

Penobscot Language Revitalization Program

A new dawn, a new hope



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May 13, 2003**

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to assist the Penobscot Nation weigh its options to decide which language program best suites its needs. The report seeks to be an easy read, so that members of the tribe not involved in the language revitalization effort can become aware of both the importance of language and the current status of the Penobscot language program. There are several members of the Nation who realize that because language is tied to identity, history and culture, it must be preserved. They are committed to the language revitalization program, but these individuals need the support of the community. A successful language revitalization program requires the mobilization and involvement of the whole community.

There are three possible tracks from which the Penobscot Nation can choose:

- 1. Revitalize Penobscot**
- 2. Learn Passamoquoddy**
 - a. Gradually switch to Penobscot**
 - b. Solely focus on learning Passamoquoddy**
- 3. Maintain the status quo**

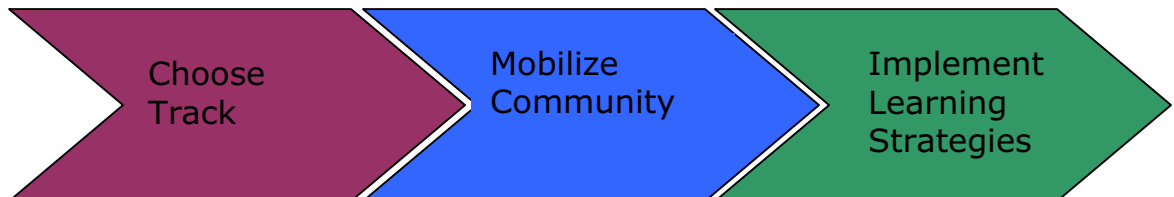


In addition, the report lays out various learning strategies that the Penobscot Nation can implement. These learning strategies can be intensive or non-intensive, depending on which track the tribe chooses to use.

Also, the report lists concerns voiced by members of the Nation.

Finally, we list two successful language revitalization programs to encourage the Penobscot Nation as it embarks on a difficult, but important journey.

Steps for Language Revitalization



History of the Penobscot Nation



The Penobscot, Malisset, Passamoquoddy, Abinaki and Mi'-kmaq tribes compose the Wabanaki Confederation. Before contact with Europeans, the 40,000 members lived

in what is now the northeast United States and southeast Canada.

There were approximately 10,000 Penobscots, mostly in northern Maine. During summer months, tribes would stay closer to the ocean to fish and farm. As winter approached, they disbanded and moved inland to subsist off of hunting and trapping.

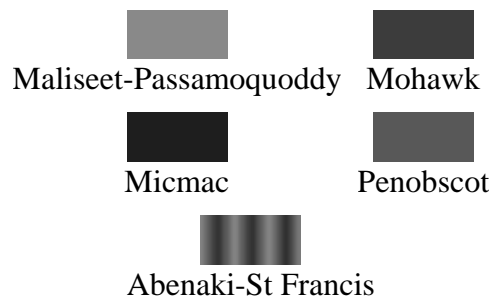
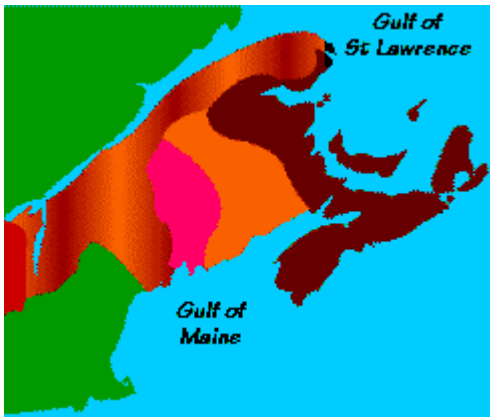
Due to infectious disease triggered by European contact, the Wabanaki Confederation decreased to 5,000 people (with only 300 Penobscots) in the 1600s. As Native Americans living in the south fled northward due to European pressure, the Wabanaki population grew. The following century was tumultuous due to wars between the English, French and various native tribes, mainly the Iroquois. Because of the Penobscots' bitterness with the English, they fought for America's independence in the Revolutionary War. Their bravery prompted the Americans to "reward" the Penobscots by allowing them to remain on their land.



In the 1800's, much of their hunting land was sold without their consent and the Penobscots resorted to basket making and farming to subsist. In 1979, the federal government awarded them, along with the Passamoquoddy and Maliseet, money to reacquire part of their original land. They were also granted federal recognition in 1980.

