

## Reflections on the Arapaho Language Project, or When Bambi Spoke Arapaho and Other Tales of Arapaho Language Revitalization Efforts

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### BACKGROUND HISTORY AND LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE EFFORTS

As Indigenous North Americans prepare themselves for the challenges they will face in the 21st century, the problems of language loss will stand among some of their greatest challenges because with the loss of language comes an inevitable loss of culture. Typically language loss begins when young adults become bilingual, speaking both the language of their ancestors and the language of the majority culture. The stage that follows occurs when the children of these bilingual speakers become monolingual speakers of the majority language. This pattern continues through successive generations until eventually only the older people speak their ancestral language. At this point the ancestral language has become a minority language, and usually remains so until the last native speaker dies. Long before this occurs, however, the minority language has degenerated through loss of its grammatical complexities, loss of native words that have been forgotten and dropped from the lexicon, and loss through incorporation of foreign vocabulary and grammatical features. As these losses accumulate, they also bring about various cultural losses. While recent governmental attempts have been made to redress the devastating impact that assimilation policies have had upon the languages of Indigenous North Americans, the effort and commitment needed to revitalize endangered languages must come from within native-speaking communities themselves.

In December 1994 I was hired to direct a language revitalization effort on the Wind River reservation in Wyoming. The following will examine strategies used toward this revitalization effort and discuss the steps taken to implement both the first language-immersion kindergarten class and the first full-day language-immersion preschool class for the

specific purpose of creating a new generation of Arapaho speakers among children on the Wind River reservation.

The Arapaho language has been classified as a member of the Algonquian language group. In the past century speakers of Arapaho have fallen into three primary tribal groups: the Gros Ventre of Montana, the Southern Arapaho of Oklahoma, of which there are only a handful of speakers remaining, and the Northern Arapaho of the Wind River reservation in Wyoming.

Members of the Northern Arapaho tribe have long been concerned about the rate of language loss that their communities have experienced. Due to influences of missionary boarding schools, Arapaho people were led to believe that it would be detrimental to their and their children's ability to become valued "American" citizens if they continued to speak Arapaho. This resulted in English becoming the standard language of communication, and the Arapaho no longer speaking their language to their children. The effect of this, and the dominance of English in all forms of communication, has led to the steady decline of the Arapaho language.

At the time of this writing, the Arapaho language is identified as a language in serious decline, and if action is not taken to change the language's steady decline into disuse, by the year 2025 the Arapaho language may well be extinct. Table 23.1 illustrates 1996 levels of Arapaho language speaking ability among the Northern Arapaho of the Wind River reservation.

As indicated by Table 23.1, there are approximately 1,000 fluent speakers of Northern Arapaho, all of whom, with one exception, are over the age of 55. By 1978, in an effort to keep the Arapaho language viable, community members had begun to establish adult and youth language programs in the community and schools. In 1992, after observing that the language was still rapidly declining, the community took

TABLE 23.1 1996 Levels of Speaking Ability for Northern Arapaho

Speaking ability	Age groups								
	3-4	5-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	80+
None	60	200	138	420	258				
Limited vocabulary	50	1000	690	360	470				
Marginal	15	38			27	74			
Marginally fluent						124 M 151 F	29 M 36 F		
Fluent					1 F	92 M 113 F	157 M 192 F	38 M 45 F	8 M 14 F

M = males, F = females in number of fluent speakers

measures to bring a new vitality to the language. While adult and youth language programs were continued, the community called for a more effective method of keeping the language viable that could produce new speakers of Arapaho among young children.

In the spring of 1992, a community organization called the Northern Plains Educational Foundation was established to oversee planned directional changes of language instruction for the Wyoming Indian School District, a public school system on the reservation. Arapaho language instruction within this school district was being administered by seven fluent speakers who served the total number of Arapaho students from kindergarten to the twelfth grade. As good as this may sound, the downside is that prior to 1994, children from kindergarten to 5th grade received only 75 minutes of Arapaho language instruction per week. This amounted to a total of 45 hours per school year. Interestingly, the school's primary teachers were of the opinion that the language teachers were not competent because the children were not learning the language within the allotted time frame. At the 5th- to 8th-grade levels, about 178 students received 84 minutes of language instruction per week. Although high school students who enrolled in Arapaho language classes received 100 minutes of Arapaho each week, Arapaho language instruction at this level was optional. During the 1993-94 school year, of the 170 students in 9th-12th grade, only 20 took Arapaho instruction. Since the 1994-95 school year, however, this number has shown a small increase, possibly as a result of the Disney production of "Bambi Speaks Arapaho."

In August of 1992, the Northern Plains Educational Foundation approached me to direct an Arapaho Language and Culture Project within a public school system on the reservation. One of the objectives of this project was to arrest the steady decline of the Arapaho language. And so it was that on December 14, after having packed up our belongings, my family and I left Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, where I had been teaching courses at the University of Alberta, to take up a two-and-a-half-year position on the Wind River reservation at Ethete, Wyoming. Fortunately, I did not depart with-

out a well-thought-out strategy and plan of action. At least part of my plan was first conceived during the summer of 1979. It was during this time, while working on the Rosebud Sioux reservation in South Dakota, that I first began to give thought to the idea of using animation as a tool for language learning for children. A year later, after completing a master's in anthropology with an emphasis on language revitalization, I began to examine the merits of language immersion as a tool for second-language acquisition.

### THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD CHANGE

As soon as I arrived on the reservation I drafted a letter to Roy Disney requesting permission to translate the movie *Bambi* into the Arapaho language. While waiting for a reply, I began to assess the Arapaho language situation within the school system. Foremost was the realization that whatever knowledge my assessment brought me, I had only about two years to make some sort of impact. I also knew that a single approach to the problem would have little if any real impact. The biggest test, however, was whether the different factions on the reservation could effectively be worked with, and because of this I was hopeful that a project like *Bambi* might work as a catalyst to bring about support from various factions.

As director of a Title V project within the school system, the first obstacle I faced was to try to increase the amount of time allotted for language instruction in the classroom. I decided that the kindergarten represented the best place to initiate change with the least amount of resistance. In a meeting with the elementary school principal, I pressed for an hour of Arapaho language instruction per day as a test model for language instruction. I was allowed to take a team of four Arapaho language instructors into a kindergarten class for the 18 weeks that remained of the second half of the school term. The hour of Arapaho language instruction at the kindergarten level was a significant gain, because prior to that language instruction within the elementary school amounted

**Animals (36)**

antelope  
bear  
beaver  
bird  
buffalo  
butterfly  
cat  
chicken  
chipmunk  
cow  
coyote  
crow  
deer  
dog  
duck  
elk  
fish  
frog  
hawk  
horse  
insect/bug  
monkey  
mouse  
rabbit  
raccoon  
sage chicken  
salamander  
sheep  
snake  
wolf  
owl  
pig  
porcupine  
spider  
turkey  
turtle

**Phrases (33)**

come here  
sit down  
be still  
sit still  
listen  
stand up  
write your name  
erase it  
move over (sitting)  
move over (standing)  
are you hungry  
yes I am hungry  
I am thirsty  
pick it up  
throw it (an.)  
go and get it  
let's go  
can I touch him  
throw it away  
can I ride him  
can I feed him  
give it to me  
talk loud  
feed him  
what is your name  
my name is . . .  
line up  
what are you doing  
I am jumping  
jump  
put it down  
come in  
quit it

**Miscellaneous word items (24)**

box	paper	mountain
cup	snow	grandma
fork	plate	grandpa
chair	river	mother
knife	tree	father
hello	rock	what
spoon	ball	sun
moon	night	day

**Body parts (16)**

body  
eyes  
ears  
mouth  
nose  
hair  
head  
elbow  
hand  
fingers  
toes  
leg  
knee  
neck  
face  
teeth

**Foods (14)**

apple  
bread  
butter  
corn  
bacon  
eggs  
meat  
potatoes  
milk  
orange  
salt  
sugar  
pepper  
water

**Clothing (8)**

belt  
gloves  
hat  
shirt (men's)  
shirt (women's)  
shoes  
socks  
pants

**Colors (9)**

red  
orange/yellow  
blue/green  
brown  
black  
white  
pink  
purple  
grey

**Numbers (1–30)**

**Total combined word & phrase count = 170**

FIGURE 23.1 Kindergarten Arapaho Language Class after 14 Weeks of Instruction

to only 15 minutes per day. The results of this first effort proved to be dramatic. Where children had been generally assessed at having mastered a vocabulary range of only 15–18 words by the end of a school year, a minimum of 80% of the test class had mastered 170 words and phrases after 14 weeks. This included the ability to count from 1 to 30 and a

list of 33 phrases, 16 body parts, 14 different food items, 8 different items of clothing, 9 colors, 36 animals, and the 20 miscellaneous words as illustrated by Figure 23.1.

By mid-April I had received a response from Disney studios suggesting that I contact an individual in their video production department. A letter was immediately drafted

and sent. While waiting for a response, an opportune event arose: a conference called Native American Language Issues (NALI). The only catch was that the conference was in Hawai'i, and for this reason alone it appeared as if I would get no support to attend.

When I became aware of the NALI conference in Hawai'i, it seemed like the perfect opportunity to validate what needed to be done next with the language immersion efforts on the Wind River reservation. I submitted my request for travel leave, and two days before the school board was to meet I discovered that my request was not on the agenda. My supervisor was of the opinion that my wanting to go to a conference in Hawai'i would be an embarrassment to the project and I therefore should not make such a request of the school board. It took calling a special meeting of the group that hired me and two hours of discussion before they were sufficiently convinced to allow me to make the request. On the tail of this meeting came another meeting an hour long the following morning with the school district's superintendent to garner his support for my request. With the stage set, I went into that night's meeting feeling fairly confident. Then, right before I was to address the school board, lightning struck. The superintendent got up and spoke to the board on the loss of money that the school district experienced as a result of paying people to attend conferences instead of being on site performing their jobs. It appeared as though my request was doomed, and as my supervisor was telling me I should not make my request, I was called before the school board.

The Wyoming Indian Schools' school board is predominantly native. As I approached the members of the school board I realized that in one way or another they all had some connection to our summer ceremonial lodge. I had been through the lodge three times by then, so I decided to make my request through this shared link. As a result, what I had expected to be a firm denial concluded as a unanimous vote of confidence.

So in May 1993 I traveled to Hawai'i to attend the Native American Language Issues conference. During the conference I was able to videotape several adult Hawaiian students in an immersion class on site at the conference and was also able to visit a Pūnana Leo immersion preschool. My attendance at NALI proved to be instrumental in supplying me with needed resources for negotiating the implementation of a half-day kindergarten immersion class at the Wyoming Indian Elementary.

