

HANNAHVILLE INDIAN COMMUNITY



Project Title:	Ewikkendaswat Ekenomagewat (They Will Learn To Teach): Language Teacher Training
Award Amount:	\$355,425
Type of Grant:	Native Languages
Project Period:	Sept. 2009 – Sept. 2012
Grantee Type:	Tribe

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 3 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 4 Elders involved
- 164 youth involved in project implementation
- \$95,178 in resources leveraged
- 7 partnerships formed
- 168 youth increased their ability to speak a Native language
- 71 adults increased their ability to speak a Native language

BACKGROUND

The Hannahville Indian Community is located in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, 15 miles west of the town of Escanaba. As of 2009, there were only 27 remaining fluent speakers of the Potawatomi language, and 90 percent of them were age 60 or older. The Tribe is invested in revitalizing Potawatomi, and the kindergarten through 12th grade Hannahville Indian School offers daily language classes and regular culture classes.

In a review of school performance, school improvement monitors noted that language

and culture teachers could benefit from additional training in classroom management, child development, and facilitating active student participation. While language and culture teachers have rich subject matter knowledge, many have never had formal training in education theory. In addition, many teachers sought to improve Potawatomi proficiency.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The project purpose and first objective was to launch a training program to build teachers’ knowledge of educational psychology and language teaching skills. Project staff provided trainings to a core group of 11 people called the Language Instructor Skills Training (LIST) group, including four language and culture teachers, one teacher’s aide, and six community members. The in-school trainings occurred for a full day every 2 weeks during the school year, for all 3 years of the project. In the first half of each day, education specialists from Northern Michigan University provided training in child development, creating lesson plans, and classroom management. The second half of the day focused on language learning and connected the teachers to fluent

Potawatomi speakers through videoconferencing.

Each summer, the LIST participants and Potawatomi communities from across the country convened for 3 weeks of language immersion, led by expert speakers with over 20 years of teaching experience; a total of 120 people attended the immersion camps during the project period. The immersion classes featured lessons in conversation, pronunciation, orthography, and grammar. Bands from the U.S. and Canada, including Forest County Potawatomi (Wisconsin), Prairie Band Potawatomi (Kansas), Pokagon and Gun Lake Potawatomi (Lower Michigan), and Citizen Potawatomi (Oklahoma), joined the summer sessions in person. In addition to broadcasting immersion classes to remote learners, the project coordinator also created an online community forum, or “wiki,” for instructors and participants to continue dialogue outside the classroom.

The second objective was to evaluate the impact of teacher training on students’ language ability at the Hannahville Indian School. The project coordinator hired an educational achievement evaluator who used pre- and post-tests to measure students’ individual growth in listening comprehension, conversational skill level, and grammar knowledge. The results showed an average improvement of 10 percent in comprehension for kindergarten through 12th grade students, and gains in comprehension ranging from 20 to 40 percent for children in the kindergarten to 5-year old age range.

The third objective was to hold intergenerational events with immersion activities for the entire community, and provide an opportunity for LIST participants to showcase new skills. Staff held eight events over 2 years, which were attended by 90 people the first year and 123 in the

second. Events included: a Family Fun Day of “Shi Shi Be” (Bingo), Family Feud, and word games using Potawatomi phrases; Family Nature Day; sweat lodges for teachers and students; and a “bring your own darn bag” event using Potawatomi vocabulary.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Through this project, Potawatomi Bands from across the country were able to work and learn together, strengthening their connection. To bring back the language and increase its use, Potawatomi communities are sharing limited equipment and fluent teachers, and discussing strategies for applying for joint language funding.

The LIST participants expressed increased confidence in the classroom and pride in their professional growth. As one teacher said, “Now I know more about dealing with different skill levels at the same time.”

Reaching advanced proficiency in Potawatomi used to be a challenge for many teachers; as one participant said, prior to the camp “we had the words, but it was like trying to learn a song without a melody.” According to LIST participants, the immersion setting boosted language proficiency faster than non-immersion programs.

The development of the teacher training program is timely; the Michigan State legislature passed a bill in 2010 that enables Tribally certified teachers to teach Native language and culture classes in state public schools while pursuing state certification. This legislation opens doors for the five LIST participants who attained state or Tribal teaching certifications as a result of the project. Now, they are able to carry on the important work of Potawatomi language revitalization in schools across the state.