Currently, the home of the Penobscot tribe is a 315-acre island in northern Maine. The tribe also owns approximately 200 other islands in the Penobscot River. About 600 people live on Indian Island, another 500 live within 25 miles of the island and the remainder are dispersed throughout the US.

Population Distribution of the Wabanki Confederation in the Northeastern United States and Southeastern Canada



History of the Penobscot Language

The Abanaki language, which includes the dialects of Penobscot, Maliseet and Passamoquoddy, is originally from the Algonquin language family. Because of the close contact between the Penobscots, Maliseets and Passamoquoddys throughout the centuries, the dialects are quite similar. Although pronunciation differs, grammatical structures are almost identical and much of the vocabulary is the same.

Frank Siebert, the man responsible for recording and transcribing Penobscot, began his study of native Maine languages in the 1930's. In 1960, he retired from his medical practice and settled in Old Town to dedicate himself to the slowly dying language. A Harvard PhD student studying linguistics, Conner Quinn, spent three summers with Siebert in the late nineties to learn the language and assist the Penobscot tribe in preserving its language. Quinn is currently writing a book called "Learning Penobscot." When Siebert died in 1998, he left a Penobscot/English dictionary and 200 pages of notes on the Penobscot language.



Currently, there are four fluent speakers who grew up speaking the language. They are in their 80's and 90's and do not live on Indian Island. Another 22 individuals were identified as having a modest command of Penobscot. Because of the constant contact with the Passamoquoddy people, speakers have trouble distinguishing between Penobscot and Passamoquoddy. This makes teaching pure Penobscot confusing and frustrating. The Penobscot tribe has recognized that if they do not pro-actively pursue the revitalization of their language, it will die out completely within a generation.

The Penobscot tribe is currently trying to revitalize their language. Children from kindergarten to eighth grade study the Penobscot language a few hours a week with their teacher, Carol Dana. Conner Quinn has been working with the youth during the summer to teach pronunciation and basic grammatical structures. Furthermore, adult classes are attended sporadically in the evenings.

A committee was formed in 2000 to develop a more effective strategy. The tribe applied for a grant from the Administration of Native Americans (ANA) in March of this year. The proposal solicits 75,000 dollars in order to assess the language abilities of the Penobscot tribe,



record and duplicate material in Penobscot and develop a school curriculum.

Why Are We Loosing Native Languages?

When the Europeans first settled in North America, indigenous peoples spoke more than 300 native languages. Currently, there are only 175 languages. Of the 175 languages, 125 are only spoken by middle-aged people and elders, and 50 are spoken by less than 6 people. It is estimated that in the next 60 years, only 20 languages will remain.

- 1 out of 20 languages in Alaska are being taught to the next generation.
- In Oklahoma, 2 out of 23 languages are being learned by children.
- All of the 50 languages in California are moribund.
- Few of the native languages in Washington are spoken by people under the age of 60.

Some argue that languages, like evolutionary traits, die out if they do not serve a useful purpose. This rationale has been used to hinder the maintenance and revitalization of native languages. However, Native Americans are losing their language, not because of "language suicide" but because of "language murder." Tribal members, since the European occupation, have been punished for speaking their native languages. Because they do not want their families to suffer as they



did, many adults do not teach their native language to their children. Furthermore, Western civilization has made maintaining indigenous cultures while prospering economically nearly impossible. Therefore, in order to provide for their families, many natives feel they must assimilate.

Why Preserve Language?

- Creates a cultural identity
- Promotes cultural pride and uniqueness
- Helps maintain native family values
- Acts as a vessel for cultural information
- Promotes self-determination

"Along with the accompanying loss of culture, language loss can destroy a sense of self-worth, limiting human potential and complicating efforts to solve other problems, such as poverty, family breakdown, school failure, and substance abuse."

