she wasn't taught Washoe. So she heard it around her, but...they were not allowed to speak it in the home. That [is] due to the fact of the teachings of the boarding school. In the boarding school, the language was forbidden. Those parents that were in that space and time started loosing their language.”⁵⁷ Rakow further identifies the process as discouragement, “They said 'Well I want you to succeed in this other world, because that's where we're going to be,' then we don't do the language. But now, a lot of those are seeing it as 'We should have been taught our language.’”⁵⁸ Absolutely, Washoe children should have been taught their language, but that is an ideal and was not, nor has been everyone's reality.

Joanne and numerous other Washoes like her suffered a linguistic trauma, a generational trauma that forcibly prohibited Washoe language and further discouraged its proliferation among future generations. “That's what I've found,” Rakow states, “Most were discouraged from

⁵⁵ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (New York: Routledge 2006) 403.

⁵⁶ Taiaiake Alfred *Peace Power Righteousness: an Indigenous Manifesto* (Don Mills, Ont. Oxford University Press 1999) 13.

⁵⁷ Melba Rakow Interview.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

speaking. It carried on to their children. Now we've got to turn that around.”⁵⁹ This linguistic trauma is still evident among Washoe people and countless Indigenous people across the globe. It is a pressure indoctrinated in the boarding school and settler colonial process and generated in individuals, families and society. The decision remains; to either let go of the world before or attempt to balance both.

I spoke with Boo Boo Roach, a current student of Rakow's in the *WWM*. I wanted to know how Washoe became endangered. Roach believed that English was a problem in the process, “I think it wasn't valued. Because there was a time when you had to survive, and to survive you had to speak English. So people didn't teach Washoe to their children, because they said 'Well, they're going to have go out and earn a living, they're going to have to live in this world and they're going to have to speak English.’” She later comments on the proliferation of English, “I think the main thing is because we're so intermarried. There's not a common language, so English is the common language. Everyone's... like Majesta... I'm two tribes, she's three. Everyone's something. Most people just speak English.” Echoing Fanon in the quote that introduced this section, the perverted logic of colonialism not only effects the native mind, but also distorts and destroys their history. In this system, Native people are understood to devalue their aboriginal traditions and rid them from their memories. In the prescription of U.S. cultural hegemony, Eurocentric views of white superiority attempt to erode and replace the Indigenous mind. Washoe and other Indigenous communities had been conditioned to accept the inferiority of the Washoe language and culture. Yet today, Washoe people attempt to reverse that change.

Turning it Around.

“You have to survive but you still have to hold on to what you are,” says Roach. She and

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

her granddaughter Majesta Roach are regular students of the *WWM* and they are doing their part to learn the Washoe language and reverse the shift. I asked Roach if she felt English was a predatory language. After laugh and a chuckle, Roach admits, “I’ve never thought of *that*! Yeah... it kills the others. But it's the language of money too.” Her analysis reflects the literal currency of the English language. A currency used in the settler world and one that is still highly valued today. I wondered if the old mentality still exists, that, Washoe people are not taught Washoe for the sake of living in an English world. That was a harder question for the two to answer, which suggests that maybe in some respects that preconditioned notion still exists. In the end, however, both grandmother and granddaughter nodded their heads, agreed it has changed.

It is quite evident that the Washoe people have been subjected to the transaction of colonization. This notion of “transaction” is used to convey the exchange and replacement of aboriginal tribal values. Washoe values of kinship, cultural practices, home life and language were subjected to replacement. The Washoe language that once proliferated in and out of the Washoe home became repressed. The currency of the English language became a beneficial tool and was perceived as more valuable than Washoe.

Unquestionably, institutions of settler colonialism like Stewart Indian School not only affected Washoe children during the time they attended, but also influenced their years thereafter. Generations of Washoe people suffered a linguistic trauma that is felt in Washoe individuals and families today. Down family lineages, Washoe people were forced to speak English, or discouraged from speaking their heritage language. Settler society enforced English as a valued currency, and Washoe was set for elimination. Thus echoing Patrick Wolfe’s definition of invasion—a structure not an event.⁶⁰ As such, these schools reinforced western

⁶⁰ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (New York: Routledge 2006) 388.

structures and western linguistic values for future generations. Proliferation of Washoe culture, tradition and language became difficult, however, not all is lost. To echo Rakow, “Now we've got to turn that around.”⁶¹ And the Washoe community is working on that.

In the failed project of colonialism, Indigenous communities have been able to maintain and preserve their traditional ways. The very presence of the *WWM* is a testament to this fact. The Washoe community has accomplished important and valuable language revitalization work and has continued on this path. The following sections will prove just how far the community has come. While the rhetoric of language endangerment is a useful tool to call forth for language revitalization it is dangerous concept for a community to internalize. Indigenous communities must not co-opt these notions for fear of accepting “eventual” language death. This contributes to the vanishing trope of Indigenous people and allows the surrounding society to accept concocted images, fragmented histories or simulations of Native people.⁶² Instead, I call for a rhetoric of survivance, that is scholar Gerald Vizenor’s term that works to mediate and undermine the narratives of dominance and in this case language death.⁶³ Survivance in this case is the survival and proliferation of the Washoe language. Moving past these invented simulations, are stories of survivance, hope within a community and ways to see beyond the discourse of settler colonialism. The *WWM* and the Washoe people accomplish this with their language efforts by affording new and old generations the opportunity to *Wa:šiw gewgayáy?* (Speak Washoe).

⁶¹ Melba Rakow Interview.

⁶² Gerald Robert Vizenor *Manifest Manners Postindian Warriors and Survivance* (Hanover, VA: Wesleyan Univ., 1993) 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 8.

Section 3.

*hélmeʔ*⁶⁴

Little has been done academically in the way of research on Washoe language revitalization. The majority of work on the language was conducted for documentation purposes to enrich linguistic knowledge. Trained anthropologists first investigated the Washoe tribe just after the turn of the twentieth century. Aside from a few researchers in the mid-twentieth century, the Washoe remained absent from the scope of academia. One of the biggest achievements of this period, however, is the *Washo Grammar*, a dissertation completed in 1964 and written by William H. Jacobsen, Jr.. This grammar is the essential resource of Washoe language material. It also includes a standard Washoe orthography—a writing system—that utilizes symbols found in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).⁶⁵ It is geared towards advanced linguistic students and is not suitable (or at least is difficult to interpret) for the novice or beginner student. Because of this academic approach, the material is inaccessible to emergent Washoe speakers.

Furthermore, *Washo Grammar* is a linguistically oriented description that is not designed for language learners. Many sections of his grammar indicate only one form of a given sentence. For example, it is easy to find the Washoe sentence for “I’m crying” but no further statements such as “S/He’s crying,” “They’re crying,” or “It is crying.” While this piece is foundational, it is very helpful to work with a trained linguist to understand the technical terms. Currently the *Washiw Wagayay Manal* employs only certain portions of Jacobsen’s grammar. In the classroom, his orthography is loosely used by some of the instructors, often with some amendments.

⁶⁴ “Three” in the Washoe language.

⁶⁵ For more information on IPA, please visit the International Phonetic Association’s website: <http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/index.html>.

After four decades after his first contribution, Jacobsen once introduced another vital tool. *Beginning Washo*, published in 1996 with the intent to actually teach the Washoe language to eager tribal members and serious scholars. Jacobsen worked with tribal elders to create twenty-two lessons for the beginning student. This small book brings to life elements of *Washo Grammar* that were difficult to decipher for novices. Jacobsen wrote lessons in this book that he later taught to Washoe language students on the Washoe reservation. This creation of *Beginning Washo* coincides with the short yet successful run of the *WWM*'s language immersion school. Some of the material from this work is still used in classes today. While a very helpful tool for language learners, *Beginning Washo* is a difficult book to find. To this day the book is published by the Nevada State Museum in Carson City and only printed in small batches. Gene Hattori, Curator of Anthropology at the museum informed me when I purchased the last copy of *Beginning Washo* that he anticipated a new production of books to assist with the *WWM* language program.

In 2005, Charles Wilkinson examined Washoe language revitalization in *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations*. In this brief analysis, former Chairman Brian Wallace is quoted saying, “Whatever the future of *Washiw Wagayay Manjal* may be, it started a movement across the whole tribe. It showed us the cliff we were about to go over.”⁶⁶ The cliff Wallace refers to is the death of the Washoe language. In language revitalization efforts, time is of the essence. Linguist Marianne Mithun calls this the “significance of the moment.”⁶⁷ In this moment, the Washoe have made a choice—they have decided to proactively preserve and rejuvenate their language.

⁶⁶ Wilkinson, Charles F. *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations*. New York: Norton, 2005, 367. Print.

⁶⁷ Mithun, Marianne. "The Significance of Diversity in Language Endangerment and Preservation." *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*. By Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley. Cambridge [England: Cambridge UP, 1998, 163. Print.

Chairman Brian Wallace served the Washoe Tribe from 1990 to 2006. His sixteen-year term marked the beginning of the *WWM* language program and immersion school. Wilkinson notes that Chairman Wallace was an “intellectual” and an advocate for language preservation.⁶⁸ In the nineties when the language school opened its doors, Wallace took part in the language classes. He pressed for the Washoe immersion school, making provisions of financial support and congressional appropriations.⁶⁹

Unfortunately, due to lack of funding and infrastructure the tribe had to suspend the immersion school in 2003. The *WWM* however continued to offer language classes for children and elders. Wallace reports that despite the school's closure, the language effort spread beyond the school to the communities. These communities have their own gatherings, what Wallace calls “language circles.” Elders and other fluent in Washoe tutor children after they get home from the public schools. They use the materials from the language program but, as Wallace puts it, “it's gone way beyond any institution.”⁷⁰ When asked about the tribe's now persistent effort of language preservation, Wallace proposed,

Language repatriation has become a kind of natural thing. Now we know that we can think the way our ancestors thought only if we have the language. Now we know that the land is a caregiver, but we must be caretakers of the land and we can do that only if we speak the language of the land, *Washiw*.⁷¹

Since Brian Wallace's chairmanship and the end of the immersion school, the language program had been on a fairly steady decline. However, in the last years the community has witnessed an energy and enthusiasm around language revitalization. And with the support of academic involvement there have been new strides to advance language resources.

⁶⁸ Wilkinson, Charles F. *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations*. New York: Norton, 2005, 365. Print.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 367.

After a decade's hiatus of Washoe language materials, 2007 marked the start of the Washo Project, from Alan Yu of the University of Chicago, which created the Washo Project website, a comprehensive multimedia documentation tool. The website hosts the first ever Washoe Dictionary and an Introduction to the Washoe language. The English to Washoe and Washoe to English dictionary includes morphological analysis and vital pronunciation voice clips. If a student wants to hear how to pronounce “*hàmuʔáŋawi*” or “he is happy,” they can do so with the click of a button. This dictionary is a dynamic teaching tool that offers more than just words in a book.

The ultimate goal of the project is to produce a reference grammar and increase the accessibility of the Washoe language for community members and scholars. While the Washo Project has existed for about four years, only recently have Yu and his team come to Nevada to teach community members how to use the website and dictionary. The website is quite intuitive, but some Washoe community members might suffer from a technological learning lag or lack access to Internet altogether. Needless to say, some elders may have difficulty navigating a digital dictionary. The project does, however, provide much promise for future generations of Washoe language learners.

The major success of the Washo Project is the continued collaboration between the tribe and linguists. In fall of 2010, Yu and his team joined students for a language summit at Meeks Bay in Lake Tahoe. Each monthly installment of the *Wá biba úm múše eš gi*⁷² Washoe Tribal Newsletter has a dedicated section to the language program's activities and updates. When possible, Yu visits Nevada to collaborate with tribal members and improve the learning curve. Recent newsletters report that he has assisted with lesson plans, monitoring students' progress

⁷² “Read it here,” in the Washoe language. A name change that started in December of 2010 with a new Chairship.

and making class more interesting.⁷³

Tribally developed language tools are fairly limited, with the exception of a few recent efforts. In 2007, the *WWM* created the first of a few language CDs to be made available to tribal members everywhere. In the monthly newsletter tribal members are regularly informed about the language CDs and encouraged to call the language program to receive a mailed copy. The CDs are a wonderful addition to the existing resources and work proactively to get the language tools out to Washoe homes on and off reservation. I will further examine these tools in section five. These small efforts demonstrate the language program's ability to adapt and improve resources.

Features of the Washoe Language.

Linguists have considered the Washoe language to be a member of several different linguistic “stocks” or families. J.W. Powell regarded Washoe a family all on its own, Washoan.⁷⁴ Edward Sapir included Washoe in a larger group, the Hokan stock, part of the Hokan – Siouan super stock.⁷⁵ Drs. C.F. and F.M. Voegelin also classified the language as a Hokan, which they regarded as a phylum in its own right.⁷⁶ The later classification is indicative of the fact that Washoe is considered to be a linguistic isolate. This means it does not necessarily descend from an ancestor common with any other language. Furthermore, nearly a century ago, it was established that Washoe is of a distinct linguistic family completely unrelated to those of the territory's surrounding tribes.⁷⁷ Contemporaneously, this analysis is upheld.

⁷³ “Tribal Talk” Washoe Tribal Newsletter, November 2010 edition.

⁷⁴ Boas, Franz and John Wesley. Powell. *Introduction to the Handbook of American Indian Languages. Indian Linguistic Families of America North of Mexico / J.W. Powell*. Lincoln, Neb.: Univ. of Nebraska Pr., 1966, Print.

⁷⁵ “Central and North American Languages”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th. ed.; reprinted in *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir*, ed. by D. G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1949).

⁷⁶ Voegelin, C. F., and F. M. Voegelin. *Classification and Index of the World's Languages*. New York: Elsevier, 1977, Print.

⁷⁷ S.A. Barrett, *Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee: The Washo Indians* (Milwaukee: Order of the Trustees 1917), 5.

Dialect.

According to Jacobsen's dissertation, the Washoe language has minimal dialectal differences and there is no clearly delineated boundary of speech types.⁷⁸ This is to say that while there are some differences in terms used for identical objects and concepts, the tribe is culturally and linguistically quite uniform. Essentially, Jacobsen's claim is correct, but many Washoe today would argue that there are definitely a dialectal differences. Additionally, there is a geographical boundary that demarcates a region where speakers demonstrate a “Southern Washoe” dialect. In traditional times, the Washoe were divided into three main regional communities. The furthest south was and is referred to as the *Hung a lel ti* (or southern people).⁷⁹ Those well south of Carson City, like the Woodfords community, are known to speak Washoe a little differently, emphasizing “th” sounds in their speech. This would also include communities even further south of Woodfords. Certainly, this is not to say that language learners and speakers are predisposed to a kind of dialect, but their speech patterns will reflect the dialect of their instructor or home life.

