ON THE NET
Teaching Indigenous Languages: An Essential Reference

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Certainly one would be remiss if, in listing online resources for indigenous languages, one did not include the extensive site, Teaching Indigenous Languages (TIL; http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/TIL.html), maintained by Professor Jon Allan Reyhner and hosted by Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, AZ.

Teaching Indigenous Languages

As stated by the author, this site grew out of a series of symposia on indigenous languages that began in 1994. The goals of the symposia, as enumerated in a brief history of the conferences, are

- to bring together American Indian and other indigenous language educators and activists to share ideas and experiences on how to teach effectively American Indian and other indigenous languages in and out of the classroom;
- to provide a forum for exchange of scholarly research on teaching American Indian and other indigenous languages; and
- to disseminate through the Internet and monographs recent research and thinking on best practices to promote, preserve, and protect American Indian and other indigenous languages.

The last goal is achieved nicely through the TIL site, which maintains online resources on the linguistic, educational, social, and political issues related to the survival of the endangered indigenous languages of the world.

The site provides access to over 80 full text papers from the proceedings of various conferences and symposia on indigenous languages. There are also over 50 columns from the Newsletter of the National Association for Bilingual Education from the past decade and several journal articles dealing with issues in indigenous bilingual education. These references are, in large part, concerned with indigenous languages of the United States and the Americas.

Also accessible from the TIL page is the monograph, Stabilizing Indigenous Languages (Gina Cantoni, Editor). This monograph is an excellent compendium of articles on issues of primary importance to the stabilization of indigenous languages, including a rationale, language policy, and education. The final chapter of the monograph is a treatise by Joshua Fishman on the "dos and don'ts" of maintaining languages. The monograph is maintained by the National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education, which has recently undergone a name change: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs to become more inclusive.

The TIL page points readers to several recent publications that may be unknown to those with a budding interest in indigenous languages. One such publication is the summer 2001 issue of Cultural Survival Quarterly and is titled "Endangered Languages, Endangered Lives." This particular issue, guest-edited by Dr. Eileen Moore Quinn, a linguistic anthropologist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, presents examples from Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Americas. This special issue provides advice on how to preserve cultural and linguistic heritage.

Other recent publications mentioned include several journals and booklets dealing with indigenous languages and cultures and books on language revitalization in practice and reversing language shift.

The TIL page also has a section on teaching methods that are viewed as particularly successful with indigenous languages.

The Index of Indigenous Education and Indigenous Language Web Sites is an extensive list of additional links and is organized under topical headings such as Assessment, Bilingual Education & Programs, Book Reviews, Computers, Cultural Values, Curriculum, Dictionary Development, Families, Higher Education, Language Development, Planning, Programs, Preservation, Promotion, & Teaching, Literacy, Policy, Reading, Second Language Acquisition, Special Education, Student Motivation, Teacher Preparation, Technology/Media, Textbooks, Total Physical Response, Tribes, and Writing.

Because so many indigenous languages are at risk and numbers of speakers and learners tend to be small compared to more widely spoken languages such as English, Chinese, Spanish, French, and so forth, the teaching of these languages is at the same time very important and lacking adequate resources. As is also the case with other less commonly taught languages (LCTL), the Web can be a powerful and relatively inexpensive distribution medium for support materials for students and teachers compared to print (see also the LCTL Project page review in a previous "On the Net"). Although this site does not make use of the multimedia potential of the Web, its high quality text content and extensive links make it an essential reference for those interested in teaching indigenous languages.