The NALI conference proved to be even better than I had expected, and I was able to document 18 hours of the conference and surrounding events on videotape. The only disappointing event came when I phoned Disney studios and learned that my request to translate the *Bambi* script into Arapaho had been denied. When I returned to the reservation I quickly mailed off a reply to Roy Disney, taking the liberty of sending him a copy of the letter of denial I had received. Using skills of logic and reasoning, I concluded my letter:

My request was not made in the interest of public entertainment. All I sought was permission to allow the English words from *Bambi* to be spoken in Arapaho to our children in an effort to strengthen the language. How sad it has become. The denial of my request clearly demonstrates that when we can be legally punished for speaking Arapaho in place of English words, because those words are from the movie *Bambi*, we the Arapaho cannot even claim ownership of our language: It would appear that little has changed since the days when the government's boarding schools purged the language from our fathers' minds by punishing them for speaking Arapaho. . . . I find it amazing how the Anglo-European holds such a fascination with Indian culture and yet will idly stand by as our culture slowly slips into extinction: People have done more to save the Florida Manatee than the "American" Indian.

Because I am looking at the face of Genocide I can do no less than continue my efforts. I must continue to believe that somewhere in the Media world there exists a "Moral Conscience" that can not only distinguish there is a difference between helping to preserve the Manatee as a distinct community of animals from helping to preserve the Indian as a distinct community of people, but also be willing to take some form of action. I had hoped that you might understand. (Author to Ron Disney, personal communication, 1994)

I do not know whether this note had any bearing on Disney's decision, but three weeks later I received a phone call from Disney Studios stating they were considering the project and wanted to meet with me in August. We met in New York for about 90 minutes. Disney representatives had planned to use their own voice talents. When I insisted that the language was too difficult and that it was absolutely essential for Arapaho people to speak the parts, serious skepticism was voiced. It was not until I explained that the language had tonal qualities which if not spoken properly could change an innocent word into some vulgarity, that they were finally convinced.

Throughout the summer I had been experimenting with various computer projects, some of which were the creation of an Arapaho talking dictionary that included interactive animation, talking storybooks that incorporated videos of community members and animation, and animated children's songs in Arapaho. I used these new computer tools and the Hawaiian material to try and convince the elementary school principal of the merits of implementing a kindergarten immersion class within the school system.

### **IMPLEMENTING WYOMING INDIAN SCHOOLS' FIRST IMMERSION CLASS**

As the start of another school year approached, with no talk about implementing an immersion class, I was getting worried. I decided to canvas the community with a questionnaire to see if there was any support for such a project. Of the anticipated 60 children that were to start kindergarten, 40 questionnaires came back from parents requesting that their



children be placed in an immersion class. The responses worked to get things focused again on the language immersion issue.

It was my good fortune that at the Wyoming Indian Elementary School kindergarten children attend classes all day, versus the standard for the majority of schools in the United States, in which kindergarten students spend only half a day in classes. This variance was used to question why the school's excellent teachers used a full day to accomplish what the rest of the country's kindergarten teachers were doing in a half a day. Amidst complaints and some resistance, a kindergarten half-day immersion class was started in September 1993. After 8 weeks of class, student vocabularies were assessed at 20 words, versus the 14-word vocabulary of other students randomly picked from the nonimmersion kindergarten classes. After 16 weeks, immersion and nonimmersion students were randomly selected from the kindergarten classes and were correspondingly assessed at a 55- and 16-word or phrase vocabulary. By the end of the school year the immersion students displayed an 80-word or phrase speaking ability at the lower end, and a 120-word or phrase speaking ability at the upper end, while nonimmersion students from kindergarten to 4th grade were assessed at a 16-word vocabulary at the lower end and a 42-word vocabulary at the upper end.

At the start of the immersion project it was realized that the strongest possible argument would need to be built if the project had any hope of continuing. This sparked me to compare the immersion children's absentee rate to that of the other kindergarten children (see Table 23.2). The rate of absenteeism was calculated by taking the total number of days' absence for each child in a class in a given month and adding them together, then dividing that number by the total number of child school days in the month (the total number of child school days in a month was calculated by multiplying the total number of children in a class by the total number of school days in the month).

Table 23.2 shows that when the immersion kindergarten student (I.K.S.) statistics are factored from out of the statistics for all kindergarten students (A.K.S.), the absentee rate for the nonimmersion kindergarten classes increased to 8.36%. This increase illustrated that the attendance rate for the immersion kindergarten students was effective in reducing the absentee rate for the entire kindergarten student population. Over the course of the school term, the kindergarten immersion class served as a model which sparked increased interest in Arapaho on the part of teachers and students alike. This increased interest was also reflected at the school's Christmas and spring concerts, which reflected a 60% increase in Arapaho language content in presentations by children in grades K-4. As a result of these positive outcomes, the school administration indicated it would continue to maintain the kindergarten immersion class through to the end of 1997, and possibly beyond.