In the early 1990s, the late Marvin Dressler—a Southern Washoe—taught Washoe language classes to the community. His work is particularly memorable to current *WWM* student, Lavina “Boo Boo” Roach. Roach still has copies of Dressler's handouts and worksheets from 1992 when he taught her then adolescent daughters. She can recognize his work on account of the dialectal differences, “There's the 'th.' Here's 'bird.' He writes *thithu* and we say *sí:su*. So I think this is a Southern Washoe.” She laughs about the dialectal differences, “They say *bomthi* for sugar, and we say *bámci!*”⁸⁰ This form of Washoe is referred to as Southern Washoe, or

⁷⁸ Jacobsen Jr., William H. "A Grammar of the Washo Language." Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1964, 5 Print.

⁷⁹ Jo Ann Nevers, *Wa She Shu: A Washo Tribal History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Printing Press 1976), 8.

⁸⁰ Lavina Roach Interview.

sometimes in fun, “Woodfords talk.”⁸¹

Sounds and Typical Aspects of Washoe.

According to Jacobsen's grammar, there are six distinct vowel qualities in Washoe and vowels may be distinctly short or long.⁸² The following vocabulary words are written in Jacobsen's orthography and demonstrate the short and long vowel sounds found in Washoe.

Sounds of the Washoe Language – Figure 2.

	Short	Long
i	dílek - 'mallard duck'	c'í:bel - 'louse'
e	pélew - 'rabbit'	t'é:liwlu - 'man'
a	gális - 'winter'	wá:laš - 'bread'
o	gót'aha - 'break it!'	gó:beʔ - 'coffee'
u	súkuʔ - 'dog'	c'igú:guš - 'stomach'
ɨ	p'íʔliyi - 'he is fishing'	mí:de - 'brown bear'

The orthography Jacobsen developed includes a number of characters to represent the many sounds of the Washoe language.⁸³ The following (Figure 3) is a list of the phonemes and their occurrence in the language. This is an unpublished chart that Jacobsen gave to me at our interview. He intends to include this updated detail in a second version of *Beginning Washo*.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Mischelle Dressler Interview.

⁸² For the entirety of the “sounds.” section I have deferred to the categorization as detailed in *Beginning Washo* and reprinted on the Washo Project website.

⁸³ To learn more about the specifics of the Washoe language, see Jacobsen's *Washoe Grammar* or visit washo.uchicago.edu

⁸⁴ Jacobsen Interview.

Washoe Phonemes – Figure 3.

WASHO PHONEMES						
<u>Consonants</u>	labial	apical	apical affricate	frontal	velar	glottal
stops						
voiceless	p	t			k	ʔ
voiced	b	d	ʒ		g	
glottalized	p̚	t̚	ʒ̚		k̚	
fricatives, voiceless			s	ʃ		h
nasal resonants						
voiceless	M				ŋ	
voiced	m	n			ɳ	
glottalized	m̚	n̚			ɳ̚	
oral resonants						
voiceless	W	L		Y		
voiced	w	l		y		
glottalized	w̚	l̚		y̚		
<u>Vowels</u>	front unrounded		central unrounded		back rounded	
high	i		ɨ		u	
mid	e				o	
low			a			
<u>Stress</u>	strong:		written over vowels: ́ í ı́ ú é ó á			
	weak:		(unmarked)			
<u>Length</u>	written after vowels:		ı́ ı́' u' e' o' a'			
<u>Intonation</u>	sustained:		,			
	fading:		.			

Washoe’s “Typical” Elements.

W.O. Bright's Encyclopedia Britannica article from 1974 reviews many “typical” aspects of American Indian languages.⁸⁵ The Washoe language demonstrates quite a few of these traits. Washoe makes use of affixation (the use of prefixes and suffixes, etc.). Washoe uses prefixes on verbs to indicate subject and also possessor. See Figure 4. For example, in the first part of the table below, we can see that the root words in Washoe have attached a prefix to indicate a person is happy. The words are essentially the same, yet the addition of *di* to *hàmuʔáŋawi* differentiates between the meanings “he” and “I” are happy. An example of possession can be found in the phrase *láŋal*, “my house” where *l* = first person possession + *áŋal* = house. Similarly *máŋal* means “your house” where *m* = second person possession + *áŋal* = house.

Additionally, suffixes indicate tense. *Lémeklegi* in Washoe breaks down to *le* (I) – *imek* (cough) – *leg-i* (recent past). Bright also finds many American Indian languages demonstrate reduplication or the repetition of all or part of a stem. Such is the case in both of the Washoe examples below. Finally, Washoe uses a glottal stop, another typical characteristic. For the purposes of this thesis I will refrain from examining atypical aspects of the Washoe language.

Typical Aspects Cited by Bright – Figure 4.

	Washoe
Prefixes indicate person and number	Hàmuʔáŋawi = He is happy dihàmuwáŋawi = I am happy
Prefixes indicate possession	láŋal = my house máŋal = your house
Suffixes indicate tense	Lémeklegi = I coughed
Reduplication associated with plural nouns	súkuʔ= dog sukúkuʔ = dogs

⁸⁵ Bright, William O. “North American Indian Languages,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Macropaedia*, 15th ed., vol. 13, 1974.

Glottal stop is a common consonant	Haʔwáʔwaʔ = eight
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On the Subject of Orthographies.

An orthography is a standardized writing system for representing the contrastive sounds of a language. Typically, an orthography includes spelling rules and sometimes punctuation and capitalization standards. When Jacobsen started his Washoe research, he relied on a phonetic transcription linguists commonly use. While I refer to his approach as “Jacobsen's orthography,” the linguist himself does not attempt to take credit; “It's perfectly standard...I hardly developed it.”⁸⁶ Certainly, Jacobsen did not develop the symbols; however, the symbols he did choose to use are based on his analysis of the language and what he felt were appropriate symbols to represent Washoe. The following is a list of phonetic symbols Jacobsen uses to write the Washoe language.

Washoe Short Vowels: a, e, i, o, u, ɪ

Washoe Long Vowels: a:, e:, i:, o:, u:, i:

Washoe Consonants: b, d, g, p, t, k, p', t', k', c', s, z, š, h, m, n, ŋ, l, w, y, ɳ, M, L, W, Y, ʔ

The written Washoe language as Jacobsen writes it uses many unfamiliar symbols. Many of these spellings appear to look or sound “foreign” when compared to common English spelling. However, to echo Jacobsen's statement, they are perfectly standard for linguists and represent familiar sounds. For example, the š letter refers to the sound written as “sh” in the English language. While the letter appears to be quite different, the sound itself is the same as that in English or Romance languages like Portuguese. As an example we can take one of the many words used to convey the aboriginal term for Washoe people, “*Wa:šiw*.” The word nearly

⁸⁶ Jacobsen Interview.

matches, the Anglicized pronunciation of “Washoe.” The : symbol indicates vowel lengthening,⁸⁷ representing a prolonged “a” sound—“Waa-shiw.” Another symbol from Jacobsen's orthography is η, which represents the sound written “ng” in English, which you can find in the word “tongue.” This same sound and symbol can be found among other Native languages such as Dakota and Māori.

Orthographies: A Source of Contention.

While Jacobsen's orthography is “perfectly standard,” the Washoe community is divided on whether or not to use it. In fact, some classes of the *WWM* do not use the system and opt for a different orthography. These orthography factions are nothing new or secretive. In fact, many students from the *WWM* classes are quite vocal about their distaste for Jacobsen's orthography. They do not feel the need to have the language represented in the linguistic fashion. Melba's student Roach declared, “We're trying to produce more speakers. We're not trying to justify our language to the linguistic world. I'm totally against it.”⁸⁸ The alternative is a syllabic based orthography developed and taught by *WWM* teacher, Melba Rakow. Community members often refer to this method as “phonetic.” Overwhelmingly, those who support the syllabic orthography feel that Jacobsen's grammar does not capture the “flow” of the language. Perhaps this refers to particular intonation or the movement of the language from the mouth. The general sentiment is that the language should be accessible for community members and not necessarily for linguists.

Rakow's syllabic orthography differs significantly from Jacobsen's grammar. For an example, in Jacobsen's orthography, the Washoe word for “now” would be written as *wádiη*. In Rakow's orthography, the same word would be written as *waa-ding*. Further, “I am” or *lé?i* is written as *leh-aye*. On one occasion in Rakow's Thursday class, a student proclaimed, “It's

⁸⁷ As examined in Table 1.

⁸⁸ Lavina Roach Interview.

easier that way. Jacobsen's way, you have to learn all of the characters."⁸⁹

The Issue of Heterographia.

There are clear disagreements about representing Washoe sounds in a written language. In certain communities this functions well. In others, this can be dangerous. When one community with a shared single language opts for multiple orthographies, there is a potential for issues. In their analysis on the Kiowa language, Neely and Palmer refer to the multitude of orthographies as "heterographia." According to these scholars, about 10 – 20 highly fluent speakers speak Kiowa and the community has produced about six overlapping yet distinct writing systems. Exclusively academic institutions utilize some of the systems. The University of Oklahoma has used the Parker McKenzie orthography since 1992 and the Anadarko High School has used an English based orthography since 1990.

According to Paul Kroskrity, this heterographia phenomenon "poses a real challenge" to effective language revitalization. Under the present Kiowa system, "the language is not fulfilling an intratribal, intergenerational communicative function for the larger heritage community."⁹⁰ That is to say, with the multiple orthographies, potential intergenerational communication is limited and perhaps inaccessible to the larger Kiowa community. The orthographies may be quite useful on the local level but can pose a challenge to the whole community of (potential) language learners. Certainly, some orthographies have their particular strengths and weaknesses, however the issue almost always affects the language learner. If the student does not understand the written system, they might be discouraged from learning. If this is the case, then they must simply be taught how to read the orthography. It would be hard to imagine one Kiowa language

⁸⁹ Stewart *WWM* Class.

⁹⁰ Kroskrity, Paul V. "Language Renewal as Sites of Language Ideological Struggle: The Need for 'Ideological Clarification'." *Indigenous Language Revitalization [electronic Resource]: Encouragement, Guidance & Lessons Learned*. By Jon Allan. Reyhner and Louise Lockard. Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University, 2009. 71-83. Print.

learner attempting to absorb six different styles of orthographies to learn one language. Kroskrity notes that in the Kiowa case, the root of the issue can be addressed with ideological clarifications. In this particular case, that would mean beginning a discussion in which those invested in these distinct orthographies can learn to understand the problems language learners face when attempting to gain literacy. With ideological clarification, the community can work towards a compromise solution.

Thankfully, the Washoe heterographia ends at two systems, not six as in the Kiowa case. And while ideological clarifications are certainly helpful, in the community it seems that each writing system will be fought to the maintained. Perhaps the ultimate solution then, is a compromise. I will discuss this issue in section six.

Section 4.

*háʔwaʔ*⁹¹

In my research, it was crucial that I speak with the foundational Washoe language scholar, William H. Jacobsen, Jr., whose linguistic work on Washoe began in the 1950s. I was happy to speak with Jacobsen about his linguistic research and his thoughts on Washoe language revitalization. I interviewed Jacobsen in his home in Reno, Nevada.

As a child, Jacobsen was intrigued by the field of philology, the study of language in written historical sources.⁹² When he enrolled at Harvard University as an undergraduate in 1949, Jacobsen explored his interests and became a student of Linguistics and Romance Languages. In the summers of his junior and senior years, Jacobsen attended the Linguistics Institute at Indiana University. There he learned about UC Berkeley's newly formed Survey of California Indian Languages. The survey was set up informally in 1949 and on January 1, 1953, it was permanently established and still functions today.⁹³ Jacobsen began his work on Washoe in the mid-1950s. Mary Haas directed the Survey of California Indian Languages at that time. The program focused on documentation of languages, particularly those that had been inadequately researched or illustrated.⁹⁴ While some language work by Great Basin scholars like Kroeber and Dangberg existed, there was only little linguistic work prior to Jacobsen's research.⁹⁵ When I questioned Jacobsen as to why he chose to research Washoe, he declared,

⁹¹ "Four" in the Washoe language.

⁹² University of Nevada Oral History Program. "William Jacobsen Jr." *UNOHP Home Page*. University of Nevada Oral History Program, 2007. Web. 02 Apr. 2012. <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/research_jacobsen.asp>.

⁹³ "History of the Survey." *History - "Survey of California and Other Indian Languages"*. Survey of California and Other Indian Languages, 1 Jan. 2009. Web. 17 Mar. 2012. <<http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/~survey/about-us/history.php>>.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ For further information on other Washoe language resources, visit <http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/~survey/languages/washo.php>.

“Well, probably because it hadn't been done yet.”⁹⁶ Indeed, at the time, there was no linguistic research comparable to Jacobsen's. No other Washoe grammar exists and Jacobsen's work is regarded as the first scholarly source for Washoe language.

Jacobsen began his work in June of 1955. He stayed all summer long and continued his work in the summer months of 1956 and finally 1958. For contacts, Jacobsen relied on fellow Washoe scholar and anthropologist Stanley Freed. Freed had worked in the Washoe community years before and had connections with elders like Bertha Holbrook, Hank Pete and Nancy Emm.⁹⁷ The first person Jacobsen interviewed was Hank Pete. As Jacobsen reported, “Some turned me down.”⁹⁸

For those who did participate in Jacobsen's research, some Washoe people believe they did it to preserve and proliferate the Washoe language. By the 1950s, generations of Washoe children were well into decades of schooling at Indian Boarding schools that prohibited Indian languages. Likely, Washoe was not the only language spoken in the household. In fact, English was probably the language most families used. Perhaps this is the reason why elders who worked with Jacobsen allowed him to record their words, songs and stories.⁹⁹ Washoe tribal member Benny Fillmore explained to me that Jacobsen interviewed his great-grandmother while conducting his research. Fillmore reflects on the elder's agency to participate and preserve the Washoe language, “They did that for a reason, so it would be passed on.”¹⁰⁰ Perhaps even then Washoe elders took language revitalization into their own hands. In any case, as we will learn, the elders did in fact have a great deal of agency (and still do) in regards to language activism

⁹⁶ Jacobsen Interview.

⁹⁷ "Stanley Freed." *UNOHP Home Page*. Ed. University of Nevada, Reno. University of Nevada, Reno, 1 Jan. 2007. Web. 18 Mar. 2012. <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/research_freed.asp>.