James Crawford

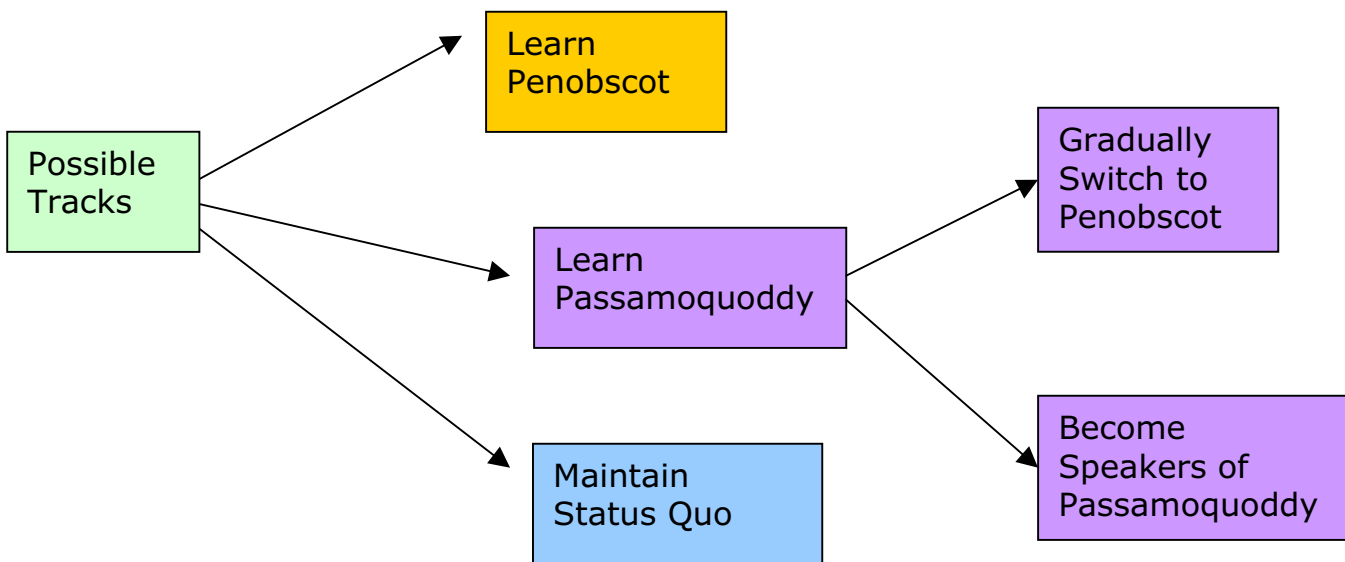
In order for people to find meaning in their lives they need support from family and community members who share similar values and traditions. Language protects values by acting as a median to express and share cultural norms. Furthermore, by giving people pride in



their unique culture, language stimulates self-determination and sovereignty.

The United States government acknowledged the importance of language in 1990, by passing the Native American Language Act, which not only made native languages legal again in some states, but also provided communities options for funding.

Possible Tracks for the Penobscot Nation



Track 1: Learn Penobscot

Pros:

- The Penobscot people will maintain their uniqueness among the other Native American tribes in the region
- The Penobscot language will not die out



Cons:

- There are few speakers to teach the language
- There are few speakers with whom the Penobscot can converse
- Learning materials must be created and reproduced

Track 2: Learn Passamoquoddy

Option 1: Gradually switch to Penobscot after the Passamoquoddy grammatical structure and vocabulary are understood

Pros:

- There are many speakers who can teach
- There are many speakers with whom the Penobscot can converse

Cons:

- Lengthy process
- Resource intensive – will eventually need to produce learning materials in both Passamoquoddy and Penobscot

Option 2: Become speakers of Passamoquoddy

Pros:

- Reinforce the existing cultural and social ties that exist between the two tribes

Cons:

- Lose the Penobscot language

Option 3: Maintain the Status Quo

Pros:

- No added financial or human resources needed

Cons:

- Students of Penobscot will most likely not become fluent speakers





Making the Decision

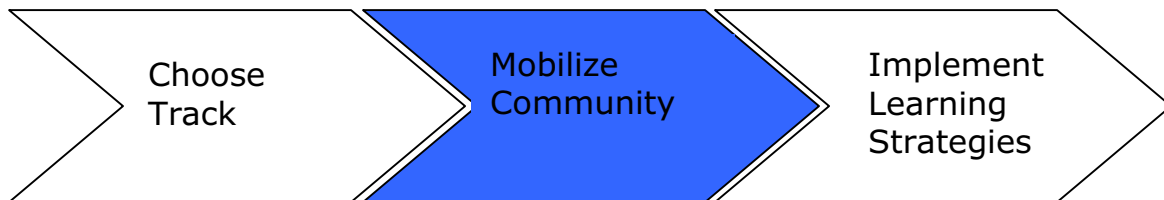
Members of the Penobscot tribe feel a strong bond to the Passamoquoddy because of shared traditions and history. However, if the Penobscot focus on Passamoquoddy because it is logistically easier, they could lose their language forever. Tribal members are aware that they must make a decision and execute a plan of action now. In order to decide, the Penobscot should hold a debate where people can discuss the consequences of each track and evaluate the resources available. The Penobscot should arrive to an agreement that alienates as few people as possible.