TABLE 23.2 Absentee Rate for Immersion Kindergarten Students vs. All Kindergarten Students

	Days absent	÷	Total days	=	Absentee rate
1. (A.K.S.)	94	÷	1,218	=	7.72%
2. (I.K.S.)	(-)15	÷	(-)273	=	5.49%
3.	79	÷	945	=	8.36%

### THE QUESTION OF FLUENCY

While considerable debate exists over what fluency means, I choose to approach the term from the position that if individuals think in a particular language and are capable of communicating their full range of thoughts in that language then those individuals are operating at a level of fluency. Furthermore, I do not believe it would ever be claimed that an individual adult, though only possessing the English verbal skills of a five-year-old, was not a fluent English speaker. I would postulate that this individual would most likely be acknowledged as a fluent speaker because English would be recognized as the only voiced language of thought he or she possessed and the only language used to communicate his or her thoughts.

Through my observations of the Hawaiian Pūnana Leo immersion preschools I had calculated that children within the Pūnana Leo were achieving fluency after about 600 language contact hours. This, however, was operating in an environment in which non-Hawaiian-speaking children were entering schools in which 20-30% of the returning children had already achieved fluency in the previous year. Under such conditions I observed that in one of the Pūnana Leo schools, children had only been exposed to about four hours of the Hawaiian language per day, in a five-day school week, and had still achieved an age-appropriate level of fluency in less than five months. This amounted to approximately 400 language contact hours!

The shortfall of the Wyoming Indian public school system's efforts to teach the Arapaho language in the classroom seemed obvious to me: at 75 minutes per week, what could realistically be learned in only 45 hours of language instruction per school year? The kindergarten immersion class, on the other hand, could offer two and a half hours of Arapaho language instruction per day, and over the course of a 180-day academic year this could amount to approximately 450 hours that children could be in contact with the Arapaho language. Thus, with the kindergarten immersion class in place there was a tentative expectation that, if functioning optimally, children could potentially achieve an age-appropriate level of fluency. For the children outside of the immersion class, however, about the best that language classes could offer was to function as a language maintenance program. If

this was the best one could hope for, then it logically made sense that if children could gain fluency before they entered kindergarten, then the language program within the school system could function to maintain and perhaps even slowly expand on the children's Arapaho language skills. With this realization, the goal then became to create an Arapaho language immersion preschool.

### IMPLEMENTING A LANGUAGE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL CLASS

Starting up an immersion class for preschool children was taking on a major piece of responsibility and represented much more than just getting an already existing school to expand upon its already existing programs. Starting a preschool meant a staff needed to be interviewed, hired, and managed; a site for a class had to be located; a process for selecting children for the class had to be worked out; materials, supplies, and furniture for the class and classroom had to be obtained; a curriculum format needed to be developed; and most importantly, funding needed to be raised to sustain the project for more than a few months. This was a whole new area and a lot of uncertainty existed over the best course of action to take. After several discussions with one of the executives of the Wyoming Council for the Humanities I decided to request funding for a pilot project that would operate from January to May 1994. I was relatively confident that by implementing the project in this way, I could obtain additional funding for another immersion class that would operate over the course of a full academic year. The grant was written for a pilot immersion project to operate Mondays through Thursdays, two hours per day. The \$5,000 budget for this project was used for rent, supplies, and second-hand furniture, and to pay the salaries of the two Arapaho language instructors.

A real concern was getting the right people hired for the project. My concern sprang from observing that fluent Arapaho speakers were not speaking Arapaho to children. I was very perplexed by this and over several months of observations I formulated the hypothesis that Arapaho speakers would not engage in anything that even remotely bordered on a conversation with individuals they believed were not capable of addressing them back. Although I explained to individuals that children could not possibly learn Arapaho if people stopped speaking to them, it did not matter how much logic or reasoning I put before individuals, it seemed to have little impact. Speakers might attempt some initial query, but when they got no response they seemed to feel that the exercise was fruitless and silly. It was for this reason that I felt I had to be relatively confident that the people hired as language instructors would carry out the directives of the immersion project.

About six fluent speakers on the reservation loosely made up the "Arapaho Language Commission." This language

commission had been set up in the late 1970s, when money was still flowing, as a method of certifying Arapaho speakers as qualified to teach the Arapaho language in the schools on the reservation. When money dried up to pay members of the commission, they became less and less active. By the time I arrived only two of the original members were still available, and they were in a small political battle with a few other individuals trying to position themselves on the commission. For the sake of trying to keep the immersion project apolitical, I decided that I would conduct the interviews myself. Eight people responded to the job advertisement who, I am sure, wondered how I, as a passive speaker, was going to conduct the interviews.

Interviews for the immersion class were set up to ascertain whether the interviewees could competently and comfortably work with children within an immersion environment. As a candidate came in to be interviewed, about 30 minutes was spent explaining how they would actually be interviewed and learning what the individual knew and thought about teaching Arapaho through immersion. The interviews were videotaped and set up so each candidate would spend about 45 minutes in a simulated immersion setting with children. Each candidate had an outline that showed the various activities they had to cover and how much time they should spend on each activity, and all were told that they absolutely were not to speak any English. In spite of the time and detail given to explain the interview process and the importance of not speaking English, it was nevertheless interesting to note that when faced with having to instruct children, some of the best speakers could not get beyond that psychological barrier of feeling that it made little sense to speak to children as if they could understand. As a result, some individuals would either spend extended periods of time saying nothing or would speak to me. This psychological barrier became very evident when a child who knew the routine would cue or prompt the interviewee in Arapaho to let them know the next activity to move on to. In one example, the person being interviewed, who was supposed to ask the children what they were going to play with, fell silent for quite a while, in spite of the fact that one of the children kept saying *niibeetniniikotiino* 'I want to play'. In another instance the children were supposed to have been told that they were going to eat a snack. After several minutes of silence a child started repeating *heesneenoo* 'I'm hungry'. But it was not until I said *Neh bii3iine* 'Better feed them' that anything happened.

