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“Stay With Your Words”: Indigenous Youth, Local Policy, and the Work of Language Fortification

Elizabeth Sumida Huaman

Nathan D. Martin

Arizona State University



Carnell T. Chosa

The Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School

United States

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Abstract: This article focuses on the work of cultural and language maintenance and fortification with Indigenous youth populations. Here, the idea of work represents two strands of thought: first, research that is partnered with Indigenous youth-serving institutions and that prioritizes Indigenous youth perspectives; and second, the work of cultural and linguistic engagement that is often taken for granted as part of the sociocultural fabric of Indigenous communities where youth are active participants. By highlighting a study with Pueblo Indian youth in the southwestern United States, we aim to build on the counter-narrative frameworks of other educational scholars and community-based researchers in order to offer alternative approaches towards understanding how Indigenous youth can and do participate in representing themselves as cultural and language agents of change. Arriving at this realization requires several key steps, including deconstructing dominant assumptions, holding ourselves accountable for interrogating and revisiting our own biases, and

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ultimately committing to long-term research and support with Indigenous youth. As such, we offer empirical evidence that contradicts universal discourse of Indigenous peoples and youth as victims at risk. Instead, we focus on the ways in which Indigenous youth demonstrate both tentative and bold fortification of key elements in their Indigenous identities and illustrate promise in contribution to multiple levels of policy development to address their communities' most urgent needs and goals.

Keywords: Indigenous language revitalization; Indigenous language education policy; Pueblo Indian education

“Mantengan sus palabras”: Juventud indígena, política local, y el trabajo de fortalecimiento de idiomas

Resumen: Este artículo se enfoca en el mantenimiento y fortalecimiento de las culturas e idiomas indígenas con jóvenes indígenas. Representamos dos líneas de pensamiento – primero, investigaciones en asociación con instituciones que sirven jóvenes indígenas y que priorizan las perspectivas de la juventud Indígena, y en segundo lugar, el trabajo de participación cultural y lingüístico que a veces se da por descontado como parte de la estructura de comunidades indígenas donde jóvenes participan activamente. Destacando un estudio de investigación con jóvenes indígenas *Pueblo* del suroeste de los Estados Unidos, nuestro objetivo es fortalecer contra-narrativas de otros intelectuales y de investigadores insertos en comunidades Indígenas para ofrecer propuestas alternativas para la comprensión sobre como los jóvenes participarán y participan para representarse como agentes culturales y de idiomas para cambios sociales. Estas tareas requieren varios pasos, incluso deconstruir suposiciones dominantes, responsabilizándonos a nosotros mismos para interrogar y volver a visitar nuestros prejuicios, y finalmente, comprometiéndonos a estudios de investigación de largo plazo y que apoyen jóvenes indígenas. Ofrecemos pruebas empíricas que contradicen el discurso general que caracteriza a los pueblos Indígenas y sus jóvenes como víctimas en situación de riesgo. Nosotros nos enfocamos en las maneras como los jóvenes indígena fortalecen tentativamente y audazmente elementos importantes para sus identidades indígenas e ilustramos sus contribuciones en múltiples niveles de desarrollos políticos para abordar las necesidades y metas más urgentes en sus comunidades.

Palabras-clave: revitalización de lenguas indígenas; política de educación de lenguas indígenas; educación de los Pueblos indígenas de Nuevo México

“Mantenha suas palavras”: A juventude Indígena, política local, e o trabalho no fortalecimento da língua

Resumo: Este artigo foca no trabalho de manter e fortalecer a cultura da língua indígena com as populações de jovens indígenas. O trabalho representa dois aspectos de pensamento - primeiro, pesquisas associadas com instituições que sirvam à juventude indígena e que priorizam as perspectivas da juventude Indígena, e segundo, o trabalho de engajamento cultural e linguístico que muitas vezes é algo adquirido como parte da estrutura sociocultural de comunidades Indígenas onde os jovens participam ativamente. Destacando um estudo com a juventude indígena *Pueblo* do sudoeste dos Estados Unidos, nosso objetivo é desenvolver sistemas de contra-narrativa de outros estudiosos e pesquisadores com base nas comunidades indígenas a fim de oferecer propostas alternativas para a compreensão de como jovens indígenas participaram e participam representando a si mesmos como agentes culturais e linguísticos em uma mudança social. Chegar à essa realização requer várias etapas, incluindo desconstruir suposições dominantes, mantendo-nos responsáveis para interrogar e visitar nossos próprios preconceitos, e, por fim, comprometendo-se a investigação a longo prazo e apoio com os

jovens indígenas. Como tal, oferecemos evidência empírica que contradiz o discurso universal dos povos Indígenas e os jovens como vítimas em risco. Em vez disso, focamos em formas em que os jovens indígenas demonstram fortificação tanto hesitante como ousada nos elementos principais para suas identidades Indígenas e ilustram o nível de contribuição a múltiplos níveis de desenvolvimento político para abordar as necessidades e metas mais urgentes em suas comunidades.