Language Awareness and Community Mobilization

The most important requirement in establishing a successful language program is to gain and maintain community support. If the community has other financial priorities or time commitments, it cannot revive a language from a moribund state to a widely spoken state. Even with several skilled and motivated tribal members, increasing fluency is such an enormous task that it requires 100%



community participation. Before trying to implement an expensive language project that might end in failure and dissuade future advances in language preservation, language advocates should rally support.



How?

Make the language seen and heard as much as possible:

- Church prayers and songs in Penobscot
 1. Print out the prayers in Penobscot with English translations.
 2. Translate favorite church songs in Penobscot.
 3. Practice the prayer and songs at the beginning of church services and Sunday school classes.

Hail Mary in Penobscot

Mali kedalamikol
passankogowan wliwa-
wogan Ne Logmōmna
Kwijthamekw, kolal-
megwesitali phanemikokta
wlalmegwat keminkogan
tali khagak Jasos.

Wawassi Mali, ktchi-
Niwaskw wigawessa,
winowōswawina saagawa
kosowinowiak, nikkobi,
ta tōniadoji kadawi mat-
chinaak.

Ni alatch.



Resources required: Supportive church officials and money for photocopying

- Street signs and public building names in Penobscot
 1. Select a few strategic buildings that are visited by the majority of the Penobscot tribe. e.g. the school, church, museum, fire department, police station, tribal office and recreational area.
 2. Select a few main streets.
 3. Translate names into Penobscot and make signs to accompany the name in English.

Resources required: Signs do not need to be professionally made in order to have an impact. Wood and paint will work unless the tribe can afford to pay a professional.

- Radio Programs

This does not have to be a method to teach the language but to expose the sounds and intonation.

1. Find local radio stations in Orono or Old Town that are willing to support an hour-long weekend program.
2. Find youth that are willing to read stories in Penobscot or play recordings of elders speaking.
3. English translations must be provided so everyone can understand.

Resources required: Willing radio stations, stories in Penobscot and recordings of elders



Get people together to talk about language:

- Form a community group of women who are concerned with maintaining Penobscot culture. They can have bi-monthly meetings to discuss issues of culture, form concrete strategies for action and designate work.
 1. Carol Dana should invite her friends for an initial meeting.
 2. Women should all bring ideas about language and culture.
 3. They should then set dates for future meetings and designate who will perform program tasks.

Resources required: None

- Language program kick-off

Once initial strategies have been developed, the community should hold a social event to describe the status of the grant, the plan of action and ways in which everyone can get involved. This could be in conjunction with another community event to ensure participation. Food and music are good ways to draw participants.

Resources required: Food, music, motivated speaker, and a concrete plan

- Form a Theater Troupe

The Passamoquoddy tribe already has a language troupe that explores issues of language and culture. The Penobscot can also form a troupe in order to expose people to both the sounds of the language and the psychological impacts of language and cultural loss.



1. Talk with the people in charge of the Passamoquoddy troupe and find out the date of the next performance.
2. Gather a group of interested Penobscot members to attend the event.
3. Review Passamoquoddy plays and skits and select one for the first performance.
4. Recruit a group of interested youth to perform the play at the Penobscot community theater.

Resources required: Interested youth, cars and gasoline for the trip to the Passamoquoddy reservation

Educate People on Language Loss:

- Language Conferences

There are many conferences throughout the year that would allow the Penobscot to learn about language theory and see other language initiatives. People who have not been actively involved in the language program should attend in order to broaden the projects' support base. A list of conferences is located in the appendixes of this booklet.

Resources required: Money for tuition and air flight

- Language Fair

Present to the community, in the form of booths and activities, current language statistics, language initiatives and projects, stories in Penobscot, cultural artifacts, food and music.



1. Youth in high school can conduct a research project in order to learn about language initiatives in other areas. They can present the information at a booth. Their high school should give them school credit to award them for their hard work.
2. Each grade in school can have a booth that represents a cultural aspect of the Penobscot tribe. They should use as much Penobscot vocabulary as possible in their presentations.