After all of the interviews were conducted, the videotapes were reviewed and a list made of pluses and minuses, representing strengths and weaknesses, for each individual. The pluses and minuses were then added up for each individual, and the candidates with the best scores were offered the job. While the process was quite fair, it did get some flak on the grounds that some people felt interviews should have been conducted by the language commission. My answer to this was that it was clear that everyone interviewed was a fluent

speaker. What the interview determined was how well an individual could work with children. From that point on the issue of how the interview was conducted seemed to be over. While things began to gear up for the first Arapaho language immersion preschool class, things began to move forward on the *Bambi Speaks Arapaho* project.

### BAMBI SPEAKS ARAPAHO

In early October I began to put up notices at the elementary, junior high, and high school announcing auditions for the *Bambi* video. The Disney people had wanted me to send them an audiotape of the auditions. I thought that it might be better for me to videotape the voice auditions so they could see the faces of the children. The only problem was that on October 15 only three junior high school girls showed up for the audition. I videotaped the girls introducing themselves and reading the parts for Bambi, Thumper, and Thumper's mother. I rescheduled another audition in two weeks and asked the three girls to spread the word and to bring friends back with them. When the girls returned for auditions they brought with them three more girls, but no others came. I videotaped the six girls reading the parts selected by one of Disney's directors and sent the tape off with crossed fingers, wondering all the while what had happened to all the people. After all, if this were happening in Hollywood parents would have herded their children in like cattle; but then again the reservation was not Hollywood.

By the middle of November I received a call from Disney's vice president of manufacturing and distribution, who told me what I had sent was not going to work. I was expecting to hear that they had decided to scrap the project. When I was told not to abandon hope and to try again I was greatly relieved. It was all too true; the reservation was not Hollywood. The two places represented two different cultures, with each characteristically responding in two very different ways to two very different worlds. I knew the primary characters in the *Bambi* movie and I knew the people around me, so by the middle of January I had selected children to do the voices of Bambi, Thumper, and Flower, and I asked one of the teachers to fill in for Bambi's mother. This time I stuck to the script and sent an audiocassette of the voice auditions. The people at Disney liked what they heard and scheduled a test dub for early March.

One of the questions asked of me was who would pay the cost of renting the studio for the recording sessions in Jackson, Wyoming. While I was well aware that a bill of about \$2,000 was relatively insignificant for a corporation like Disney, I also recognized that it represented a measure of good faith on our part, and communicated that we were not simply looking for something for nothing from Disney. I let Disney Studios know that the project I was directing could arrange payment for the recording studio. I also let Disney's assigned

director for the *Bambi* project know that the program I directed would also pay the costs of our own transportation, hotel, and meals. Once the formalities were over and done with, we drove the 170 miles to Jackson.

I had originally selected Evan, Roland, and Star for the parts of Flower, Thumper, and Bambi. Roland and Star were in the fourth grade and Evan was in the third grade, and all three were children I was well acquainted with. I selected these students for the parts because their own personalities closely matched the characters they were supposed to represent, and because they were all doing well in their Arapaho language classes. While preparing the children for the recording session I emphasized that they would have to try to follow whatever directions the director would give them. When we started the recording session, the director wanted to switch Star and Roland because Roland was having trouble speaking Thumper's lines. During the recording of Thumper's lines with Star, however, the director ran into a problem. When recording Thumper's lines a part was reached in the script where Thumper had to laugh. The director explained the scene and then when the time came directed Star to laugh. Nothing happened. The director tried the scene again and Star, with a stony expression, said, "No, I don't want to." Nothing we could do could get Star to laugh. The problem worsened as we discovered that none of the children would laugh when directed to. The tension began to mount. I suggested that we try tickling, but both Star and Evan resisted, and even though Roland laughed he fought it all the way. We decided to go back to Star as Bambi and Roland as Thumper, and hoped for the best.

The director flew back to Hollywood late Friday afternoon and was to do the dubbing over at Disney Studios. On Monday morning I received a phone call telling me they all loved it. At this point I was astonished; I knew technology was good but I had not expected that the process would be that fast. I was informed that Disney's executives felt the project warranted moving ahead with plans to dub the entire movie. Still baffled, I asked the director how he had gotten the dubbing done so fast. He told me that the lines fit so well with the animation that it appeared as if the movie had been made for the Arapaho language. The realization then struck me that long before I had received a yes from the Disney Studio, I had spent months trying to find the right translations for the lines and then tested them for mouth synchronization. This was done by turning off the sound and speaking the lines in Arapaho as the English version of the *Bambi* video played. The extra effort had paid off.

I was told that only a small time frame existed within which to work if the video was to be completed before September. The reason for the limited time frame was primarily due to the studio's work to get *The Lion King* completed and out into the theaters. This meant that everyone had to be ready to record the Arapaho version of *Bambi* in April. I also realized that everything needed to move without a hitch if the



project's completion was not going to be jeopardized, and that meant a lot of work was still ahead. Once the final approval was given to record the entire movie script into Arapaho, I still had 20 more parts to find speakers for, a recording session to be planned out, transportation and room assignments to be arranged, parent releases to be signed and returned, and approval from the school board had to be obtained before any of this could happen and the project could proceed.