⁹⁸ Jacobsen Interview.

⁹⁹ For access to archives, visit UC Berkeley's California Language Archive: http://cla.berkeley.edu/collection/10058?tab=description&search_within_string=.

¹⁰⁰ Benny Fillmore Interview.

and saving the Washoe language.

Community Language Work.

The *Washiw Wagayay Manjal* has a decades-long history of language research and renewal efforts by individuals and groups. While these efforts may be only distantly related to the program that exists today, they are nonetheless foundational to today's endeavors. This section will declare the history or genealogy of the language and recognize the roots of today's program.

As explained in the previous Section, much of today's language efforts are based in the phonetic writing system and grammar established by William H. Jacobsen, Jr.. On account of his expertise, community members sometimes sought his involvement in later programs. This would not always be the case. Washoe language instruction began in the fall semester of 1965 at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR).¹⁰¹ It was Jacobsen's first semester teaching at UNR and he was encouraged to teach the Washoe course by well-known Washoe historian Warren L. d'Azevedo.¹⁰² Just over a decade later, in 1976, Jacobsen incorporated Washoe into a Linguistic Field Methods course at UNR.¹⁰³ These classes were separate from the Washoe community and Tribally initiated programs and, it is likely that they were not offered in the interest of language or cultural revitalization. I asked Jacobsen about whether or not he ever anticipated his work would stimulate revitalization. Jacobsen frankly responded, "Well, not at first." He explained that he wrote and researched his work for linguists, which remains his "main interest, still." He suggests that if he had not done the work, then perhaps someone else might have. He finishes his

¹⁰¹ Jacobsen, William H. *Beginning Washo*. Ed. Donald R. Tuohy. 5th ed. Carson City, NV: Nevada State Museum, 2003. Print. Nevada State Museum, Occasional Papers.

¹⁰² Jacobsen Interview.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

answer with, “well there's nothing like *Beginning Washo*.”¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵ Indeed, there is not.

Tribally initiated language revitalization efforts begin in the June of 1979. It is difficult to determine if such efforts existed in prior years. Perhaps they did on a local level by families. During that summer, under the direction of the Tribe's educational coordinator, Jacobsen was hired to teach Washoe language classes. For about two months, two nights a week, Jacobsen taught a Washoe language class at the Washoe Tribal Office near Dresslerville.¹⁰⁶ The first lessons of his book *Beginning Washo* were written for use in this class.¹⁰⁷ Jacobsen instructed about six faithful students in this two-month-long class.¹⁰⁸ That small but significant effort marks the beginning of the tribe's official language revitalization endeavors. Nearly a decade later, in 1986, Loren Simpson taught a class at UNR. A small class followed this course in the fall of 1992. As these classes progressed, Jacobsen continued to add to his lessons that later become *Beginning Washo*.

It is not clear why Washoe language revitalization movements were so sporadic, but nearly two decades after the first ever Washoe language class, tribal elders took language instruction into their own hands. In the early 1990s, elder and community member Marvin Dressler began to teach Washoe to the community. Dressler taught the classes with the help of a young relative and used his own kind of orthography or writing system.¹⁰⁹

Revitalization work truly developed in the early nineties after Dressler's work. The result was the creation of the *Washiw Wagayay Manjal (WWM)* language program or “The house where

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ During our interview, Jacobsen expressed interest in publishing a second, update edition of *Beginning Washo*.

¹⁰⁶ Jacobsen, William H. *Beginning Washo*. Ed. Donald R. Tuohy. 5th ed. Carson City, NV: Nevada State Museum, 2003. Print. Nevada State Museum, Occasional Papers.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Jacobsen Interview.

¹⁰⁹ Jacobsen Interview.

Washoe is spoken.”¹¹⁰ Language classes at the *WWM* were a kind of practice ground for Washoe language instruction and later immersion. Within a few years time, the *WWM* began a six-year language immersion program. Nevertheless, this did not happen overnight.

A History of the Washoe Immersion School.

During my research visits, numerous individuals recommend that I speak with a woman named Laura Fillmore who was promised to have a full history of the once thriving immersion school. On my final spring trip to the community, I finally spoke with Fillmore and interviewed her along side her husband Benny in their home on the reservation. In our interview, I learned more about the Washoe Immersion School than has ever been written. I learned that much of Fillmore’s drive to learn and foster the Washoe language derived from her love for her children, “I’m realizing that from a working class and rural farm background in Missouri, I can teach my kids a lot—but I don't know anything about their culture and I realize.. that there's a lack of identity among young people...so I wanted to be able to address that with my own children so, they could have a choice.”¹¹¹

The choice that Fillmore afforded her children contributed to numerous Washoe youth in the late 90s. The Washoe Immersion School grew from years of community development and gathering of language revitalization resources. It became a reality in 1997 and served countless Washoe students who learned Math, English and history all in Washoe. These students connected with their heritage and were given the opportunity to embrace Washoe culture. The school was an advanced immersion education that had it continued could potentially have rivaled current Native Hawaiian and Blackfeet language programs. Though it was a successful program, the school ultimately fell to infighting and political issues among the Washoe community. The

¹¹⁰ Wilkinson, Charles F. *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations*. New York: Norton, 2005, 365, Print.

¹¹¹ Laura Fillmore Interview.

Washoe Immersion School ended in 2003, but its legacy is tangible today.

In the fall of 1993, future language activist Laura Fillmore was a student at UNR, writing term papers on Indigenous language immersion and language renewal. Fillmore, a non-native woman, lived on the reservation with her future husband and Washoe tribal member Benny Fillmore and their children. Fillmore had only been on the reservation a few years when she began to contemplate how the community might save the Washoe language. These term papers Fillmore was writing were a catalyst to the communal discussion on Washoe language revitalization. They served as foundation to what would become the Washoe Immersion School. One particular paper addressed the problem of, as she put it, “Who is this *dabó?o* (white person) and what does she want with us?”¹¹² This paper expressed Fillmore's desire to start an immersion school in the community. She looked at the work of successful and effective language revitalization efforts: Māori language nests, Darrell Kipp's Moccasin Flat School for Blackfoot language and even Ukrainian language programs. Fillmore distributed this final paper to community members who never quite articulated their thoughts or opinions on the piece. But by the spring of next year, the community had a chance to speak.

On February 4, 1994, there was a community meeting on language in Dresslerville. A total of 73 community members signed in and voiced their opinions about saving the Washoe language.¹¹³ Laura's husband Benny Fillmore remembers the strength of support, “[E]verybody was for language—we had *a lot* of backing.”¹¹⁴ And support they did have. Community members and elders in particular were passionate about doing what they could to save the language. Many who attended the meeting gave their testimony on the issue. Fillmore recalls a moving statement made by the late Goldie Bryan, “I just know one thing, if all these white people out here had only

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹¹⁴ Benny Fillmore Interview.

Indian teachers, they'd all rise up and want their own teachers and they would never stand for that, so why are we standing for it when we have so much to lose?"¹¹⁵ Fillmore says the energy and Bryan's declaration were nothing short of "awesome."¹¹⁶

Making Immersion a Reality.

After the community meeting, the Fillmores and elders along with other language activists began to tap into language resources. To honor all those who were involved in the process, I will refer to the collective group as the "Washoe Advocates" or what Jacobsen refers to as the Washoe Language Circle.¹¹⁷ That summer of 1994, the Washoe Advocates began to work with Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival (AICLS). AICLS is a Native run and led non-profit that formed in 1992. Its mission is to assist California Indian communities and individuals in keeping their languages alive.¹¹⁸ The AICLS Board emphasizes the goal of developing new speakers while also recognizing the importance of documentation. Its programming includes the Breath of Life Workshop, the Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program (MALLP) and the Language is Life biennial conference, to name a few.¹¹⁹ At the first ever Language is Life conference, the Washoe Advocates met a range of fellow language enthusiasts. Organizers from Hawaii's *'Aha Pūnana Leo* attended and brought along native speakers and those who had learned Hawaiian as a second language. At the conference Fillmore met a Yowlumne mother and son language team, Matt and Agnes Vera.¹²⁰ The two had successfully participated in the first round of AICLS' MALLP.

¹¹⁵ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Jacobsen, William H. *Beginning Washo*. Ed. Donald R. Tuohy. 5th ed. Carson City, NV: Nevada State Museum, 2003. Print. Nevada State Museum, Occasional Papers.

¹¹⁸ AICLS. "Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival." *Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival*. AICLS. Web. 19 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.aicls.org/>>.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Laura Fillmore Interview.

Through the course of the MALLP, the Veras developed methods to assist with Yowlumne language learning. Matt and his mother watched TV together with the sound off and added conversations in Yowlumne. He sometimes drove around in the car listening to his mother speak to him in Yowlumne, commenting on what she saw, never reverting to English. Their methods would grow to strengthen the MALLP and form the foundation for Hinton, Vera and Steele's book *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-on-One Language Learning*.¹²¹

The Fillmores and Vera became fast friends. To say he was an inspiration to the group would be an understatement. As I chatted with the Fillmores at their dinning room table, Laura fought back tears when she talked about Matt, “He was completely *fluent*. It was awesome.....he was just so genuine.”¹²² She was proud to say that he had visited the immersion school twice. As she cried, Fillmore explained that Matt had passed away in a car accident some years after. *How to Keep Your Language Alive* is dedicated to Matt's memory and declares “we miss him sorely.”¹²³ Despite the loss of their good friend, the Washoe Advocates continued their work with AICLES to gain the resources they needed to revitalize the Washoe language.

Washoe Community Language Classes.

That summer of 1994, the group of Washoe Advocates began to hold language classes three times a week in three communities, Woodfords, Dresslerville and Carson City. In the beginning, the classes were somewhat rough. Fillmore recollects the casual environment, “It started with Sylvia Andrews, sitting there. We would ask questions [like] how do you say

¹²¹ Hinton, Leanne, Matt Vera, and Nancy Steele. *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-on-one Language Learning*. Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2002. Print.

¹²² Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, xii.

strawberry?”¹²⁴ Fillmore explains that sometimes, native speakers had difficulty remembering the words they once knew so well. After she realized the word for strawberry escaped her, Andrews responded, “I’ll tell you in a week ‘cause it’s going to come to me!”¹²⁵ Sure enough, as Benny Fillmore recalls, “next week you would see her and she would have that word.”¹²⁶

In the classes, students and staff would create language lists for plants and animals and gather as much Washoe information they could. They sought information from Jacobsen's dissertation and relied on existing Washoe language research. Fillmore remembers the struggle of those first years, “it was like *digging* it up.”¹²⁷ However, within time as elders got used to speaking more frequently and as teachers and learners developed together, the program would grow. Elder Adele James was involved at the time and brought along her sister Kathy Pete. Reportedly, Kathy was the first speaker produced that learned “solely by ear,” where no written materials were used.¹²⁸

During the infancy of these months, Fillmore was an organizer in creating and implementing renewal as well as a student of the Washoe language. At the time she made a personal and conscious decision not to write anything down for the first year. When she did write, she attempted to do so in Jacobsen's orthography to the best of her ability. Fillmore would later be a student of William Jacobsen's at UNR and would visit him regularly to correct her work.¹²⁹

Funding and Washoe Master Apprentices.

As the revitalization work progressed, Fillmore caught what she calls “language fever”—

¹²⁴ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Benny Fillmore Interview.

¹²⁷ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

a burning desire to learn and save the Washoe language.¹³⁰ With her background Fillmore sought resources that would actualize the community's goal of revitalization. The first step in that direction was to secure funding. In 1994, Fillmore and the Washoe Advocates, started to prepare for a substantial federal grant from the Administration for Native Americans (ANA). To ready themselves for the grant application and to gauge the community's needs, the group conducted a language survey following ANA guidelines. Washoe Advocates went door to door in the community to gather responses. Their efforts were well received and the group was able to secure \$250,000 in the first of many ANA grants. This first grant was later managed by the tribal grants coordinator and did not fare as well as future grants. As the language classes progressed, the group worked to secure another source of funding to support true immersion efforts.¹³¹

In December of 1994, the group had secured funding from AICLS to run their own Washoe MALLP. The program financially supports individuals so they may work with a native speaker as dedicatedly as possible. Benny Fillmore teamed up with his uncle Herman Holbrook and Goldie Bryan teamed up with a woman from Woodfords. Kathy Pete and Adele James were another team. During our interview, Fillmore switched to Washoe as she tried to remember the names of all of those who participated in the first round of Washoe MALLP. It was as though our conversation brought up vivid memories of immersion.¹³²

Community Language Programming.

Around 1995, Fillmore and the Washoe Advocates began to get more creative. They applied for funds from a series of foundations including the Nevada Humanities Grants. That particular foundation funds projects that promote community through various forms of engagement and projects that encourage conversation. The project the Washoe Advocates had in

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹³² *Ibid.*

mind was called Elders Telling Stories. It was exactly that—inviting elders to speak to one another in Washoe and tell stories. Some stories were traditional Washoe creation stories, while others were translated stories. That year they were awarded the funding and embarked on a unique media based project. Elders and the Fillmores, along with the Washoe Advocates, met at Merrill Gardens, an assisted living facility in Dresslerville, NV. As the elders got comfortable with conversation, Fillmore filmed the Elder Telling Stories sessions and transcribed them. She worked with Jacobsen to ensure spelling and proper use of his orthography. While working on the project, Fillmore reflected on the demise of Washoe stories: “With electricity and radio, Washoes stopped telling their stories.”¹³³ As a result of this phenomenon, some elders only knew the beginning or ending of a story, so the group had to actively connect parts of stories to create a full and complete narrative. The project continued through the next couple of years. All the while Fillmore filmed the events and transcribed the narratives.

In another creative effort, the group held pine nut camps. *T'á:gim* or pine nuts are a traditional Washoe food, significant to fellow indigenous people of the Great Basin area such as Paiutes and Shoshones. Pine nut harvesting is an annual event, often including a pine nut dance or *Gumsabay*.¹³⁴ The harvest requires knowledge of how to gather the pine nuts and how to prepare and then cook them. In this project initiated by the progressing MALLP, elders instructed language learners how to harvest the pine nuts and traditionally cook them in the ground. The pine nut camps were fully immersed in Washoe as much as possible and students learned valuable vocabulary. This project along with the Elders Telling Stories project went on for some years and they are all essentially intertwined like many of the other language activities of the time. The elders and students would come to truly grow and thrive in immersion

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ The Washoe Tribe of NV & CA. "WA SHE SHU: “The Washoe People” Past and Present." *Washoe Tribe of California & Nevada*. Washoe Tribe of NV & CA, 2009. Web. 2 Apr. 2012.

situations. Fillmore reflected on the process, and observed that, “It wasn't until 1997 when the elders did Elders Telling Stories, that you could really hear them relaxing with one another and speaking fluently.”¹³⁵

The Possibility of Head Start.