Resources required: (very resource intensive!) People, money for booth set-up and cultural stories and artifacts

Not all of the strategies should be pursued at once. The Language Committee should assess the current resource level of the tribe and start planning one or two events. The process of gaining community support is long and should be initiated with a patient attitude. If an activity fails, and one probably will, the committee should try something new and different. The important thing to remember is: don't give up! If exposed enough times, the community will eventually realize the importance of revitalizing its language



Learning Strategies

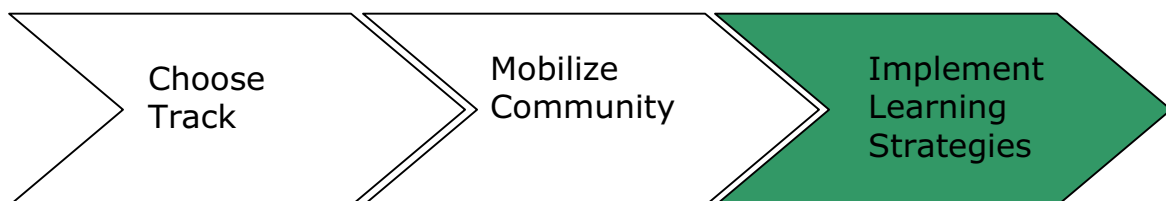
"Since we have no more elders from the previous century, we should be concentrating on our youth. We should be volunteering to help in school-based programs instead of criticizing them into oblivion. We should be doing things that are proactive and positive that ensure the continued use of our language".

Richard Littlebear

Once the community commits to revitalizing its language, it needs to determine the best methods in doing so. It will need to apply for future funding in order to execute chosen programs. A list of conferences is located in the appendixes of this booklet.

The Penobscot Nation can choose to implement a combination of the following strategies:

- Pre-school program
- Weekend and evening programs
- Summer camps
- Partner with the University of Maine
- Mentor program
- Create CDs & CD-ROMs
- Create books about Penobscot traditions (e.g. basket weaving or stories)



Pre-school Program



The pre-school program will focus on children from ages 3 to 5 years old. This program appears to be the most successful model used by other tribes. Children of this age are more likely to absorb the language if they are in an intensive program. Currently, it is more feasible to conduct this program in Passamoquoddy because there are more speakers and teachers of the language.

However, if the nation chooses to teach Penobscot it is possible to group all the pre-schoolers in one classroom with one teacher.

Initially, this program will be less intensive due to the lack of fluent speaking teachers. However, it will pick up once teachers gain more fluency and the general population uses the language more often.

Weekend & Evening Programs

Adults and youth with busier schedules maybe unable to attend intensive classes for long hours. In order to reach out to this group, a weekend and/or evening program maybe preferable. These classes can be taught at the Indian Island community center or possibly in conjunction with the University of Maine.



Summer Camps

The Penobscot Nation can set up an intensive language summer camp for children and teenagers. The children can take classes varying from history to math to art. Like the weekend and evening programs, if the Nation chooses to teach Penobscot in the summer camp, it will be less intensive because of limited resources. Currently, there is only one language teacher on Indian Island. If the other two-dozen speakers became involved in the summer camp, it may be possible to have several classes in Penobscot. However, there is a danger of overburdening these individuals by demanding too much of their time and dedication to the project.

Work with the University of Maine

The University of Maine is located a few miles from Indian Island, and has a Native American Program dedicated to increasing the understanding and appreciation of Native people. The program seeks to create awareness about Native American tribes in the Northeast through the Native American Studies program and the Wabanaki Center. Native American Studies is an interdisciplinary minor with a goal of teaching students the history, culture, tradition, and right to sovereignty through Native perspectives. The Wabanaki Center is a resource for the University, but is especially targeted to serve Native



American students. The center focuses on recruiting and retaining Native students.

The main mission of the Native American Office is to develop a relationship between the University and the Native American tribes in the region: the Maliseet, Mi'-kmaq, Passamoquoddy and the Penobscot.