Schedules were arranged to make the most efficient use of time, and the final recording of the entire script proceeded with only minor problems. One of those problems was the result of the director attempting to read the lines in Arapaho. The children would listen and then try to repeat the lines as they had been improperly pronounced. After explaining how the children were being confused, things moved along a little more smoothly. In another instance the director wanted one of the Elders to inflect her lines at the end to show that a question had been asked. I could see that this was causing a problem because the Elder was reluctantly trying to accommodate the request. I finally had to explain that the Arapaho language does not display voice inflection at the end of a question because with Arapaho the question is formed at the beginning of the sentence. Another problem resulted from an instructor being so pleased with a child speaking Arapaho that the child received praise for saying a line, even though it had been spoken incorrectly. This led the director to believe that the line had been properly delivered, and he proceeded to move on to the next line. I had to halt the process and ask for the line to be said again without saying why, out of respect to the Elder. I finally had to request that because the movie was being made as a tool to both spark an interest in learning Arapaho and also as a language-learning device, it was absolutely essential for all children to deliver their lines accurately before they were praised. By the second day of recording the sessions were moving so smoothly that it took only four days for the entire script to be completed.

When the dubbing was complete, people at Disney stated that the finished version exceeded the studio's dubbing standards for voice-to-mouth synchronization of foreign films. The executives at Disney were very pleased, and I was particularly impressed by the attention that Disney Studios had given the project, which once underway was really not much different from any of their other feature films. One of the ways this was illustrated was that while it would have been more economical for Disney to have run all prints off of a video master, it was decided to run the video prints off of a 35mm master. Also, before premiering the movie at a theater near the reservation, Disney brought in upgraded speakers so the sound quality would be at its best for the only two showings the 35mm print version received.

While meeting with the vice president of manufacturing and distribution during the final editing of the video, I learned that Disney Studios had planned to generate five copies of the video for use by the Arapaho people. I explained that five

copies would not be very helpful if the end objective was to benefit the Arapaho people and language. When asked how many prints I thought would be needed, my response was a modest 2,500. I observed Miller's expression, which might have suggested that he did not believe what he had heard. When he asked who would pay for the copies, I said the Arapaho people. The vice president of manufacturing and distribution felt that Disney Studios could not ethically ask the Arapaho to pay for the video. I explained that I saw no problem with the Arapaho contributing toward the welfare of their language by individually purchasing videos for their own homes. After all, Arapaho people have purchased many other Disney videos. The difference with purchasing the "Bambi Speaks Arapaho" video was that the money from those purchases could be matched and placed in a special account by the Wyoming Council for the Humanities for the explicit purpose of language revitalization efforts. In the end Disney's representative saw the logic and agreed to the sale of the video.

The final production of the *Bambi* movie dubbed into the Arapaho language has been viewed as a very positive event. Young Arapaho children have been said to watch the video repeatedly and have learned some of the speaking parts of their favorite characters. The fact that the video was produced has also helped in furthering Arapaho language revitalization efforts, one of which has been in acquiring funding from granting agencies to develop and expand upon the Arapaho language immersion project.

### THE ARAPAHO LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROJECT

The first Arapaho language immersion preschool class began as a two-hour-a-day, four-day-a-week class that operated from January to May 1994. That first class began with six children in the "L" section of a cafeteria that was used by the Head Start program. Officially the Head Start program was the sponsor of the immersion class. In spite of the strong administrative support, the Head Start instructors teaching in the building made it clear that they would have little tolerance for a program invading their space. After two months the situation had become so stressful we decided we needed to move the class to another location. We moved into a 12 by 18-foot room at the community center. The new site, though cramped for space, had a playground outside, much to the delight of staff and children. In little time we settled in and viewed the new site as our own.

When the pilot project concluded in May 1994, it was obvious that while two hours a day for four days a week was not enough time to have a major impact upon the children's Arapaho language skills, it nevertheless did have the effect of producing limited speaking ability in the children. The children's new-found Arapaho verbal skills impressed family



members enough for parents to inquire if the class could extend into the summer. A grant proposal was written for a summer program to operate three days a week for three hours each day on a \$2,000 budget. Unfortunately, none of the granting agencies approached would fund the program. In desperation I sought support from two places, the parents and instructors themselves. I explained to the instructors that if they would work the summer program at half the hourly income they had received from the pilot project I believed that the parents would be able to pay their salaries.

It is fairly common knowledge that on the majority of reservations in the United States, unemployment rates are over 75%. On the Wind River reservation the average unemployment rate is about 80%, and during the summer months the unemployment rate may exceed 90%. While some viewed my claim that parents would pay the instructor's summer salaries as unrealistic, when parents were asked to pay summer tuition for their children to attend, their commitment to the project was so strong that they paid readily.

The summer project ran for five weeks, three hours a day, three days a week, on a \$500 budget. Each parent paid a \$20 tuition fee, and the instructors agreed to work for \$5 an hour: It was probably one of the most significant acts of support ever given to a program on the reservation. Before the summer had ended, the Wyoming Council for the Humanities, possibly impressed by the parents' support, agreed to fund the project from September 1994 to May 1995. The 1994–95 project ran three hours a day, Monday to Friday. I was still very much aware that the project needed at least six hours a day if there was to be any hope of developing fluent speakers, but at least the increase in time represented movement in the right direction.