While the Master-Apprentice program progressed, Fillmore and elder Adele James wanted to bring the language efforts to young children. The advocates were inspired by the success of the Washoe MALLP and it only seemed natural to include Washoe youth. At the time, Fillmore was a student again at UNR. Through an independent study course, James and Fillmore collaborated to bring Washoe language and culture into the Head Start classroom. The Washoe Tribal Head Start Program provides care and education for three to five years old children.¹³⁶ It seemed like a likely program to foster Washoe language in Washoe youth. But the immersion process at Head Start proved difficult when compared to the Master-Apprentice program. Fillmore noted that the Head Start structure and staff limited the potential of success, “you would have to have an entire staff of Washoe speakers.” From her interaction with leaders in the *'Aha Pūnana Leo*, Fillmore became familiar with techniques utilized in Hawaiian language nests, “Anyone who was not a...speaker, has to stay in the back room and do paperwork and reporting.” This approach might seem problematic to Head Start staff and yet in practice would be very beneficial to the development of Washoe language speakers by simply removing English from the classroom.

At the time, Washoe community member Lisa Grayshield was also working on Head Start language efforts along with her relative, elder Sylvia Andrews. Fillmore and James

¹³⁵ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹³⁶ Washoe Tribe of NV & CA. "Head Start Program." *Washoe Tribe of California & Nevada*. Washoe Tribe of NV & CA. Web. 02 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.washoetribe.us/administration/programsdepartments/head-start-program.html>>.

continued to work with Head Start until about 1996. Fillmore maintains that, “if [our work with] Head Start had remained successful, perhaps we would have built from that. It didn't work.”¹³⁷ After their stint with the organization, Grayshield would take over the Head Start project for a brief period of time. Throughout the entirety of the process, Fillmore and James built and improved upon Washoe language learning materials and curriculum. Perhaps the biggest result of their time at Head Start was the realization that they had to create an independent immersion school to reach their goal.

The Beginning of the Washoe Immersion School.

Towards the end of the summer in 1996, the group stationed itself at the “Pagoda,” an old tribal events and office building on the east side of the Dresslerville community named for its pagoda-like exterior. That year, Fillmore had officially taken over the ANA reporting and the tribe welcomed in Chairman Brian Wallace who remained the tribal Chair throughout the entire duration of the Washoe Immersion School. Just before fall, Fillmore wrote another grant, but this time to the highly competitive Indigenous Communities Program grant sponsored by the Lannan Foundation. Many successful programs like the *'Aha Pūnana Leo* (Native Hawaiian), and Darrell Kipp's Piegan Institute (Blackfeet) rely on the Lannan Foundation for their language revitalization work.¹³⁸ The Lannan grant was written to support the language immersion school and foster a program that many believed was the answer to saving the Washoe language. In the grant writing process, it was important to convey the elders' sentiments and their wishes to save the Washoe language. Fillmore worked to articulate the elders' desires and the community's needs. Despite the competition, they were awarded the prestigious funding, a first in a series of Lannan awards. In February of 1997, the group opened the first ever immersion lab school—

¹³⁷ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹³⁸ The Lannan Foundation. "Language Preservation." *Lannan Foundation*. The Lannan Foundation, 1999. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.lannan.org/indigenous-communities/language-preservation/>>.

their dream was quickly becoming a reality.¹³⁹

The immersion lab school started in the Pagoda. In the beginning, there were only nine students working with a handful of elders like Herman Holbrook and Sylvia Andrews. The school started late in the day and met three days a week. Fillmore reflects on the excitement of this time but admits, “we didn't know how to do full immersion fluently.” Reportedly there was not enough curriculum and elders had to be reminded not to break into English over the course of the session. However, as time went on, the elders, the staff and the students began to create a working immersion environment. Through constant evaluation, they learned that language thrived outdoors. The class did not remain in the Pagoda, but travelled outside, traversing Washoe land and interacting with the local environment. Students and their teachers walked around and held conversations in Washoe over small harvesting trips. The immersion lab school functioned until May of 1997 and served as a kind of template to create the full-fledged Washoe Immersion School. During the time of the immersion lab school, the original language classes still functioned, three times a week in Woodfords, Dresslerville, and Carson City.

In September of 1997, the group should have been celebrating its great accomplishments, but sadly they would mourn one of their elders—a huge advocate of the project—Sylvia Andrews. Andrews had been involved in language activism since the community meeting in 1994 that started it all. She was one of the elders who had dedicated countless hours in and out of the Pagoda. The night before she passed away, the community held a pine nut dance that lasted throughout the night. Though she was weak, Andrews knew the immersion school was only days away from opening its doors. She was so happy that the school was finally a reality—that what they had strived for finally came true. The Washoe Advocates' collective efforts and persistence would allow the Washoe language to live on in the children for future generations. As they said

¹³⁹ Laura Fillmore Interview.

their goodbyes to one of their greatest allies, the community pressed on to welcome the immersion school.¹⁴⁰

The Washoe Immersion School: A Reality.

Just days later on a Monday in September of 1997, the Washoe Immersion School opened its doors to Washoe youth. From the Pagoda, the group moved to a building in Dresslerville, a former Quick Stop convenience store that now houses Washoe Tribe's Family Healing Center. The school was accredited as a Fraternal and Benevolent Association granted by the State of Nevada's Department of Education. In the first year staff and overhead costs were all funded by the initial Lannan grant that had also supported the lab school. A Coordinator, an Organizer and a language board of six elders and six language activists advised the school. In the first year, the immersion school formally taught about 12 *behéziŋ* or little children in grades kindergarten through second grade.¹⁴¹ The school continued the tradition of elder consultation and hosted a range of elder Washoe speakers; Eleanor Smokey, Herman Holbrook, Daniel McDonald, Amy Barber (a verifiable “dictionary”), Tina Wyatt and Wes Barber, to name a few.¹⁴²

The Washoe Immersion School was the result of years of work—meetings, classes and curriculum development in a conscious and deliberate manner. It was a serious institution and functioned like one, perhaps more similar to a charter school than a typical elementary school. It infused Washoe language and culture into daily lessons while also teaching the basics of math, English and history. In the morning, children and staff danced to Washoe round dance songs. Then followed a song and finally a prayer in Washoe said by an elder or student. The first lesson of the day was a chalkboard lesson that was typically based upon the season, the day or events at hand. Each student had a journal and would participate in a writing exercise written on the

¹⁴⁰ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

chalkboard.

After the first lesson of the day, children had a midmorning recess. Sometimes children had free play, other times the school hosted a collaborative traditional game. When traditional games like hand game were played, the game involved a story or theme that was addressed throughout the day or week. Each day children interacted in a clothing exercise very reminiscent of the methods outlined in Hinton, Vera and Steele's book. Children learned colors, numbers, commands and phrases such as *gebipsa* or "he picked it up." English, history and writing were taught for one hour at the end of the day. The children loved immersion math and interacted in Washoe with elders. In immersion math, Elders held up a flash card as the students recited the problems out loud in Washoe. Sometimes there was a chalkboard activity where children would run up and slap their hands on the correct answer. Immersion school children even learned about the Civil Rights movement and translated the history in Washoe.¹⁴³

In the classroom, Washoe children spoke and wrote in Washoe with only one hour of English a day. They also learned the language on computers. Fillmore explains the justification for writing in Washoe, "When you learn to read and write in Washoe, those skills will transfer to English when it's time to transfer over."¹⁴⁴ Much as she had as a language learner, Fillmore utilized Jacobsen's orthography in the classroom to the best of her ability. The school as a whole promoted his writing system.

Benny Fillmore is an advocate for Jacobsen's "writing style," or orthography, and commented, "I think it gives you structure...I can look at it and what little Washoe I know, I can form the sounds together....It's really easy to pick up and learn." Fillmore is disappointed that once he and his wife were no longer involved in the program, "they pretty much dropped the

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

writing style and started putting everything down on their own.”¹⁴⁵ Later in this thesis I will discuss the contentions over Jacobsen's orthography and the use of it in today's *WWM* language classes.

The “Big Influx.”

The second year of the Washoe Immersion School drew a much larger student body, though on account of an unfortunate event. In 1998, in a fatal confrontation at the Roundhouse Inn hotel in Carson City, NV, 12 young men, reportedly many of who were Native American, killed a young Latino man named Sammy Resendiz.¹⁴⁶ The violent event fostered extreme racial tensions among Indians and Latinos. As a result of the murder and anti-Indian sentiment, a lot of parents were fearful for their children and placed them in the immersion school. The “big influx” in the second year forced the immersion school to grow and accommodate kindergarten through fourth grade.¹⁴⁷ Fillmore recalls that the school and its staff had to “up [their] game” to accommodate the influx. Each day Fillmore was just one day ahead of the students. She studied the night before to develop the next day's curriculum that she would teach in class.

As the school progressed, it came to rely upon the curriculum around it. Fillmore commented on this approach, “In the active learning process, there is no sitting back. If you don't have curriculum, you use the stuff around you. Every opportunity becomes a lesson. When the scorpion runs across the blanket, you had better start talking about insects.”¹⁴⁸ At this period of time in 1998, the immersion school staff and the advising board realized they had to become separate from the tribe to manage all of their functions. As a result, they established a 501c3 non-profit under the name *Washiw 'itlu Gawgayay*. The Washoe Immersion School became an

¹⁴⁵ Benny Fillmore Interview.

¹⁴⁶ Burghart, D. Brian. "Bad Blood." *Reno News & Review*. NewsReview.com, 19 Sept. 2002. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.newsreview.com/reno/bad-blood/content?oid=18792>>.

¹⁴⁷ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

independent program.

Language Instruction in Action.

As Fillmore continued to describe the immersion school during our interview, she brought out a hefty stack of her children's homework and workbooks they once used in the school. During the interview, her granddaughter Vernita was seated with us at the table. As we talked, Fillmore pulled out an exercise from the school materials, a drawing activity about an egg. The entire workbook was in Washoe and half drawn in by her oldest son Herman who is now in his twenties. Fillmore started off explaining the activity to her granddaughter in Washoe and then translated in English, "What's in the chicken egg? Here's a nose coming out." Vernita was immediately engaged and I got the opportunity to experience a glimpse of what it might have been like in the immersion school. "Say *shuyep*," Fillmore asked of her granddaughter. Vernita quickly repeated the Washoe word for nose. The two moved onto the next part of the assignment, "Okay, *mušé:gew* is monster," Laura explained to Vernita.¹⁴⁹ Our conversation continued and throughout the next few minutes, Vernita was busy drawing a monster in the workbook then eagerly awaited her grandmother's next instructions.

The Breadth of the Washoe Immersion School.

Clearly, the immersion school was a full-fledged sophisticated immersion education. However, despite its success, some were critical of the work in the school. Fillmore admitted despite the years of work put into the school, many people did not realize that the Washoe Immersion School was "structured, researched and serious."¹⁵⁰ Early on, a tutor in the program was doubtful of its strength and ability to create students capable of transferring to public schools. In an attempt to denigrate the program, this tutor contacted the principal of a local

¹⁴⁹ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Carson City elementary school, claiming that the institution would soon receive students from the Washoe Immersion School who were unprepared and unfit for a public school education. In an attempt to address the situation, the principal contacted an immersion school student who was on the path towards special education in the public elementary school.

In a meeting with all parties concerned in attendance, the principal was given a copy of the child's journal from the Washoe Immersion School. Immersion school lessons and daily written exercises (in Washoe) filled the pages of the child's journal, showing that the student was clearly capable. The principal, aghast at the ability of the student coughed out, "That's a lot of small motor skills!" As she recounted the event, Fillmore fought back tears, and asked, "What more do you need in the world to take a kid they said needed special education and make them a giant in their own community? What more do we need to see our children see themselves in a curriculum that they can be proud of and learn something from?"¹⁵¹ Certainly, developing language schools have their growing pains, but that should not overshadow the triumphs of such programs and the skills they impart to youth.

Continued Immersion Education and Language Acts.

Before and during the immersion school, the staff and community members constantly sought direction and resources from other successful language immersion programs. In August of 1999, the Fillmores, along with elder Steven Dressler attended the World Indigenous People's Conference on Education (WIPCE) in Hilo, Hawaii, on the Big Island. They met with well-known Hawaiian language instructor and activist William "Pila" Wilson. Wilson, a Native Hawaiian speaker collaborated with a number of fellow Hawaiian language teachers and created

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

the *Aha Pūnana Leo, Inc.*¹⁵² On their trip, Wilson introduced the group to the Waimea language immersion preschool or the *Pūnana Leo o Waimea*.¹⁵³ At the school, the visitors learned a lot of wonderful techniques, like incentivizing activities, which they would later use across the Pacific in the Washoe Immersion School. When the group reported the school's growth, Wilson was amazed and told Fillmore, "I had no idea you got this far."¹⁵⁴ In reflection, Fillmore remembers that this was the time that the Hawaiian language activists learned that "we're real," and they began to work together.

In that same year, friends of the Washoe Immersion School Pila Wilson and Darrell Kipp began to draft what Fillmore calls the "Native Language Survival Schools Act."¹⁵⁵ This draft would grow to amend the Native American Languages Act to provide for the support of Native American language survival in school. Fillmore was one of the first to receive Wilson and Kipp's draft and she worked on it internally with the elders. Fillmore is a steadfast believer in garnering the support of the elders and embracing their direction, "I don't do anything without my elders."¹⁵⁶ For the first time, the group was able to be active in a nation-wide effort to save Native languages across the country. Despite all of the excitement and growth, the Washoe Immersion School was only about a year away from a complete program shift.

A Radical Shift.

In the beginning of 2000, the school grew to accommodate kindergarten through eighth grade. Although the Washoe Immersion School had achieved much success, an incident occurred that would forever change the Washoe Immersion School—one student touched another

¹⁵² Tsai, Michael. "The Honolulu Advertiser | Celebrating 150 Years." *Hawaiian Immersion Program*. The Honolulu Advertiser, 2 July 2006. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/150/sesq5immersion/>>.

¹⁵³ 'Aha Punana Leo Inc. "Punana Leo O Waimea." *Punana Leo Preschools*. 'Aha Punana Leo Inc. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <http://www.ahapunanaleo.org/index.php?/programs/youth_programs_-_punana_leo/waimea/>.