The Interim Director, John Bear, expressed to us that the Native American Office is interested in beginning a language program, as this will create a deeper understanding of the Native tribes of the Northeast. Bear is a member of the Penobscot tribe and a fluent speaker of Passamoquoddy. He noted that although the University is located very close to the Penobscot Nation, it is more feasible to teach Passamoquoddy because there are more speakers of this language and also more demand to learn. Because college professors must have at least a Masters' degree, it will be easier to find someone to teach Passamoquoddy at the University level. In order for a language program to begin, the Penobscot Nation and Passamoquoddy Tribe need to petition to have the language taught. All Native Americans can attend the University of Maine free of charge and people do not have to be full-time students to take classes.



Mentor Program



Because revitalizing a language is a race against time, elders and those with a modest command of the language should be paired off with youth who are interested in learning the language. Through this method, the tribe can document linguistic information from the elders quickly, facilitate the creation of lasting friendships and promote language acquisition in youth.

The mentorship programs can be formed with either the Penobscot track or Passamoquoddy track. The Penobscot mentorship program would be limited to a small number of youth since there are few speakers of the language. On the other hand, a Passamoquoddy language program could be open to a majority of the youth in the community, because there are hundreds of speakers of the language. If the Passamoquoddy track is chosen, it is possible to create an exchange program with the Passamoquoddy. The program would allow members of the Passamoquoddy tribe to spend time (summer vacation etc...) and constantly converse with the Penobscot and vice versa.



This strategy could be implemented with a small budget for travel expense and personal or familial contacts.

Create CDs and CD-ROMs

Many tribes, such as the Passamoquoddy, have created CDs and CD-ROMs in order to revitalize their language. The Penobscot Nation should add to their collection of stories in Penobscot by visiting elders and recording more. All of the recordings should then be duplicated onto CDs and distributed to tribal members. These stories will assist in teaching the language and pronunciation while giving insight into the culture, tradition and history of the Penobscot. The current grant proposal to ANA solicits money for the production of CDs but it does not state explicitly how many will be produced and how they will be distributed.

CD-ROMs are great tools that can help people learn languages.

Interactive CD-ROMs allow the user to become involved in the lessons taught (e.g. to learn a word, the user simply points at the object with her mouse and the computer will say what the object is). However, they require more money and a skilled computer technician to produce.



People can use CDs and CD-ROMs according to their own schedules. Many of the adults and youth may find it difficult to attend classes because of their other activities. Instead, they can play the CDs as they are driving or use the CD-ROMs when they have time at home. The University of Hawaii currently has a program where students can receive college credit by completing a language course on-line.

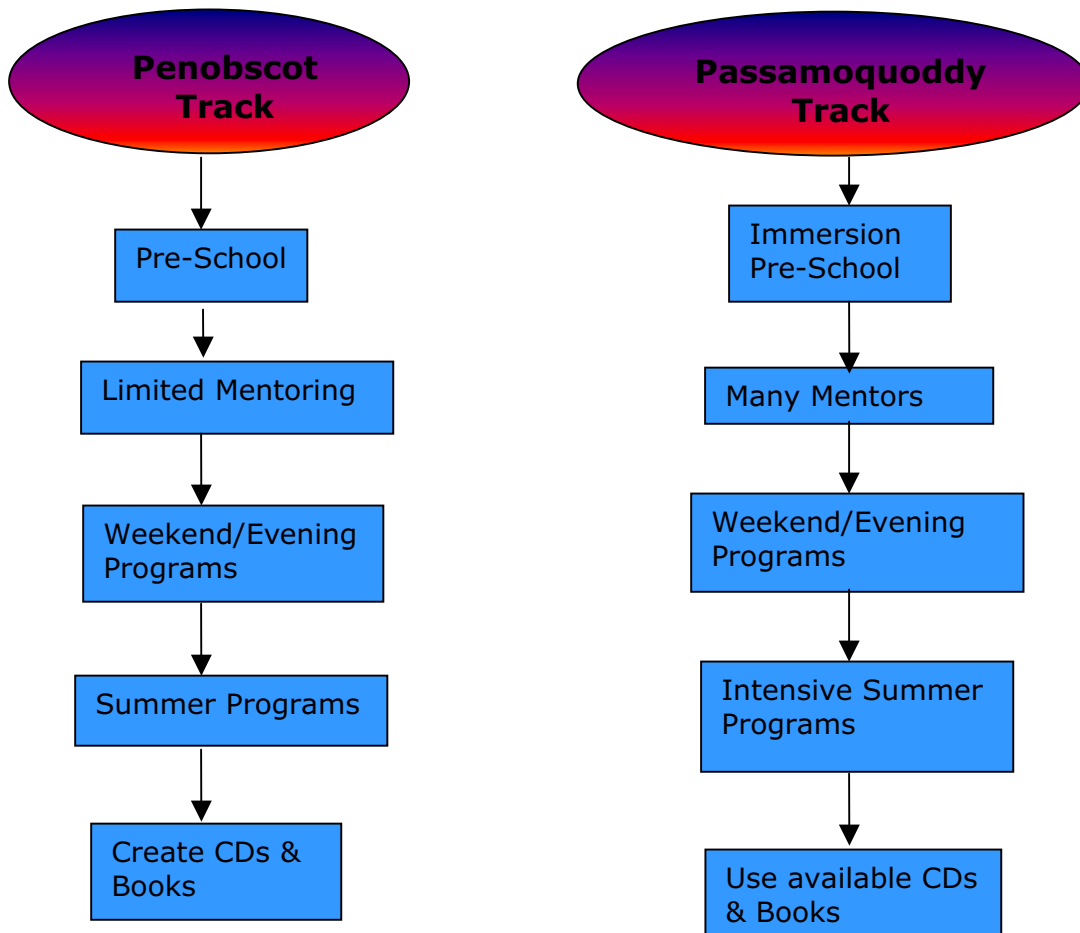
Although CDs and CD-ROMs are great tools for learning languages, one needs to be careful not to rely on them heavily. It is nearly impossible to learn a language simply by using technology. Students of the language must interact with other speakers. The technology aids the learning process, but should not be the primary way of learning.

