

WOPANAAK LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WEETYOO, INC.



Project Title:	Nuwôpanâôt8âm, I Speak Wampanoag
Award Amount:	\$541,607
Type of Grant:	Native Languages
Project Period:	Sept. 2010 – Sept. 2012
Grantee Type:	Native Nonprofit

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 3 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 17 Elders involved
- 60 youth involved
- \$87,563 in resources leveraged
- 36 individuals trained
- 37 partnerships formed
- 9 language teachers trained
- 47 youth increased their ability to speak a Native language
- 63 adults increased their ability to speak a Native language
- 3 people achieved fluency in a Native language

BACKGROUND

Wôpanâak became the first Native American language to be used in the English-speaking New World as a means of written communication with an alphabetic writing system. As a result, the language has the largest amount of written documents of any Native language on the continent. However, by the 1860s it ceased to be spoken, and by 1900 the Wampanoag Nation, once 69 Tribes strong, was reduced to 4,000 members across three Tribes: the

Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah, and the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe.

The three Tribes worked together to develop the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP), founded in 1993, to reintroduce use of the Wôpanâak language. Previous language efforts include Wôpanâak dictionaries, a grammatical framework, and language classes. However, language teachers always have been part-time volunteers, making it difficult to develop fluency among teachers and students. According to the Tribe, the main challenge to successfully restoring Wôpanâak as the primary means of communication among Wampanoag people is the lack of fluent qualified teachers.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to use master-apprentice (MA) methodology to train speakers to gain significant fluency in the Wôpanâak language and become competent teachers. The first objective was to implement MA sessions for three apprentices. Each week the master speaker, also the project director, assigned hours to the apprentices in the following areas: planning activities, independent study, apprentice-to-apprentice interaction, non-

immersion instruction, and curriculum development. The apprentices completed a total of 10,166 hours across the two project years. To measure language acquisition, independent evaluators utilized the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages scale of proficiency. According to the master speaker, all apprentices started on the novice scale; now fluency levels range from intermediate low to advanced mid.

The second objective was to implement preschool and kindergarten curriculum development training for the three apprentices. Apprentices focused on creating material for content areas following state curriculum guidelines, such as daily routines, storytelling, family and history, and basic health conversation. Curriculum created during this project includes terminology and supporting activities on ceremonies, traditional food ways, family structure, clothing, and ocean beings, as well as grammar lessons and teaching methodologies. WLRP conducted multiple focus groups and tested the curriculum with six pre-school age students, for a total of 62 hours piloting the material. Apprentices made adjustments to the curriculum and produced 18 final units, or 9 months of preschool and kindergarten curriculum.

Through this project, WLRP also developed and implemented a teacher certification process that determines the level at which language teachers can teach Wôpanâak. WLRP certified nine language teachers during the project period.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Through this project, WLRP developed three fluent speakers, improved the language speaking abilities of over 100 people, and went from having a few moderately qualified teachers to 10 certified teachers. The MA program has nearly doubled the apprentices' fluency levels, and with the

implementation of the teacher certification program, WLRP will continue training and certifying language teachers.

The Tribal community is very supportive of the language program, and interest in WLRP's language classes and camps greatly increased as a result of the project. WLRP currently conducts six ongoing language classes, and staff recounted that prior to the project there lacked enough interest and qualified teachers to hold that many classes. All community meetings are now opened in Wôpanâak, and language is used much more in ceremonies than it was before as Tribal members become more aware of the cultural meaning behind words.

Furthermore, the youth who participated in new WLRP language programs are learning Wôpanâak in a natural way, and show increased confidence and self-esteem as evidenced by greater participation in cultural nights. Many youth also are taking the initiative to share the language with family members and others in the community.

To continue these benefits, the Tribe received a new ANA grant in FY12 for a 3-year project to write a Wôpanâak language and culture curriculum for kindergarten through third grade, and to apply for a charter school. WLRP staff are hopeful this project has laid the foundation for establishing an immersion school that will instill confidence and pride in Native youth, and create a comfortable and encouraging environment to further support language and cultural learning.

"The participants [apprentices] ...are all people I have known for years, and I have never seen any of them so fluent. The immersion classes are clearly having a great impact."

Independent Language Evaluator