¹⁵⁴ Laura Fillmore Interview.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

inappropriately. Fillmore reflects on the experience, “The real world encroaches on immersion schools. You might think all the good in the world comes from immersion schools...that's what I thought.” In the history of the school incidents of child neglect like hazardous lice infestations affected certain children (which is common in any school for that matter), but this incident rocked the community. In response the immersion school hosted a “good touch, bad touch” workshop and kept the children informed about their safety. While Fillmore was not an official principal or authority of the Washoe Immersion School, she was subjected to condemnation, “by that spring, my head was on a chopping block.”¹⁵⁷ In a “special meeting” set up in the community, Fillmore was subjected to hostility and negativity. She could not bear to deal with the infighting and decided to leave the school on April 1, 2000. Out of respect for her former students, the elders she worked with and the community, the Fillmores attended the annual graduation. As time had passed, Fillmore recognized a “decline in the immersion and the amount of [Washoe] speaking.”¹⁵⁸ It seems unclear why Fillmore was the target of disdain despite all that she brought to the Immersion School, the MALLP and the generous funding she acquired. There is something to be said about the infighting and perhaps a communal issue with the fact that Fillmore was not Washoe. Needless to say, in Indigenous language revitalization, or cultural revitalization for that matter, one should not be judged by their ethnicity, but by their strength, passion and values they bring to the language. A protective hold over who is allowed to contribute to language revitalization will only hinder its proliferation.

Historic Testimony in D.C.

The Fillmores continued to teach and speak Washoe in their home as much as possible. And the family's involvement in Washoe language activism did not stop. Later in the summer of

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

2000, the Fillmores, along with Washoe elders Steven James and Thelma Tripp and then Chairman Brian Wallace, traveled to Washington, D.C., to follow-up on their work with the Native American Languages Act from the year before. On July 20, 2000, James and Tripp testified in a hearing before the Committee on Indian Affairs of the United States Senate. At the event, a range of language activists and politicians were in attendance: Hon. Daniel Akaka and Hon. Daniel Inouye, U.S. Senators from Hawaii; Michael Krauss, director of the Alaska Native Language Center; and two long-time friends of the Washoe Immersion school, Darrell Kipp and Pila Wilson. Elder Steven James attended as the Presidential representative of the 501c3 non-profit *Washiw 'itlu Gawgayay*. Laura Fillmore remembers encouraging James to speak in Washoe and to have Thelma Tripp translate in English.¹⁵⁹

The collective statement the two elders made was astonishing. In his testimony, James spoke about the demise of the Washoe language on account of colonization. He commented on Boarding Schools that did not allow children to speak their native language. James recollected the isolating feeling of wartime in Korea that was quelled by kind words spoken to him in Washoe. Tripp translated his thoughts, “The Washoe language is a very strong language and it can right all wrongs.” In his final request, in support of the bill, Tripp affirmed for James, “We do not feel we are asking a lot. We just want help with our language and our schools, so that the Washoe Tribe can continue on.”¹⁶⁰

While these last efforts were not the end of the immersion school or the *WWM* language program, it was the last time that Laura Fillmore would officially work for the program. With her resignation went the grant writing expertise that she had brought to the program, along with contacts with fellow language activists. The immersion school continued for a few years after

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ For a full transcription of the hearing, see: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-106shrg65921/pdf/CHRG-106shrg65921.pdf>

Fillmore left and a range of directors came and went. It is reported that around 2003, the immersion school finally dissolved.¹⁶¹ At the time the school served about fifteen Washoe youth up to eighth grade.

Despite the eventual end, the Advocates Era of the Immersion School marked the community's first immensely successful immersion efforts for youth. These students embraced Washoe culture and connected with their heritage. The same children who attended the Washoe Immersion School in 90s are no longer children. They are college graduates, Washoe Tribal Police officers and Tribal members focused on making a difference in their community. To date, former students of the immersion school account for a significant number of community members who are currently attending or have completed higher education institutions. And these former students want to revitalize language immersion practices in the community to share the Washoe language with a new generation. The rich and complex history of the Washoe Immersion School serves as a reminder of the potential of the current *WWM*.

¹⁶¹ Wilkinson, Charles F. *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations*. New York: Norton, 2005, 365. Print.

Section 5.

*dubáldi?*¹⁶²

The end of the Washoe Immersion School was a sad and tangible loss. The program was on its way towards creating fluent young speakers who would later have the capacity to teach their children and fill in the gaps of Washoe language eradication. After a revolving door of directors, the community language classes also disintegrated.¹⁶³ There was a kind of “language depression” felt throughout the Washoe community. Certainly, some families kept up instruction in the home, but there was a lack of communal effort. In the moment of apathy, Washoe elders acted as change agents to bring back the language. Around the fall of 2003, elders Steven James and Carnegie Smokey, Jr., both long-time members of the Language board that advised the Washoe Immersion School, were looking for a new employee to refashion the program. They sought out Washoe tribal member Lynda Shoshone to help revive the *WWM* language program. Shoshone had been a long-time employee of the tribe years before and had the accounting experience necessary to work on the *WWM*'s financials. After Fillmore left the immersion school, the *WWM* had little or no financial backing. Despite the fact that she was not a Washoe speaker, Shoshone had a good background in her “true passion,”¹⁶⁴ Washoe cultural preservation. This became her foundation to build upon Washoe language revitalization. That fall, she started as the Director of the *WWM*.

Shoshone grew up in Mendocino, CA, about a six-hour drive from the Washoe communities. Her father was Wailaki from Covelo, CA, and her mother was Washoe. Having a non-Washoe speaking father made it difficult to learn the language in the home, but Shoshone

¹⁶² “Five” in the Washoe language.

¹⁶³ Lynda Shoshone Interview.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

became more exposed to it when her family relocated to Woodfords, CA, the southernmost Washoe community. Thus, Shoshone did not grow up speaking Washoe, and to this day is not a speaker. She does, however, have an appreciation for the language and is proud to boast that her youngest son, Keith “Danny” Wyatt, is a fluent speaker.¹⁶⁵

Shoshone's background in the community started decades before her involvement with the *WWM* language program. She served on the Washoe Housing Authority Board for fifteen years and was elected to the Woodfords community council in 1985. From that position Shoshone moved up to Vice-Chair and later Secretary Treasurer. Around 1990 she mostly maintained employment with the InterTribal Council of California (ITCC) based out of Sacramento, CA. Throughout the 90s, Shoshone worked with Washoe's then Cultural Coordinator, Leland Dancingfeather, to negotiate repatriation of Washoe artifacts from archeological sites. She frequently did contract work with independent archaeologists on behalf of the tribe. Shoshone's extensive background in cultural preservation and coordinating was helpful, but language preservation proved to be a challenging project.¹⁶⁶

A New Start at the *Wašiw Wagayay Maṅal*.

When Shoshone entered the *WWM* language office, there was work to be done. The electricity and phone service needed to be reactivated and teachers needed to be hired. She immediately got the financials in order, paid the bills and hired community members to begin teaching. First was elder Dinah Pete to teach in Woodfords, then Melba Rakow to teach a program in Stewart and Dresslerville. Shoshone also found support in elder and language activist Steven James who was highly involved in the Washoe Immersion School. James insisted that he volunteer for the position and has never wanted to be hired as an employee. He treats his

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

teaching as a kind of responsibility to his community, “They wanted to hire me, but I said 'no, I don't want no money, I want to volunteer my services.’”¹⁶⁷ The *WWM* had a new team of language instructors.

After the dissolution of the immersion school and the general demise of the *WWM*, much of the curriculum and learning materials were gone. Together, Rakow, Pete, James and Shoshone gathered all the Washoe language materials they could find. They organized them in binders and collaborated to create new curriculum for the classes. Shoshone's youngest son Danny Wyatt, nearly a high school graduate, helped out as much as he could during the process and worked intently with his relative, elder Dinah Pete. Danny was later hired on as a Teaching Assistant for the *WWM*. At the time, Wyatt's work would allow him to immerse himself in the language and later become a fluent Washoe language speaker in his 20s—an impressive rarity.

Funding and Program Growth.

As the *WWM* grew, it needed financial support to maintain itself. Any former grant monies that had been acquired were mostly depleted. Around 2004, Shoshone turned to the Tribe for funding. She found support in then Chairman Brian Wallace and his Tribal Council. The Tribe began to grant quarterly funding to the language program, with a total support of \$58,000 annually. These funds covered salaries, utilities, materials, teachers, and other overhead costs. The *WWM* once functioned separately from tribe through its independent non-profit *Washiw 'itlu Gawgayay*; however, in its new capacity, the *WWM* became an official Tribal program.¹⁶⁸

As the *WWM* staff attended more council meetings, the program expanded to include more classes within the Washoe communities. It grew to include classes in Carson City and revived language retreats at the tribally-run Meeks Bay Resort on the west shore of Lake Tahoe.

¹⁶⁷ Steven James Interview.

¹⁶⁸ Lynda Shoshone Interview.

In response to funding proposals, the tribe further extended its resources to include funding from its newly created Native Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. These funds covered spring and fall expenses. The *WWM* also secured \$20,000 in grant funding from First Nations Development Institute's Native Youth and Culture Fund. The grant funded joint youth camps between the Washoe and Kashaya Pomo communities and featured workshops with tribal elders. Children learned sustenance hunting, traditional dances and how to clean and prepare acorns for cooking.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, Shoshone and the *WWM* applied for and received \$5,000 from the Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development. While all of these grants were helpful, they were not substantial enough to allow the *WWM* to run independently from the tribe and they only lasted for limited grant cycles. Shoshone wholeheartedly admits, "I am not a grants writer."¹⁷⁰ She gathered some funds and future donations through her extensive range of contacts, but the funding the language program once enjoyed was a thing of the past.

The *WWM*'s current Administrative Assistant, Mischelle Dressler joined the language program in 2008. She started as a WEX worker, a work exchange program through the Tribe's Native TANF program. Dressler was born in Reno, NV and lived there until she was about 5 years old. Shortly after, her family moved to Carson City, NV. When Dressler was about 11 years old, the family settled in Dresslerville and has been on the reservation since. As a child she was exposed to the Washoe language through her fluent grandfather and uncle. Her grandfather often spoke and sang to her in Washoe. But on account of the distance from Washoe speaking family (Reno is 53 miles from the reservation and can feel like a world apart), the language was not very accessible to her. But this all changed when Dressler started her position at the *WWM*,

¹⁶⁹ Foundation Source. "Native Youth & Culture Fund." *Native Youth & Culture Fund Project Of: First Nations Development Institute*. Foundation Source, 7 Feb. 2011. Web. 9 Apr. 2012.
<<https://access.foundationsource.com/project/native-youth-culture-fund>>.

¹⁷⁰ Lynda Shoshone Interview.

“When I started working here, I would go home and sleep at night and my brain would be talking Washoe!”¹⁷¹

Dressler manages and creates a lot of the new curriculum coming from the *WWM*. The majority of her work is done independently and on her own accord. She is a personal fan of Jacobsen's orthography and attempts to write in his style as dedicatedly as possible. When I attended one of the afternoon classes at Alpine TANF in Woodfords, CA (*Huŋa lel ti*), Mischelle was my teacher and read down a list of words she herself had created and edited. She thoroughly explained the pronunciation of each of the symbols from Jacobsen's orthography and was patient with my father and me—first time Washoe language learners. Upon my first trip to the *WWM*, Dressler brought out a thick binder of language worksheets, including some she developed herself. One worksheet unpacked Jacobsen's orthography. She understands that Jacobsen's method needs to be taught for students to understand how to read it, “I created this to help with our symbols,” she said as she pointed to the worksheet, “to be able to read it.”¹⁷² Indeed, some are very resistant to reading in Jacobsen's style mostly because the characters are foreign. Roach pointed out, “I think a lot of people are turned off by seeing the linguistic [orthography] with the barred ‘I’ and stuff.” Dressler's efforts bridge the gap.

When she started at the *WWM*, Dressler recognized the need for updated curriculum. She gathered what was then available and took in resources created by Shoshone's son Danny Wyatt. Dressler also utilized some of Melba Rakow's language material and rewrote it to accommodate Jacobsen's orthography. Occasionally, Dressler also develops tests for *WWM* students. This was the first time I had learned of assessment within the language program.

Dressler likes to make the language available for her nine-year-old son who attends some

¹⁷¹ Mischelle Dressler Interview.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

language classes. She created a worksheet of small sentences to allow her son to practice. Dressler herself is a kind of a student, learning alongside the elders who teach the classes. Despite her contributions, Dressler wishes she were a more advanced student, “I should know a lot more, but I surprise myself...” While some may argue (even Dressler herself) that the program needs more teachers, being a student teacher is beneficial. Dressler is in a unique position to understand what language learners need to absorb the material. In the classroom, Dressler is able to direct students on pronunciation and unpack the concepts of the day (usually a thematic lesson). Likewise, she asks questions of the teachers to promote greater student involvement and enhanced knowledge. From this perspective, the *WWM* learns what students need to be effective and active Washoe language learners.

Language Resources and Tools.

Today's *WWM* is trying to gain traction, improve its language curriculum and garner more community support and interest. The current staff attends various trainings such as the Breath of Life conference hosted by AICLS. In the “Advocates era” of the immersion school, teachers and staff attended such conferences to improve their instruction techniques, learning materials and gain support from fellow American Indian language revitalization communities. Shoshone and the new wave of the *WWM* have kept that tradition alive. Furthermore, the language program has made advancements in the way of language learning material. In the last years speakers and community members have created multiple Language CDs with coordinating lessons, some Washoe story collections and a Washoe reference guide for plant names. All of these materials are available for language learners at no cost. On occasion, the *WWM* announces the materials in the monthly Washoe Tribal newsletter. All community members are encouraged to contact the language program and be mailed the materials.

In 2007, Keith Wyatt developed *Ye LuLu iduš gúlaygi* or “The Old People said this long time ago,” a beginner’s guide to speaking Washoe. The comprehensive guide includes Washoe history and insight into traditional culture such as acorn processing. *Ye LuLu* also teaches students how to learn Jacobsen's orthography, Washoe greetings, kinship terms, commands, a range of thematic vocabulary and Washoe pronouns. In 2008, Wyatt created another addition with a Volume 1 CD of common conversational Washoe phrases and vocabulary words. The CD does not seem to correlate with a workbook, though some phrases and words are found in the *Ye LuLu* piece. This 18-track audio CD includes Wyatt introducing the phrase in English and saying the Washoe equivalent twice. In this useful CD, Washoe language learners are able to practice greetings, learn terms for various animals, and to understand independent pronoun use. The latter half of the CD includes a reading from *Ye Lulu* and also Washoe songs and even a Washoe version of Itsy Bitsy Spider. There appears to be no workbook associated with the audio so it is fully an oral tool. This CD is quite useful for students to listen to in the car or practice at home. If there is a Volume 2 CD, I was unable to acquire it.