Books

In addition, stories should be made into books with Penobscot and English translations. Other books can be written on traditional activities, such as basket weaving. Also, there is a Penobscot dictionary compiled by Dr. Frank Siebert. This is a great resource, but it needs to be organized in a simple way, so people unfamiliar with the Penobscot language can find words easily.



Learning Strategies that the Penobscot Nation can utilize depending on the track it chooses:



Concerns

These are a few concerns that need to be addressed in order to make sure the language program is successful:

- Traditionalist vs. non-traditionalist community members
- Change in tribal leadership
- Commitment level of the community
- School trade offs
- Penobscot vocabulary based on old culture
- Only 600 of 2,000 members live on Indian Island
- Involvement of linguists from outside the Nation

Traditionalist vs. Non-traditionalist

One obstacle facing the language revitalization program is the division within the Penobscot Nation. Community members are split into two camps: traditionalists and non-traditionalists. Traditionalists are those who are committed to maintaining the tribe's history, culture, language and uniqueness. Non-traditionalists are those who are more concerned with everyday life, such as working and fitting into mainstream society. In order for the language program to be successful there needs to be a common understanding between the two groups of the importance of language and the sacrifices involved.

Change in Tribal Leadership

The Penobscot tribal leaders are elected every two years. The current chief and vice-chief are committed to the language revitalization



project. However, this is their second term in office and it is unknown if the new leaders will be as committed to this project. The chiefs normally have many issues to deal with, but in order for the language revitalization project to be successful it must be a top priority for the leaders. Because of their political and social legitimacy, tribal leaders can play a large role in convincing community members that language is important in preserving tribal identity and culture.

Commitment of the Community

Above all else, community involvement and mobilization is key to the success of the language revitalization project. Currently, the project rests on the shoulders of a few individuals, as they are the only ones who are involved. If these people do not get support, they will get burned out and the program will fail. It is important to get more people excited and focused on learning the language.

School Trade off



In recent years, the standardized scores of children on Indian Island have been substandard. Therefore, many parents are concerned that their children's education is in jeopardy if they are required to learn Penobscot in addition to other



subjects. These parents prefer that the school focus on teaching basics such as math, science, reading and writing English. They feel that these are the subjects that will help their children advance in contemporary society. But there is no evidence that shows that children that learn a second language fall behind in their other subjects. In fact, there are studies that demonstrate that students who learn a second language may actually perform better in school. Examples of this can be seen among students in the Blackfeet immersion school. It is possible that the children in the Blackfeet immersion school advanced in their studies because they received individual attention.

Penobscot Vocabulary Based on Old Culture

Another concern is that the Penobscot language is based on an old culture, and has not changed with time because a majority of the tribe stopped using it. The language has not been updated overtime, making it difficult to convey modern ideas. For example, there are no words to translate, "Turn off the television," or "Our high school team won the football game." It is possible to get over this hurdle by having speakers agree upon how to translate contemporary lingo into Penobscot.



