

## Dakota Language Revitalization - Dr. Sherry Johnson & Dr. Nadine Eastman - OSEU #3

**Dr. Nadine Eastman:** We want to talk about language because...I want you to know that I'm the youngest sister and she's the oldest sister...and in between us is our middle sister, Tammy...and in our reservation, her job is...what's her official title?...Lakota Language Director at Dakota Language Institute...she's a director. And she has been trying to preserve our language. We're all concerned about losing our language. So, for years and years now, she has been working on making curriculum materials in Dakota for the schools and individuals. She has a program through Transparent Languages, a **UNKNOWN WORD** program, just for assisting Dakota that we use in our schools. Everybody relies on her program... in particular to create signs and anything you can think of...she's made all occasion cards like birthday cards and Valentine's Day cards...and games...she made a Scrabble game...she got permission from Hasbro...and she made a Scrabble game in Dakota. Our dad was a fluent speaker. We lost him. But he was very fluent. And now our sister Tammy...she's fairly fluent...and she's a second language learner...because we didn't grow up speaking it. We knew some words just from hearing what we weren't supposed to hear. And then Sherry has been working hard...you can talk about learning and...

**Dr. Sherry Johnson:** Yes. It's at times...I feel like the language is part of my being. I don't want to be known as the generation that lost our language. And so, I'm presently in an education program that's building language and...actually a certification program...and tomorrow

**Dr. Sherry Johnson:** I have to teach a college class using our language. And other things that we've got going...we've had Jeopardy programs...we've just released our first Dakota dictionary...and we're already working on the next version or how to upgrade it...we're recording our elders...right now out of all the Dakota tribes, we have the most first language speakers left out of the five Dakota tribes. People look toward our tribe as that savior and that help for that...so we're recording elders...we're doing tape recording, video recording...doing whatever we can to save that language. Some new things that we are working on within the Education Department is immersion programs...and daycare...so I've got meeting with daycare people...with the HeadStart

program...how we can do an immersion within the HeadStart...and actually working with the office of HeadStart with immersion programs...and then one of our local tribal schools is going to have an immersion classroom by this coming fall. So as a tribe, we are working on developing that curriculum...so I'm talking to publishing companies...and trying to figure out how we can develop these resources and materials. The only resources we have in Dakota are created through Tammy's program, the Dakota Language Institute. And so, all kinds of things. I meet with the college board this weekend and we're going to talk language there. And so, we have a lot of language initiatives...when the Hawaiians first started their journey for language...they had a thousand speakers left...and they declared it a state of emergency...well, we are at like 68 speakers left that are truly first language speakers.

**Dr. Sherry Johnson:** So we're looking at language nests...we're looking at our schools...we're looking at our daycares...we're looking at our HeadStart. We're creating our first cohort of truly language speakers that have come through...that have the methodology of teaching language...the theory base of how languages are learned...and so we're doing that on the college level. So we have a lot of initiatives going. And it's very aggressive because at this point in time, we have to be aggressive. That's our language.

**Dr. Nadine Eastman:** And we have it in both of our school systems that are tribal schools. It just hasn't been effective enough. We haven't produced fluent speakers even though our students have had it every year. So, one of the biggest pushes in the K-12 system is trying to find a more effective way to produce fluent speakers by the time they exit their education.