In 2009, Wyatt teamed up with Steven James to create *Wašiw Stories*, a workbook with companion CD. As the title indicates, this two-piece language tool includes Washoe stories. Each story is first read in Washoe then followed by the English equivalent. The workbook follows in the same style, Washoe transcriptions first, followed by English transcriptions. A total of four stories encompass this set: People are Growing, The Bear and the Crane, *T'sel T'sel* and *Paša p'owdi*. Culturally, these stories are very useful for Washoe people. They are certainly enriching for the Washoe language learner. However, there is no word for word interpretation of the stories, which may prove difficult for language learners attempting to break down the components of the language. Eleanore Muscott, a new student of the *WWM*, uses this CD in her

car, but wishes it included more English translation for her to understand, “I have a CD...but it's a story in Washoe.”¹⁷³ Nevertheless, the CD and stories are invaluable. Perhaps this particular CD is more beneficial for the advanced Washoe speaker.

The *WWM* also has a plant guide called *ʔWaʔ Deʔ T'i-meʔ*¹⁷⁴: *It Grows Here, Native Plants of the Tahoe Basin*. The language program created the reference guide in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service. The first half of the small guide lists a number of regional plants with their accompanying photo. Many of the plants list two different Washoe spellings (utilizing both Rakow and Jacobsen's orthography) and the plants' English equivalent and biological taxonomy. The latter half of the guide also lists regional insects and animals. This guide is useful both linguistically and culturally. Language students will learn a great deal about the surrounding Washoe environment. Perhaps a second edition of the guide can incorporate vocabulary words with useful phrases about the environment.

The final piece that the *WWM* offers is the newest of the technological tools, a workbook with accompanying CD called *Washiw Wagayay Maŋal Lessons 1-11*. Mischelle Dressler and Steven James created this two-piece language tool in 2009. Dressler recorded while James narrated. It is the first language guide to include lessons with word for word audio and vocabulary elements. Each lesson reviews nine to ten vocabulary words, first listing the word in Jacobsen's orthography, indicating its meaning in English and then using the vocabulary word in a Washoe sentence, followed by its English equivalent. The lessons review a series of Washoe words alphabetically. Words covered range from *abúŋ*, to tie a baby in a basket, to *íš*, skin.

Instruction and audio CDs are helpful tools for complimenting language learning and comprehension. However, as scholars Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer note, these technological

¹⁷³ Eleanore Muscott Interview.

¹⁷⁴ At our interview, Jacobsen suggested that the proper spelling of this guide should be *wá-ʔ de'émeʔ*.

tools can contribute to avoidance strategies. “Avoidance strategies usually look for others to solve the problem,” the scholar note. “These look to a quick solution, in which other people are designated or expected to save the language and the culture for yet someone with no personal effort or involvement.”¹⁷⁵ The scholars have found that often, community members look for a quick fix, in this case a “technical fix,” to save the language. A demand for more tools contributes to this evasive strategy. Students must actually have a personal, intimate involvement with the language and technical tools alone will not create this nor immediately reverse language shift. One cannot become too comfortable with the “technical fix,” of tools versus training.¹⁷⁶ This can also be extended to the Washo Project website. As the Dauenhauers’ warn, while these are useful tools, they cannot stand alone—“they are no substitute for human desire and effort.”¹⁷⁷ With the technological efforts now afforded to the language program it is necessary to consider the impact of these tools. How might the *WWM* track the progress of students who use the Washoe language CDs? In this artificial learning environment, it is imperative that the tools do not overshadow the genuine effort for language revitalization.

WWM Learning Materials and Classes.

In regards to *WWM*, classes, students learn from a number of handouts and worksheets with varying pedagogical styles. Melba Rakow's Thursday evening class in Stewart is known for its "knock knock" series that attempts to bring conversation into the classroom. Other classes often read themed vocabulary lists, learning about topics like the weather, commands or body parts. In all classes, students are encouraged to and do ask typical vocabulary and Washoe

¹⁷⁵ Marks Dauenhauer, Nora and Richard Dauenhauer. "Technical, Emotional, and Ideological Issues in Reversing Language Shift: Examples from Southeast Alaska." *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*. By Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley. Cambridge [England: Cambridge UP, 1998, 68-69. Print.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

cultural questions. The classes are a way for Washoe people to connect with their heritage.

Since Shoshone's start in 2003, the classes have expanded to almost all of the Washoe communities, five days a week. The majority of the classes are focused on adult learners, though some are aimed at children. A Monday class is held at 6pm in the evening in *Huṇa lel ti* at the Woodfords Indian Education Center. A Tuesday afternoon class is held at 1pm, also in *Huṇa lel ti* at the Alpine TANF Office. Elder and Woodfords community member Dinah Pete frequently teaches this class. Many participants are TANF affiliated. A Wednesday afternoon class is held at 1:30pm at the Dresslerville Community Building. Elder Steven James teaches this class. A Wednesday evening class at 6:30pm is held at the Stewart Head Start Building. This class is taught by Melba Rakow and uses her syllabic orthography. The class is made up of quite a few regular students, most of whom have attended her classes for one or more years. A Thursday afternoon class is held at 2pm in Carson City at the Carson Washoe Tribal TANF office. Recently, in the beginning of 2012, Melba Rakow began to teach this class. When I previously attended the class in the fall of 2011, the *WWM's* Administrative Assistant, Mischelle Dressler led instruction. Because Dressler utilizes Jacobsen's orthography to the best of her ability, Rakow made an attempt to address both kinds of orthographies in at least one class I attended. This includes the used of both systems on one page, a method I will discuss further in my conclusions.

The Thursday evening class was held in Dresslerville at the *WWM* office until spring of 2012. Steven James teaches this class. Since the start of this project, there have been quite a few administrative changes, one of them being the relocation of the *WWM* office from Dresslerville to Stewart. Despite the change, this Thursday evening class was still held at the former office in Dresslerville for about a month or so. However, the April edition of the Washoe Tribal Newsletter reports that the evening class was moved to 6pm in the Dresslerville Community

Building. Finally, a Friday afternoon youth class is held at 3:30pm in *Huŋa lel ti* at the Woodfords Indian Education Center. This class is also taught by Dinah Pete who is responsible for the other *Huŋa lel ti* or Woodfords classes.¹⁷⁸

Recent Funding and Participation Methods.

Financially, the *WWM* has coordinated with Washoe Tribal TANF to offer language classes to TANF participants as a means to fulfill weekly work requirements in exchange for cash aid. As a result, the *WWM* receives \$300 - \$350 per class from TANF. Presumably, these funds cover the overhead costs that grants had once financed. Recently, the Washoe Tribal TANF made it mandatory that TANF recipients attend classes for their weekly work hours requirement. When I spoke to Jacobsen about the mandate, he was not very happy to hear it, “That seems wrong to me. That's one way to get them to attend, but not really work on it.”¹⁷⁹ It is reasonable to doubt student success or interest in a mandated program, but whether or not this is a best-practice solution, it works for some. Vicky Christensen, a Washoe tribal member from Woodfords, CA, started attending Washoe language classes towards the end of 2011. She is a fan of the new mandatory system and when I spoke with her in January of 2012, she had attended two classes at the Alpine County Washoe Tribal TANF office, located very close to her home. “I like this mandatory thing,” declared Christensen. The mother of five is happy that she no longer has an excuse for skipping classes. Christensen is proud of her Washoe heritage and feels an obligation to learn the language as a means to connect with her identity, “I think you should put the message in the flyers. That should be direct. As in 'learn your language because you're

¹⁷⁸ Recently, the class times have changed by about half an hour as indicated by the April 2012 Washoe Tribal Newsletter. These time changes are not significant and the overall class details remain the same as previously mentioned.

¹⁷⁹ Jacobsen Interview.

Washoe.”¹⁸⁰

The mandatory change has had a good effect on the number classroom participants. When I first attended the Tuesday afternoon class in Alpine County, in August of 2011, there were no community students. My father and I learned alongside Dressler as we ran down a list of vocabulary terms. My second visit to the class was in January of 2012, after the TANF mandate and there were a total of eleven students—a huge jump in participation. This time Pete ran the class alongside her granddaughter who had a great capacity for the language. Reading off the page turned into a group exercise and at Christensen's request, the students each read a vocabulary word aloud to ensure proper pronunciation and reading comprehension. “That's why I like when every person says it,” Christensen said, “It makes everyone feel comfortable. I feel like it's better to say it [aloud] and be told 'That's not right.’”¹⁸¹

Changes and Separate Initiatives.

Since the start of my research trips, quite a few changes have happened at the *WWM*. When I visited the *WWM* office in August of 2011, I noticed a flyer calling for a Washoe Language Forum, a meeting that had been held one month earlier. I was surprised to see the flyer as I had been in regular contact with *WWM* staff and had not heard about the meeting. It seemed this forum was held separately from the *WWM* language program. After speaking with staff and community members, it was clear that the Language Forum did not include staff from the *WWM* and was in fact an entirely separate endeavor. Reportedly, this effort was an initiative of the Chairwoman and a space for the community to discuss strategies for Washoe language efforts. It is however quite surprising that this did not include the very Tribal program that exists to fulfill this need.

¹⁸⁰ Vicky Christensen Interview.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

In November of 2011, a follow-up meeting was held but this time under the name of the Washoe Tribe's Language Revitalization Team. At this second meeting, *WWM* staff and students were involved and participants decided on the Tribe's approach for an ANA grant focused on Washoe language revitalization. The group chose to apply for ANA's Native American Language Preservation and Maintenance – Esther Martinez Initiative. Specifically, the group decided on applying for funds to create a language nest within Washoe's Dresslerville Head Start program. The language nest would provide language instruction and childcare for at least ten children under the age of seven. During my period of research, the Tribe led this grant campaign, which was essentially separate from the *WWM*. The Tribal Grants Manager and Head Start teacher Lisa Enos led the grant and included input from elders.¹⁸²

During the campaign, the Tribe conducted an ANA grant survey, directed at all nearly 1,600 Tribal members. The survey was announced in the October 2011 Washoe Tribal Newsletter, calling for participants to visit the Tribal website, print the survey and mail the results to Tribal headquarters. Additionally, surveys were distributed at various locations and events. Again, this project was separate from the *WWM*, so much that *WWM* students were not initially aware of it. As the ANA grant deadline approached, only 78 surveys were submitted. Reportedly, this is considered a healthy number of responses.¹⁸³ According to the ANA grants website, the Tribe was not selected for the award.¹⁸⁴ Since the Advocates era of the immersion school, the Tribe has not been awarded an ANA grant for language revitalization.

And perhaps one of the biggest changes to effect the *WWM* was the layoff of long-time Director Lynda Shoshone. During my first trip back in January of 2012, I was informed that

¹⁸² Debby Carlson Interview.

¹⁸³ Washoe Tribal Headquarters Staff.

¹⁸⁴ Administration for Children and Families. "ANA - Grant Award Details." *ANA - Grant Award Details*. Administration for Children and Families, 29 Feb. 2012. Web. 07 May 2012. <<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ana/grants/anagrants.html>>.

Lynda Shoshone's position had been terminated. This is not to say that Shoshone was fired, but that her position of Director no longer existed. Instead, a new position will be created to merge Language and Culture into one appointment. At that time in January I also learned that the *WWM* office was relocating to the Cultural Preservation Office located in Stewart. This explains the aforementioned changes to the *WWM* Thursday evening classes. Needless to say, the loss of the *WWM* Director was a hard blow for the program. And as I attended classes during the January trip, students and teachers voiced their concerns. During that confusing time, *WWM* participants did not know if they were technically allowed to attend or conduct classes.

Section 6.

*dubáldi? ʔida lák'aʔ*¹⁸⁵

Washoes Speak on the Issues.

The *WWM* has changed considerably in the last nearly two decades. In the beginning, the classes were small and asked questions of elders like “How do you say strawberry?” Years later the program accommodated the first ever and only Washoe language immersion school where youth learned to read, write and speak Washoe. After the dissolution of the immersion school, the *WWM* rebooted and grew to develop more classes across the community. Students no longer have to ask how to say “strawberry” they can learn from the range of vocabulary worksheets and electronic resources. Today, a range of youth and adults attend *WWM* classes. There are three official teachers (James, Rakow and Pete) and two orthography styles that students learn from. Certainly, the *WWM* still has a ways to go if it intends to re-introduce an immersion school. However, just focusing on the current *WWM* classes, community members have expressed their concerns and suggest ways to improve the program. In general their concerns regard re-implementing immersion, student participation, attendance, necessity to bring Washoe into the home, the need to generate parental and community participation and the call for communal responsibility to save the language. Additionally, I advocate for implementing assessment tools to reach these goals.

A Call for Immersion.

When I spoke with Shoshone, the former Director reflected on the immersion school her son briefly attended and the work Laura Fillmore and the elders had done, she said, “She knew

¹⁸⁵ “Five” in the Washoe language.

what she was doing.”¹⁸⁶ Shoshone believes in immersion and recognizes the value of the school and how immersion contributed to her son's fluency in Washoe. When I spoke with Shoshone about the program, she told me about her dream to conduct an immersion program in an old Head Start building on the reservation, “Put fluent Washoe speakers in there, take ten kids, live there, eat there—everything revolves around our language—No English whatsoever.”¹⁸⁷ Dressler also recognizes this issue. When she noted that the program is not exactly turning out speakers, she remarked, “[We] need to have the Master apprentice [Language Learning] program again.”¹⁸⁸ From her expertise on the subject of immersion, Fillmore maintains that all methods other than immersion do not “preclude a totally and successful sovereign immersion program.”¹⁸⁹ Clearly, Washoe community members recognize the value of immersion and its potential to take the *WWM* program to another level. Currently, there are no tribally initiated immersion projects at all. Since the end of the immersion school in 2003, it has been nearly a decade's hiatus in immersion.

This gap in immersion language education presents an opportunity for the community and the language program to create an immersion situation for *WWM* students. Currently, there are classes five days a week in the *WWM* curriculum. It would be beneficial for the program and the community to consider implementing a full immersion class. One class once a week would give students a taste of immersion and allow them to understand the language on a new level. Worksheets, handouts and regular instruction can compliment this kind of course to offer a balance between the current structure while incorporating a new. Further, this approach might be very helpful for students in the community who are more advanced and can use an immersion

¹⁸⁶ Lynda Shoshone Interview.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Mischelle Dressler Interview.