During each of the times I visited the class it was not uncommon for me to hear instructors speaking English. I soon realized that although the instructors knew the project's goals, they still lacked a firm commitment to the methods of immersion. I constantly tried to convince the instructors of the absolute necessity of not speaking English to the children. From their perspective, however, they observed more Arapaho spoken by children than they had ever heard before and were quietly convinced that it was due to their mixing English and Arapaho when they spoke to the children.

As knowledge of the Arapaho language immersion efforts expanded beyond the reservation, more people inquired into whether such a project could happen in their communities. In October 1994, one such inquiry came from a group of Aboriginal elders who had heard about the immersion program and traveled from Australia to learn more about such language efforts by visiting various sites in Canada and the United States. When they arrived at Ethete and saw and heard the children using Arapaho while playing on the playground, they were literally moved to tears.

By April 1995, it was apparent that the goal of producing new speakers among the children was not going to be

achieved. The realization made me press even harder for a full-day program. I reviewed the unsuccessful Administration for Native Americans (ANA) grant proposal that I had written in June 1994 and revised it for the implementation of a full-day immersion class for the 1995–96 school year. Though the proposal was again denied, funding proposals written to the Wyoming Council for the Humanities and the Lannan Foundation were accepted.

On September 1995, the Arapaho language immersion class started its third year as a six-hour-a-day class. One of the positions added to the class was a salaried director and curriculum developer position. The immersion project was fortunate to get an individual who had worked with the kindergarten immersion class from 1993 to 1995, so I was fairly confident that we would meet our goal and see the first of a new generation of Arapaho speakers. When classes began I traveled down from Missoula, Montana, to get the immersion class started. The class had been moved over to a large room in a building owned by the Episcopal Mission. When I arrived I was met by the sound of the Arapaho instructors conversing in English. I took the instructors aside and spoke to them to impress upon them the importance of maintaining an Arapaho-only language classroom if the children were going to become speakers. When I left to return to Montana, I departed with the hope that the additional three hours added to the program would make the difference in achieving the program's goal.

Though the new program faced a number of obstacles, we continued to forge ahead. A child could not simply attend the immersion class: parents had to be made aware that they had to be responsible for getting their child to the site as well as for providing for their child's snack and lunch throughout the project year. Fortunately, the reservation community functions as a tightly knit community, so many assisted each other in providing for the children's well-being. As a result of my teaching position at the University of Montana, I was not able to visit the class again until mid-December, but when I did I was very impressed by what I had observed.

On December 18, 1995, about 13 weeks into the project, I traveled down to Ethete to observe the immersion class. My arrival at Ethete and the videotaping that resulted were completely spontaneous and unannounced.

Enrollment in the new immersion class fluctuated between 12 and 15 children. I was able to borrow a video camera, at the last minute, from the elementary school and rushed down to the immersion class to get there by 9 AM. When I arrived at the class only six children were present, owing to a flu outbreak. Between 9 AM and 12 noon, one hour of the six-hour day was filmed. That hour of tape was then edited down to a 20-minute tape, which I planned to use for future funding efforts. The following is a transcription and description of the edited-down 20-minute videotape. Unless otherwise noted, all communication between the Arapaho language instructors and the children was in Arapaho.

Danny's mother says goodbye to him in English. He responds to this with *Heetce'noohobeen* 'I'll see you again'.

Danny: *Neneeninoo* Danny 'I am Danny'.

There is a knock at the door by Daniel, one of the adult language instructors.

Danny: *Ciitei* 'come in'.

Danny repeats after instructor: *tous* 'hello', *nii'ooke* 'good morning', *tooyoo3oo* 'it is cold', and *hee* 'yes'.

Danny: *Kooheinokoh* 'Are you sleeping'? (initiated with no prompting)

A pretaped song is started, and the children sing *heetnee' inonii hinono'eitiit* . . . 'we are going to learn how to speak Arapaho, good morning good morning we are all glad that we are here'.

Danny: *Wohei, ho3o* 'All right, Star' (he is cut off from continuing)

Children sing another song in Arapaho: "Are you sleeping, are you sleeping, brother. . . ."

Danny is instructed to put on his coat, go out, and knock on the door, which he does. He is then instructed to take off his coat, which he does.

Danny is instructed to go with Daniel, one of the instructors, where he repeats the days counted on a calendar until the 18th day is reached. He then repeats the 12 immersion-class names of the other children in the class. Before his name is mentioned he gets excited and says *ho3o* 'right there!' (Star is Danny's immersion-class name, which he excitedly states when he sees it on the poster board.)

A picturebook is brought out and the children identify the following pictures in Arapaho: *siitiikoo* 'ducks', *he3* 'dog', *wo'oun* 'kitten', *bih'ih* 'deer', *nooku* 'rabbit'.

There is a knock at the door—children say *ciitei*. Mylan comes in and is instructed to close the door and to take off his coat, which he does. There is another knock at the door and children shout *ciitei*. Alycia comes in. Mylan is told to sit down.

Alycia, sitting at the table, is asked, "What is your name?" She answers, *neneeninoo* Alycia 'I am Alycia'.

Mylan is asked, "How many are here?" He counts the number of children present. All children are individually asked to do the same.

