

First Voices Aboriginal Languages Project

Jurisdiction: Yukon

Contact: Tina Jules

level: K-12

Theme: Curriculum/materials, Culture and Language, Classroom Based Practices

Description of Practice:

First Voices is a web-base teaching and development initiative aimed at preserving and revitalizing Aboriginal languages and creating more culturally relevant curriculum materials in Yukon. The program operates by first archiving the language in print and with audio. Currently the Han, Tagish and Tlingit (some) languages are in the process of being archived. Once the languages are archived the AL teachers can use the web-based tool to assist in teaching students: words, phrases, songs and stories and can develop many classroom materials in the language.

Background:

First Nations student are the majority population in most rural Yukon schools and comprise a large proportion in the Whitehorse schools as well. All 8 of Yukon First Nation languages are in a critical state as most fluent speakers are elderly and the sheer number of speakers is very low – in two languages only a handful remains. It is very important at this stage that all efforts are made to preserve Yukon First Nation languages immediately.

In October of 2004, a pilot project was launched in collaboration with the two Yukon First Nation communities, Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation (THFN) and the Carcross Tagish First Nation; two Yukon Government departments, Education and Aboriginal Language Services of the Executive Council and the First Peoples Cultural Foundation (FPCF), whom created First Voices, of British Columbia.

The First Peoples' Cultural Foundation (FPCF) is a not-for-profit charitable public organization that generates support to raise awareness and funding for Aboriginal language revitalization. The Foundation works with its sister organization, the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Council to ensure fair and equal access for all funds raised and to all programs available.

The pilot project aimed to begin archiving the Han and Tagish languages and for the Han language to look at developing a working relationship/partnership between school Aboriginal language staff and the First Nation language staff. The pilot also involved a 50-50 sharing of the initial investment with the FPCF between the two Yukon government departments.

How is the practice integrated with ongoing non-aboriginal programming?

Once a participating Yukon First Nation community declares its archive public and provides the school with access to archive, all students, First Nation and non-First Nation alike will have access to archive. The archive provides exposure and experiences with text and audio samples of the language. The archive will eventually provide all Yukon students with access to authentic Yukon First Nation language: words, phrases,

stories and songs – in text and in audio, complimented with image and video where applicable.

Development:

This program first received funding in 2004 and is based on programming from British Columbia. The pilot project was deemed successful and the archiving for the Han language is continuing in the 2006/07 school year and steps are being made towards expanding the program. As well, seven primary reader's are now in the Tlingit language (in text) and the process will begin to add text and audio stories to the archive in cooperation with the Tlingit language communities.

Evidence:

In collaboration with the THFN language staff, the RSS Han Language teacher, Han language teacher trainee and the Computer Studies teacher have created possibly the largest archive of the Han language that exists. A YNTEP graduate has also developed 17 different kinds of teaching materials (including 4 book) in the course of a 6 month period. Seven primary readers are in the Tlingit language and the audio will be recorded this year.

Adaptability:

Suggestions for adapting the practice in other jurisdictions: This project is very valuable for preserving a language as well as providing access to those that may not otherwise have access to the Aboriginal language.

Key lessons learned: The collaboration between the school and First Nation must include regular review times that all involved are committed to. This can help with trouble shooting and adapting plans when needed. Collaborative planning includes the design, administration, and evaluation of the project.

Cautions for interested jurisdictions: Critical to the success of this project is a strong working relationship between the First Nation government, FN language staff, the school administrator and the AL teachers as well as a commitment on all parts to make the necessary changes and apply the necessary resources to make the project work. The Department of Education provides funding for training, assistance with obtaining the necessary hardware and software, assistance in developing educational materials, assistance in aligning material development with curriculum development and when needed technical computer assistance.

Further information:

Please contact First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Council (FPHLCC) of British Columbia at <http://www.fpcf.ca/> or visit the First Voices web site at: <http://www.firstvoices.ca/>.

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