¹⁸⁹ Laura Fillmore Interview.

space to fully practice their language skills. If this particular class were to succeed in garnering participation and challenging students, the *WWM* and the community could consider further implementation of immersion programming. Some considerations are re-implementing the immersion school for Washoe youth and the MALLP for Washoe adults to learn with the current elders and fluent speakers.

Currently, immersion appears to be growing at the local level to address these communal desires. In my email conversations with Fillmore, I was informed that this summer, in the month of June, she along with students from the former immersion school will host a summer language immersion “Boot camp,” in the Pine nut Hills. The group formulates under the name *P'isew 'Angala* or “Great Grand Relatives House,” a name the late Sylvia Andrews coined on her deathbed.¹⁹⁰ Though the Boot Camp is not a part of the current *WWM* curriculum it invites all interested language learners. These communal thoughts and efforts are indicative of the desires and wishes of community members who seek to bring the *WWM* instruction to another level.

Regular Participation.

Participation is an overall issue for most classes. The anomaly is probably Rakow's Thursday class, which hosts a majority of “regulars.” In general, however, teachers, staff and students of the *WWM* would love to have more students. In a conversation with the *WWM*'s Administrative Assistant, Dressler, indicated, “We're not really turning out any speakers.”¹⁹¹ She noted that a lot of the elders from 10 to 15 years ago have passed on which indicates an even smaller potential teacher population. Dressler finds the lack of students to be “frustrating.”¹⁹² Certainly there is no clear answer as to why in general the program only has so many students. The recently conducted Language Survey attempted to address this issue, begging questions such

¹⁹⁰ Laura Fillmore e-mail communication.

¹⁹¹ Mischelle Dressler Interview.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

as “Can you attend language classes at one of the communities?” and “What is your greatest obstacle to attend language classes?” The majority of respondents indicated that yes they can attend classes, but the obstacle was scheduling.¹⁹³

In addition to participation, some teachers expressed issues with attendance. Students do not always regularly attend classes. Certainly, it would be difficult for a student to catch up if they have missed a lesson. Though the phenomenon is common, currently, there are no homework assignments or similar methods to allow a student to “catch up.” In the advent of a missed class, it appears that all students are subjected to re-reviewing the assignment that their fellow classmate missed. The process becomes cyclical in nature where depending on attendance; a class might stay on the same subject or topic for weeks on end.

Bringing Washoe Home.

Elders and staff of the *WWM* have all recognized the need for homework or at least for students to bring Washoe home with them. Administrative Assistant Dressler feels that she is not as trained with the language because she does not take it home with her; “People need to take it home. Once a week is not enough for fluency.”¹⁹⁴ Indeed, to attempt fluency, students must practice Washoe as much as possible. Speaking Washoe in class (it is important to note that no classes are immersion based), is not enough. *WWM* instructor James clearly recognizes this issue and echoes the fact that in general, students are not taking the language home. In the now defunct *WWM* Office, James adamantly declared, “Everything that happens here in school stops here...The program needs change. We've got to do something else. Do something better.” Some *WWM* students do what they can to introduce Washoe into the home. Christensen likes to keep her five children busy with flashcards in her home, “I have cards up at home for 'Brush your

¹⁹³ Washoe Tribe of NV & CA. "Washoe Language Survey Results." *Washoe Tribe of NV & CA*. Spring 2012. Web. 30 Mar. 2012. <http://www.washoetribe.us/images/stories/docs/Language_Survey_Results.pdf>.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

teeth,' 'Wash your face,' 'Go to sleep.' I have '*Miligegabogee*' on the door so they can say it on the way out.”¹⁹⁵ Eleanore Muscott is also a newer student and she tries to remember class lessons in the car on her way home from work. While these are small steps in the right direction, the steps need to happen on a communal level. The future of the Washoe language will absolutely benefit from programmatic adjustments.

Parental Participation.

Additionally, many of the individuals I spoke with urged that parental participation was necessary. Again, James recognizes that Washoe needs to be integrated into the home and one way is through the parents, “When the kids left here [class], [it] seems like they left their Washoe here too. That's why we try to persuade the parents to come too so they can teach their children at home.”¹⁹⁶ James' logic is precisely that, logical. While it is wonderful for children to learn the language, they must be able to actually communicate with someone outside of the classroom. Parents are a wonderful link to foster the language within the home. Now former Director of the *WWM*, Shoshone echoes James' sentiments, “They need their parents to support 'em.”¹⁹⁷ Needless to say, parent participation may be difficult to achieve. Some parents might be unavailable to attend classes, but there are other ways to integrate participation from parents and guardians, as I will discuss in the final section of this thesis.

Standardization.

Furthermore, *WWM* staff members feel that standardization is necessary. Dressler notices, “We're not all on the same page. Each of our classes should be doing the same thing. All of our

¹⁹⁵ Vicky Christensen Interview.

¹⁹⁶ Steven James Interview.

¹⁹⁷ Lynda Shoshone Interview.

students should be on the same level.”¹⁹⁸ While some classes cover similar topics, not all follow the same set of handouts or assignments. In fact, with the two different orthographies, there are two kinds of assignments students are working with. Perhaps instead of standardizing the orthographies into one method (because it is clear this is unlikely), teachers can determine what themes to cover each week and create lesson plans along with homework assignments and tools to allow students to catch up on missed classes and bring Washoe into the car home, at school, at work and at home.

Orthographies: A Compromise.

In the same vein as standardization, it would be beneficial for the *WWM* to make a compromise in regards to the Washoe orthographies used. Earlier in section three of this thesis, I discussed the *WWM*'s (or the whole Washoe community for that matter) issue of heterographia, or the instance of multiple orthographies. This method proves problematic for the sake of standardization of language learning. For example, if a student wanted to take multiple classes with the *WWM*, they would certainly run into the issue of having to learn two separate orthographies; the method derived from Jacobsen's orthography and Melba Rakow's informal syllabic based “phonetic” orthography.

I spoke to Rakow about “marrying” the two methods and I was surprised to hear she was very much an advocate for the approach. I wondered what the issue was and why it had not already been done. Rakow noted, “Unfortunately, you have lots of people out there who are so anti doing Jacobsen's method. You have just as many people who are saying I don't want to do it this way [Rakow's way], it looks stupid—we want to do it this way. So hopefully we can put it together. That would be the best scenario.” The best scenario sounds like a positive and

¹⁹⁸ Mischelle Dressler Interview.

progressive option. Of course, not everyone will be happy with the decision. There are certainly some who will never like one of the orthographies. Perhaps in that case, these individuals can simply ignore the orthography they find so bothersome.

A compromise then, would be to include both orthographies on one page or assignment next to an English definition. It could look much like a definition in a dictionary; one example in Jacobsen's orthography, and in parenthesis, Rakow's syllabic approach. This could be repetitive for those who have already learned to read Jacobsen's method, but for the beginning student, it might be helpful. Further, this compromise has already gained traction in the past months. The April 2012 edition of the Washoe Tribal Newsletter included a Washoe grocery list that utilized this same approach.¹⁹⁹ See Figure 5. Tribal members across the country were able to learn in any orthography style while learning the English equivalent. Transforming class materials to reflect both orthographies will require some time and collaboration among *WWM* staff. In the end however, this approach will accomplish the standardization that staff seeks. Students will truly benefit from this.

¹⁹⁹ Washoe Tribe of NV & CA. "Washoe Tribal Newsletter - April 2012." *Washoe Tribe of NV & CA*. Washoe Tribe of NV & CA, 1 Apr. 2012. Web. 30 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.washoetribe.us/images/stories/docs/i-Newsletter%20-%20Apr%202012.pdf>>.

Orthography Compromise: Washoe Grocery List – Figure 5.

<u>GROCERY LIST</u>	
Go'í atuš- bacon Gotsee adush	Day' etbí- flour Diyetbee
Ćígan yagul- eggs Zeegan yoggle	It bedúbúk ha- baking powder It bedoo bookha
Lay uší- rice Lyushee	baga' ala' yewe'- cows milk
Macaluní- macaro- ni Macaloonee	bahgah ulluh yehweh
Bíniší- beans Beanishee	waluš- bread wahlush
Uŋa'bí- salt Oongabee	góbe'- coffee gobeh
	Damúbabl- pepper Dahmoobobble

Assessment.

In regards to all of these issues that Washoe Tribal members call for, I would additionally argue that the program in general is in need of assessment. Dressler herself has attempted to bring these tools to her son, making small tests to evaluate his absorption of the material. In our nation's educational system, tests, quizzes and exams are all regular and necessary. The immersion school maintained such a practice first on an informal level. Teachers would check for a students' understanding, make them read aloud their daily journals and writing assignments. When Steven Dressler came on staff fresh from completing a program at the College of

Education at the University of New Mexico, the Immersion school conducted formal evaluations. Staff initiated a full-length portfolio-style assessment on each student, which included specific evaluation of their cognition, performance, progress and academics.²⁰⁰

Recently, the *WWM* initiated this kind of informal assessment in the June 2012 installment of the Washoe Tribal Newsletter. It included the “*Lapuš Quiz*,” declaring “Test Your Knowledge.” The section listed 30 body part vocabulary words with blank spaces. Near the quiz were the questions, “How well do you know your Washoe language? Do you know it pretty good, a little bit, or not at all? Test your knowledge and see. Need help? Check your answers against the answer key. The answer key is hidden in this newsletter. Give it a try without looking first. Challenge your friends. Come on, you can do it!” Since the *WWM* has already started this assessment on its own accord, it would be useful to implement this in the classroom. For example, after a weekly class on body part vocabulary, the next class could introduce this or a similar quiz before learning a new topic. Teachers and students could track the students' progress, which would inform their capacity for the particular material.

It seems quite reasonable to include this kind of assessment into the *WWM* classroom if even at an informal level. However, perhaps this will not work for all students or teachers for that matter. *WWM*'s Rakow for example, is not committed to the written language and prefers the oral and auditory approach, “I would rather they [my students] threw all the papers out and we just talked. And I think they would learn better.”²⁰¹ While the method of abandoning the written has been utilized in practice with MALLP, as a community effort, an assessment approach would be useful. It evokes the kind of standardization called for and also ensures absorption of the language.

²⁰⁰ Laura Fillmore e-mail communication.

²⁰¹ Melba Rakow Interview.

Hawaiian: A Comparative Language Model.

The Native Hawaiian model provides a useful comparison to the *WWM* language program. Its success and its methods may be useful to gauge the potential of Washoe language preservation. Furthermore, the analysis is fitting on account of the connections the immersion school had with Hawaiian language activists and models. In the article *Mai Loko Ma O Ka 'Iini: Proceeding from a Dream*, William H. Wilson²⁰² and Kauanoë Kamanā examine the success of the *'Aha Pūnana Leo* Hawaiian language program in Hawai'i. Initially between the Hawaiian and Washoe experiences, it is easy to recognize the basic foundational differences. The *'Aha Pūnana Leo* seeks to develop children who are dominant-Hawaiian speakers rather than simply teaching Hawaiian as a second-language skill.²⁰³ The overall goal is to reestablish Hawaiian as the first language of families, while emphasizing high-level skills in other languages.²⁰⁴ Currently, the *WWM* has no unified stance on what their language program goals are. And as it stands, the program is not currently geared towards reversing language shift. Perhaps during the six-year period of the Washoe immersion school the program's goals were different. However, after a general review of the language materials, it is clear that if the *WWM* intends to reverse language shift, it will need to reform its approach. Currently, Washoe language materials and efforts at this stage are more suitable for teaching Washoe for cultural enrichment purposes.

Hawaiian as a language has “beat the odds” because of its special legal status.²⁰⁵ Additionally, it continues to gain support through political movements that garner funding and advocacy for the *'Aha Pūnana Leo*. The education programs start at the preschool level followed

²⁰² The same William “Pila” Wilson who interacted with the Washoe immersion school.

²⁰³ Wilson, William H., and Kauanoë Kamana. "Mai Loko Mai O Ka 'Iini: Proceeding from a Dream", the Aha Pūnana Leo Connection in Hawaiian Language Revitalization." *The Green Book of Language Revitalization*. By Leanne Hinton and Kenneth L. Hale. San Diego [u.a.: Academic, 2001. 149. Print.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 159

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 148

by K-12 and even college instruction.²⁰⁶ Curriculum is focused on traditional Hawaiian values toward food, animals, spiritual elements, music and dance.²⁰⁷ Significantly, the program is concerned with employing teachers who were raised in Hawaiian speaking homes. The cyclical nature of the language program is to foster children who speak Hawaiian, who will grow into adults who speak Hawaiian, who have children who will grow up in a Hawaiian speaking home. Washoe language instruction seems to espouse the same curriculum values, however Washoe efforts have gaps within generations of speakers that do not afford the luxury of having teachers raised in Washoe speaking homes. As the *Ethnologue* results demonstrated, Washoe is spoken mostly among the elderly, leaving little room for younger generations to be able to speak in their grandmothers' tongue. However, there is hope in the students who attended the Washoe immersion school and those who are current dedicated students of the language. And there are young Washoe people who are quite skilled in the language. One of them is Shoshone's son Danny Wyatt who we have already learned is instrumental in creating language tools.²⁰⁸

Reinforcing Immersion Methods.

From the first day of class, at *Pūnana Leo*, only Hawaiian is used. Daily language routines are utilized which later builds upon spontaneous speech interaction. Families are highly involved in the language process; parents satisfy volunteer hours, attend monthly parent meetings and assist financially with income-based tuition.²⁰⁹ Currently, in the *WWM* classroom, English is used regularly in instruction. There are neither tuition requirements, nor required parent participation. And yet, the latter is a necessity that Washoe community members call for. Considering the fairly centralized community, this is perhaps something the *WWM* should

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 151

²⁰⁸ For more information on Wyatt, see Chapter 10 of David K Harrison's *The Last Speakers: The Quest to save the World's Most Endangered Languages*.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

attempt to instate. Perhaps language students and their families will feel more invested if they are in fact giving back to the program.

It is not exactly fair to compare the Washoe language revitalization effort to that of Hawaiian. The *'Aha Pūnana Leo* is a well-established program that has a great deal of support and success. The Hawaiian Islands have a common language that is closely related to many other Polynesian languages. Washoe, on the other hand, encompasses only a small area of Nevada and California and the language is not shared among, nor related to those of any of the other adjacent tribes. It seems however that the *WWM* language program can learn a great deal from Hawaiian language revitalization efforts and from their own community members. In curriculum and infrastructure there is much that the *WWM* can achieve.

Ideological Assessment and Goals.