Posterboard drawings are held up, and children as a group say in Arapaho what is on the poster boards. The following is the translation of what the children identified (all the children enthusiastically shouted out their responses in Arapaho).

I am angry, I am crying, I am sneezing, I am singing, I am sad, I am happy, I am hot, I am cold, I am tired, I am laughing, I am brushing (my hair).

Little flash cards are now brought out and children continue in Arapaho: *pants*—when asked, "What color are they?" they answer "red." They continue and identify ducks, calves, train, doll, sheep, bear, and shirt. When asked "What color is it?" they answer "green." They go on to identify tree, airplane, comb, bread, flowers, cup, and milk.

They now look at cards used to identify weather for the day (this is used in conjunction with the calendar where they are asked, "What is it like outside?") Using Arapaho, they reply: "it is hailing," "it is sunny," "it is hot," "it is raining," "it is cold," and "a cool breeze."

A book is brought out and the children, using Arapaho, identify the following pictures: frog, man, young boy, water, trees, beaver, little boy, snake, flower, turtle, bugs, ducks (here Alycia says to a boy sitting near her, "You didn't say duck"), kitten, and deer.

Children are instructed that it is snack time, and they get up and eagerly get their snacks.

Alycia says in English, "I don't have a spoon." She is told how to say *spoon*, which she repeats.

Alycia is asked by Flora (an adult language provider), "what are you eating?" She is told the word used in Arapaho for Jello® ('it jiggles').

Alycia is asked by Alvena (another adult language provider), "What are you eating?" She responds using the proper word for Jello®.

Danny is told the word for the food items he is eating; he repeats them as they are said: crackers, apple, juice.

Mylan is asked, "What is this?" He responds in Arapaho: juice, orange, crackers. He actually has potato chips; he is corrected and told the Arapaho word for chips, and he repeats the word.

Based on the language development displayed by the children in December, I fully expected that they would be fluent by May 1996. This, however, did not occur. While the children demonstrated an impressive speaking ability, they still did not demonstrate an ability to express their thoughts in Arapaho.

The parent committee had planned a graduation ceremony for the children, and I had been invited. After debating whether I really wanted to drive the 600 miles to Ethete for what I was sure would be a small ceremony, I decided that I should make the trip. As it turned out, the children's graduation ceremony was an impressive event. The parent committee had arranged to hold the ceremony in the community hall. The graduation of those immersion children who would be going on to kindergarten was celebrated by the tribe's drum, the Eagle Drum, and attended by well over 100 community members. The immersion children led the opening prayer, and speeches were given by one of the immersion children and one of the community's teens, who read a speech she had prepared in Arapaho. While the day's event was a significant marker of the children's accomplishments, I was nonetheless aware that the children had yet to attain fluency; I decided to petition once more for federal funding.

## KEEPING THE VISION ALIVE

Writing the ANA federal grant and not receiving it remained very frustrating, and I was determined that with my third attempt I would write a grant proposal for the fall of 1996, which I knew could not be refused. I decided to write three grants, one to the Wyoming Council for the Humanities, one to the Lannan Foundation, and one to ANA, in such a way that all three grants would be integrated. The Wyoming Council's grant paid the instructors' salaries for three of the six hours of the Ethete immersion project, while funding from Lannan paid the language instructors' salaries for the other three hours, plus a director's salary. I then used the director to oversee the Ethete project and a second project that I requested funding for from ANA. Writing the ANA grant

this way enabled me to show a 50% cash match of the total amount requested of ANA and also allowed me to keep the total amount requested below half of the \$125,000 maximum amount allowed per project per year. This as well as a few other strategic pluses proved to make the grant proposal too strong an application to turn down. With three grant applications awarded to fund two immersion classes, the issue of fluency was again the focus of my attention.

Even though the instructors had been exposed to a number of teaching and immersion technique workshops, it was very clear to me that having a program run six hours a day would not necessarily produce fluency, especially when the instructors were not demonstrating strong immersion techniques. What the instructors needed was some very strong training in the principles and methods of second-language acquisition through immersion. Possessing an understanding of how Arapaho people best learned, I knew that even week-long workshops were not going to be enough. If there was any hope of our producing fluently speaking children I would need to hire an immersion training specialist who would train and guide the instructors on a daily basis.

During my last trip to Hawai'i I had met a young California Indian named Pueo who had traveled to Hawai'i and learned the Hawaiian language while working as a volunteer

in the Pūnana Leo preschool. I believed him to be capable of providing the guidance the instructors needed. I was prepared to do whatever I could, to offer a salary and a challenge that Pueo could not refuse, on the conviction that the children could be brought to an age-appropriate level of fluency after he had provided the instructors with three months of on-site training in immersion techniques.

At the time of this writing, the Arapaho language immersion project is entering its fourth year. Within this period, the project has expanded from its beginnings as a kindergarten immersion class at the Wyoming Indian public elementary school in 1993 to a two-hour-a-day preschool program in January 1994. Eventually this was expanded to a six-hour-a-day program by September of 1995. Now in its fourth year, the project encompasses a half-day kindergarten program and 2 six-hour-a-day preschool immersion programs in two separate school districts on the Wind River reservation. Although everything is in place for the children to attain fluency, whether this goal is achieved or not now truly lies in the hands of the language instructors of the Arapaho Language Lodge. If the Arapaho Language Lodge Speakers, as they at times are called, achieve their goal, then the next logical step is to spread the immersion class project up through the elementary grades.