Only Thirty Percent of the Tribe Lives on Indian Island

Indian Island allows the tribe to maintain its culture, roots and relationships. However, only 600 of the 2,000 members live on the island. Many people live in the surrounding towns, and some live in other parts of Maine or the U.S. The language program needs to make a special effort to reach out to members who live off Indian Island. One way of serving this group is through the weekend/evening and summer programs, because these classes give people more flexibility. CDs and CD-ROMs also give individuals who live further away an alternative method of learning and hearing the language.

Learning Penobscot from Outsiders

“The language program should be by the people, of the people and for the people”

Carol Dana
Penobscot teacher

Some tribal members are concerned with the involvement of outsiders in the language revitalization program. These members realize that the tribe needs

assistance in revitalizing the language, but do not want to be told how to create their language programs and the “correct” way of speaking their own language. Therefore, the Penobscot Nation should control and direct the language revitalization program. In the past, much of the Penobscot dictionary and other documents were collected and compiled by a non-native, Frank Siebert. Currently, one of the



teachers of Penobscot is Conner Quinn, a Caucasian graduate student from Harvard University. Quinn's teaching on Indian Island has caused some friction. In order to avoid situations as these in the future, there needs to be an agreement between the directors of the program and outsiders. Outsiders must be respectful of Penobscot culture and give the leaders of the program full authority. On the other hand, the Penobscot Nation must decide how much involvement they would like from linguists and other outsiders.

Examples of Successful Language Revitalization Programs

Hawaii

Europeans invaded Hawaii in the 1700's seeking natural resources and religious converts. Upon annexation to The United State in 1898, officials banned the use of the Hawaiian language, which was spoken by almost all native and non-native inhabitants.

In the 1970's, people began to realize that with the passing away of the older, native-speaking generation, Hawaiian languages would be lost forever. In 1978, the people voted to make Hawaiian the official language of the state once again. A group of young adults began to work with a young professor at the University of Hawaii to learn the



language. Their children became the first fluent speakers of Hawaiian in 30 years. Concerned citizens also started a radio show that had a different elder speak every week.

In 1983, a young Maori from New Zealand helped the Hawaiian people start an immersion pre-school near the University of Hawaii called Pūnana Leo. Elders taught the language to interested college students who then became the teachers. However, founders of the program had difficulty securing funds and ensuring that the children spoke to each other in Hawaiian and not in English. The school temporarily shut-down and the founders changed their strategy. They began to require parents to participate in the program and take language classes themselves. Meanwhile, they lobbied the government to reverse laws that outlawed the Hawaiian language in the classroom. Now, there are pre-schools and elementary schools taught in Hawaiian throughout the state and 2,000 students participate in the program. After five months of the intense immersion, children become fluent speakers. A study conducted on the original students of the program demonstrated that they performed well in high-school and college.

Blackfeet Nation's Language Revitalization Project

The Blackfeet Nation has successfully launched an immersion school, enabling them to maintain their language through a new generation of



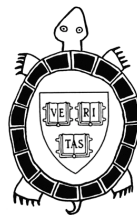
Piegian speakers. The private school on the Blackfeet Reservation, known as Nizipuhwahsin Center, came about because a few visionary leaders believed that the revival of their language was critical to the tribe's identity. Founded in 1995, the Nizipuhwahsin Center was inspired and molded after the successful nest schools in Hawaii. Initially, it focused on immersion programs for pre-schoolers, but since has expanded to a school serving children from k-8th grade. This immersion school rests on the idea that children who learn in two languages perform better in school than those who speak only one language.

The strongest advice from Darrell Kipp, the founder of the Piegian Institute, is to go ahead with the language program. He advises tribes to not wait, "Go ahead and get started, don't wait even five minutes. Don't wait for a grant. Don't wait, even if you can't speak the language. Even if you have only ten words. Get started. Teach those ten words to someone who knows another ten words. In the beginning, I knew thirty words, then fifty, then sixty. One day I woke up and realized I was dreaming in Blackfeet



Conclusion

We would like to thank the Penobscot tribe for sharing with us their stories and culture. Although revitalizing and preserving language is an overwhelming task, we feel that the Penobscot Nation has the base needed to mobilize the community and implement a successful program. Our advice is to start small, but start today. Good luck!



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