In *Technical, emotional and ideological issues*, an array of approaches are investigated as a means to improve the reversal of language shift among the Tlingit and Haida communities. While the community is different in nature than Washoe, much can be learned from this analysis, in particular, positioning one's language program on a basis of goals. The Dauenhauers' insist that the first step towards working language revitalization efforts is to establish "ideological clarification."²¹⁰ That is, an open, honest assessment of the state of the language and how people truly feel about using it and preserving it. If the *WWM* language program or the Washoe community instated such an analysis, they might better clarify their goals and their methods to achieve these goals. In this section, the Dauenhauers' felt that one issue Native Americans are plagued with "anxieties, insecurities and hesitations about the value of their indigenous language

²¹⁰ Marks Dauenhauer, Nora and Richard Dauenhauer. "Technical, Emotional, and Ideological Issues in Reversing Language Shift: Examples from Southeast Alaska." *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*. By Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley. Cambridge [England: Cambridge UP, 1998, 65. Print.

and culture”²¹¹ I think it safe to say that the Washoe people certainly understand the value of their language. On the contrary, the issue appears to be *how* to save the language. Furthermore, I do not think the Washoe people are afraid to learn the language (as the Dauenhauers’ suggest of Native American tribes). The scholars affirm, the “people must want it first”—and I think the Washoe's do.²¹²

Communal Responsibility.

In general, it seems the task of “saving” the Washoe language would be dealt to the current *WWM* institution, but as countless community members have told me, it is a communal responsibility. Dressler reflected on this issue and expressed, “Everyone says 'Oh well you should do this', 'You should do that,' or 'We should do this,' but no one really wants to take responsibility...but really it's everybody's responsibility.”²¹³ This phenomenon is familiar to the Dauenhauers who recognize a, “disparity between expressed ideals and actual support.”²¹⁴ It is one thing for community members to support saving the language, however it is quite another for them to actually be an *active* participant in the task at hand.

WWM's instructor Rakow, comments on this issue, “I think it's all of our [responsibility]. Unfortunately we have wars amongst each other.” I asked of Rakow, how does this infighting affect the language? She responded, “The language isn't doing anything. It's the same as it was, when I started teaching it seven years ago.” James echoed both of these statements declaring, “It's each individual I guess. The elders, the parents. And our leaders. Our leaders right now. None of them speak Washoe. They don't know a word of Washoe. They don't realize how

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*, 69.

²¹³ Mischelle Dressler Interview.

²¹⁴ Marks Dauenhauer, Nora and Richard Dauenhauer. "Technical, Emotional, and Ideological Issues in Reversing Language Shift: Examples from Southeast Alaska." *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*. By Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley. Cambridge [England: Cambridge UP, 1998, 69. Print.

important it is to try to save our language.”²¹⁵ Rakow agrees with James and she advocated, “I think all the Washoe tribal administrators need to come a learn at least to say 'Hello,' how to say 'Goodbye,' 'How are you..Something.’”²¹⁶

Talent and cooperation are required of the community as a group effort to reverse language shift.²¹⁷ In the search for ideological clarification among the Washoe, the community must determine who is responsible for the learning and transmission of the language.

On Implementing Reform.

This assessment I have provided requires a great deal of energy from the *WWM* staff, students and the Washoe community as a whole. The suggestions provided come from a place of passion and development and within the community. Certainly, this proposed programmatic reform would be subjected to trial and error. The *WWM* and the Washoe community would learn what methods work for the community and what do not. Pilot programs could serve to address each of these proposed methods. For example, a Parent Participation pilot program that could serve to bring in the parents of *WWM* youth to volunteer during class time or assist with making language materials (charts, worksheets, assignments). Additionally, an immersion pilot program would test the potential of a weekly immersion class. There is simply no sure way to know if these methods will work, unless the *WWM* and the Washoe community try them.

During the length of my research for this project, I witnessed a great deal of energy and enthusiasm within community members who are eager to learn what they can do to be a part of saving the language and to attempt to decelerate the language shift. It seems that most students, teachers and community members overall are questioning *how*, they can do this. There is no

²¹⁵ Steven James Interview.

²¹⁶ Melba Rakow Interview.

²¹⁷ Marks Dauenhauer, Nora and Richard Dauenhauer. "Technical, Emotional, and Ideological Issues in Reversing Language Shift: Examples from Southeast Alaska." *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*. By Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley. Cambridge [England: Cambridge UP, 1998, 69. Print.

certain way to know which methods will work effectively for their specific needs and their specific community until the methods are allowed a test of trial and error. Overwhelmingly, Washoe as a language has had to constantly battle English (and perhaps other languages) in the home, the workplace and perhaps even in dreams. Implementing tools that work proactively against the ever-increasing communal use of predatory languages like English is the only way to foster a Washoe speaking community. Whether these tools are immersion, standardization or parental participation, a multifaceted approach to cultivating the Washoe language will ensure its absorption within the community and its proliferation into the future. The community speaks for these needs and the community will benefit from it.

Washoe Language Ideologies.

While there is a question of how to preserve and promote the Washoe language, there is no question of defending and maintaining the language. In my research, I have found there to be an overwhelming drive to do this. And perhaps much of this is founded in what the Washoe language means to Washoe people. As a community the Washoe people themselves are wholeheartedly proud of their heritage language. It is a huge part of their identity. Steven James told me, “It just tells everybody who I am. Where I come from. It identifies you—who you are—your place in this world.”²¹⁸

Washoe people are proud of their language and their culture and how it makes them “different” from everyone else. Mischelle Dressler proudly boasted, “It is really unique. I love to hear it. It's different than anything around us.”²¹⁹ And more than just difference, Washoe culture and Washoe language, is an inherent part of their individual and communal identity. James commented on both of these points,

²¹⁸ Steven James Interview.

²¹⁹ Mischelle Dressler Interview.

Because [Washoe], it's who we are—where we come from and we're just different from everybody else. You know, everybody's different. One little part of that difference... See right now we got some of our land, some Washoe speakers and we've still got some of our customs, we still practice and we want to expand on that. Make it bigger. Spread it out.²²⁰

“Spreading out” the language is what the Washoe people want. And some get this idea from perhaps a spiritual source. When I spoke with *WWM* teacher Melba Rakow, I wanted to know why she chose to teach and why she started when she did. Rakow first warned me that I might laugh and in the end that was furthest from the truth—I was moved. “Because I had a dream,” she said, “and it came to me and it said 'It's time.' And I asked, 'Time for what?' And it showed me the way. That's why.”²²¹ The dream Rakow had was spoken to her in Washoe and it told her “Do what you're supposed to be doing.” That year, Rakow started teaching and has been since. The path has not always been easy, but Rakow finds such inspiration in her students and it keeps her on that path, “Oh I'll tell you, sometimes I feel like quitting, I get so discouraged. Then I see the ones that are there and they are moving forward. I mean sure, it might have been...years for them to get to the point to where they are, but they have that—they're making the effort. And these are people who were so discouraged from doing it in the past....They were told ‘Don't speak the language,’ and they're making the effort to do so.”²²² That drive within her students is something tangible and inherent.

Language and Identity.

Following on the theme of inherency, the Washoe language is also felt by community members as something a part of them—something inalienable. When I spoke with Boo Boo Roach, I wondered, how does knowing the Washoe language effect her personal identity. Roach

²²⁰ Steven James Interview.

²²¹ Melba Rakow Interview.

²²² *Ibid.*

quickly responded, “Oh I don't know. I don't think there is any separation, it's just part of who I am.”²²³ I then asked why she started to learn the language. Roach replied, over a healthy chuckle “Because I was born!” The question is then not “why,” learn the Washoe language but an answer of “because—because I am Washoe.”

An Answer of “Because.”

On this subject of “because” Washoe tribal members and students of the *WWM* believe that they have a responsibility to themselves, their family and their people to learn to learn their language and to embrace their identity. To echo Vicky Christensen's unapologetic thoughts on the subject, “I think you should put the message in the [language class] flyers. That should be direct. As in 'learn your language because you're Washoe.’”²²⁴ This message from a young Washoe woman is additionally reflected in the elders. Perhaps this is why James has insisted on always volunteering his services to the *WWM*. He approaches his position as a responsibility to his people.

And more than a responsibility, learning and knowing the Washoe language is mind altering. Laura Fillmore reflects on gaining a new perspective with learning the Washoe language, “Once you learn to think in Indian it profoundly effects the way that you think about the natural world...the way that you think about community.”²²⁵ She continued, “Once you learn the kinship terms it alters the way you think about family members.... Once you know about *dimash* my face and *dikmash* my pine nut lands.” Then Fillmore posed the question, “Once you know that, does that alter the way you think about yourself?”²²⁶ Overwhelmingly the answer I have learned from community members is yes, it does change the way you think about yourself

²²³ Lavina “Boo Boo” Roach Interview.

²²⁴ Vicky Christensen Interview.

²²⁵ Laura Fillmore Interview.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

and the world around you.

What Language and Land.

When I spoke with Rakow, she seemed to suggest that the language was quite literally, grounding. I wondered what the language connected her with and she immediately stated, “The land.” I then asked if she would be a different person or feel differently if she did not know the language. Rakow imagined, “Probably. I probably wouldn't have the ‘Get up and go’ to do what I do. The driver would be missing.”²²⁷ Rakow continued to connect the theme of language and land, “Sure, it's wonderful to speak English because that's the language of this land now, but we all need to speak our own language.” She carried on, “It makes for that well rounded person. It gives the confidence because now they can be other things if they want to. Just because you leave the community and you become a doctor or a nurse or whatever you do, doesn't mean you're leaving yourself if you have your language and your land ties.”²²⁸ The message I got from Rakow was wherever you go, if you have the Washoe language with you, you will have Washoe land always.

This profound connection with language and land harkens back to section two of this thesis where I discussed the colonization of the Washoe people and language. The course of settler colonialism drew the Washoe farther from their ancestral ways and disrupted the Washoe land, body and mind. These biopolitics of control asserted power over aboriginal life ways. So then, if the Washoe language is connected with the Washoe land, then as an effect, the learning, retention and proliferation of the Washoe language is the proliferation of the Washoe land. And if the *WWM* and the people of the Washoe tribe work through language to reverse or challenge the results of settler colonization, then perhaps the project as a whole is decolonization. Then,

²²⁷ Melba Rakow Interview.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

decolonization is taking back language—reintegrating it into the home, into the mind—taking back land and returning the Washoe mindset and body to its natural state.

To once again echo Rakow, “Now we've got to turn that around.”²²⁹ The project then is to reverse and decelerate the shift and do this through learning and maintaining the Washoe language. In the failed project of colonialism, the Washoe have maintained their culture and language too. This is the rhetoric of survivance—the survival and proliferation of the Washoe language. The narrative of the life of the Washoe language works to mediate, undermine and challenge language death.²³⁰

Conclusion.

Since its humble beginnings in 1997, the *WWM* has had a lively history of revitalizing the Washoe language. The same children who attended the Washoe Immersion School in the 90s are now college graduates; they work in their community and they are Tribal members focused on making a difference in for their people. This generation wants to revitalize language immersion practices in the community to share the Washoe language with a new generation. There is a promise of summer boot camps and perhaps future collaborations with the *WWM*.

Since its inception this program has transformed from the once thriving immersion school into weekly multi-aged classes from Alpine County, CA, to Carson City, NV. And for this new wave of the *WWM*, language students are taking language instruction into their own hands—one project at a time. Boo Boo Roach is keeping the Washoe teenagers busy. She recently started “Lunchtime Language,” at the local high school where she conducts an hour-long Washoe language lesson over pizza. Roach volunteers her time to fulfill the need she sees in Washoe

²²⁹ Melba Rakow Interview.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

youth. As she pointed to a stack of Washoe vocabulary flashcards, Roach declared, “I meet a lot of kids in school who are *hungry* for something. I’ll give ‘em those. And they’ll come back!” She said proudly. “And when they see me, they make a point to say something in Washoe.”²³¹

And for the generation of elders who suffered linguistic trauma—who were discouraged from learning their heritage language—they now have a space to reverse that shift and embrace their Washoe culture and language. The Washoe language, though up against the odds has come along way. In the last decades, the Washoe community has gathered to revitalize its language and despite infighting and discouraging statistics, the Washoe people are still ever passionate for the Washoe language.

The overwhelming energy and drive is tangible. And perhaps much of this is founded in what the Washoe language means to Washoe people. As a community the Washoe people themselves are whole-heartedly proud of their heritage language. Further, they are adamant on declaring that the language is linked with their identity—that they even owe it to themselves and their people to learn it. Vicky Christensen is a student of the *WWM* classes in Woodfords. She attended the immersion school as a child and wants her children to be able to have that same experience that was so gratifying for her. Christensen comments on the inherent responsibility she feels to learn the language and be an example for her children, “I want to be able to be fluent. For my kids too, for everybody. I think we have a responsibility as tribal members. We can go around saying ‘I’m Washoe,’ but that doesn’t mean anything if you can’t talk it or know anything about it.”²³²

It is clear the Washoe people value their heritage language. It is an inherently connected

²³¹ Lavina “Boo Boo” Roach.

²³² Vicky Christensen Interview.

extension of their being and their Washoe identity. To echo Roach, “Because I was born!”²³³ The question is not “why,” learn the Washoe language but an answer of I want to learn it “because I am Washoe. Because I have a responsibility.” What seems not clear however and what the community speaks to is how to revitalize the Washoe language. How to create more speakers and how to, as James put it “spread it out.”²³⁴ Currently, the issue at hand is distinguishing how best to endeavor language revitalization. Will parental participation help bring Washoe into the home? Will the TANF requirement continue to bring in newer students? Is immersion the way to go? How effective will the program be, if it continues on an unchanging path? Community members and the *WWM* are at a critical juncture on determining these best practices. And the only way to know what those are, is essentially a practice of trail and error. There is a great deal of energy on the topic with a community call for reform and a new progressive approach to challenge language death. The moment is significant and at this crossroad, the future of the Washoe language is promising.

Washoe is being redefined by a new generation. It is being rewoven into a context relevant and significant for today’s Washoe community. Community members of all ages are hungry for the language; they are hungry for more speakers, and they are eager to learn how to do this. The connection Washoe people have with their language influences them to eagerly connect with their heritage and contrary to the generations before them, they are allowed to learn and speak their language and make it a part of their identity. Washoe is no longer relegated to those traumatic spaces and perhaps in time we can “turn that around,” and afford everyone the opportunity to *Wa:šiw gewgayáy?* (Speak Washoe).

²³³ Lavina “Boo Boo” Roach.

²³⁴ Steven James Interview.

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