Palavras-chave: revitalização de línguas indígenas; política de educação de línguas indígenas; educação de povos indígenas

Introduction: Indigenous Youth and Critical Language Issues

As a starting point, this examination of Indigenous youth and their Native heritage language experiences recognizes two critical issues embedded within an exploration of youth language ecologies (Creese, Martin, & Hornberger, 2010; Haugen, 1972): first, the lack of youth-directed Indigenous language planning and policy (LPP) despite increasing language shift to dominant languages; and second, a broader concern regarding widespread characterizations of Indigenous youth, including tribal depictions and mainstream policy language, that may serve to limit youth agency. In order to address these issues, we offer a review of more recent scholarship highlighting critical research with Indigenous youth, a description of our own tribal institutional research collaboration, and youth-recommended strategies for addressing language loss and shift. We argue that research focusing on Indigenous youth is instrumental to the realization of Indigenous language revitalization vis-à-vis federal policy and law in the U.S. (i.e., the 1990 and 1992 Native American Languages Acts and the 2006 Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act) outlining commitment to the survival of Indigenous languages. States like New Mexico whose legislators are sensitive to Indigenous populations have a window of opportunity to work with tribal communities currently reclaiming educational sites and highlighting language loss as a priority to address (Aguilera & Lecompte, 2009). Furthermore, because language loss is so troubling – for example, only 16% of the remaining 210 American Indian languages in the United States and Canada are acquired as a first language by children (Romero-Little & McCarty, 2006) – the participation of all, including children and youth, must be considered in LPP. At its core, this article focuses on the work of cultural and language maintenance and fortification with Indigenous youth populations.

Here, *work* represents two strands of thought – research that is partnered with Indigenous youth-serving institutions and that prioritizes Indigenous youth perspectives; and second, the cultural and linguistic engagement often taken for granted as part of the sociocultural fabric of Indigenous communities where youth are active participants. By highlighting Pueblo Indian youth in the southwestern United States, we therefore aim to build on the counter-narrative frameworks of other educational scholars and community-based researchers, which emphasize the transformative potential of marginalized voices who challenge dominant language ideologies and popular misperceptions regarding Indigenous youth identities (Lee, 2014; McCarty & Wyman, 2009). In doing so as researchers, we uplift alternative approaches towards understanding how Indigenous youth can and do participate in representing themselves as cultural and language agents of change.

The status of Indigenous language transmission to youth and children worldwide is troubling as there are clear indications that up to 90% of the diversity of the world’s languages will be lost over the next century (Romaine, 2006). In fact, in some North American Indigenous communities, the shift from the Indigenous language to the dominant colonial language has occurred as rapidly as five to 10 years (McCarty, Wyman, & Nichols, 2014). When a language becomes endangered, not

only are methods of communication that are important for individual and community relationships and cohesion threatened, but so is the sociocultural knowledge, environmental knowledge, and political status of Indigenous nations (Fishman, 1991, 1994, 1996; Hornberger & Coronel-Molina, 2004; McCarty, 2003). Additionally, because Indigenous languages are linked with community-based lessons stemming from Indigenous knowledge systems (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Kawagley, 1995; LaDuke, 2005; Romero, 1994, 2008), Native language socialization requires broader conceptualization and practice.

In New Mexico as in other Indigenous contexts, language as a sociocultural foundation is endangered. Meanwhile, youth encounter increasing pressures, including adhering to the norms of a Western-based standard way of living, that require leaving the reservation at some point to attend primary, secondary, or tertiary schooling and finding a job. Youth are typically asked by tribal leaders and family members to pursue higher education or other opportunities (i.e., to leave home) while also maintaining tribal connections in an increasingly globalized society (i.e., stay home/remember home/come home). This trajectory often becomes increasingly difficult as language learning and socialization at the community level is intimately linked with historical language ideologies at the national level that have problematized Indigenous peoples as resistant to so-called progress. Federal policies (e.g., No Child Left Behind) have long since competed with Native language priorities. As a result of collective pressures, youth are left with some tough tasks: participate in compulsory schooling now totally dominated by state standards that must adhere to testing mandates, compete in a Western standards-based system of failure and success, and continue to maintain Indigenous connections through language and cultural practice while witnessing language and cultural loss with every passing of a community knowledge holder.

Of course, the choices are not necessarily this stark. Hornberger (2008) argued that schools – even those historically constructed for purposes of assimilating Indigenous children – still had an important role in saving Indigenous languages. Because communities in New Mexico, like the Pueblos, are more recently acknowledging language shift, and as a result, are introducing language programs in schools, these considerations are increasingly useful. Lee (2014) added another layer in the youth-language shift-schooling dynamic in the southwestern US. Based on a total of 98 counter-stories collected from youth and young adults from several different tribes, including Pueblos, Lee argued that youth locate and create safe spaces in schools with teachers and courses that are friendly towards their cultural identities. Because of their struggles with access to language learning and recovery within school and other spaces, Lee further argued that young people develop language awareness that can lead to effective demand for language education (p. 132).

We argue that this type of research is vital for examining not only youth experiences in school, but also youth experiences with language out-of-school and in community and social spaces. This research also demonstrates the many facets where new understandings about youth and their perceptions and ideas of language are relevant for developing strategies to address language at many different levels, in many spaces, and using diverse approaches. They remind us that language planning and policy development are iterative processes, imperfect and experimental, but quite powerful when community-based and community-owned. In this regard, like Romero-Little and McCarty (2006), we define LPP inclusively as both government-based action and community-based and grassroots efforts that can lead to myriad language shift interventions, including summer language immersion programs, early childhood language nests, and the establishment of language immersion schools within Indigenous communities.

Policy and Risk

One of our initial concerns is the pervasiveness of policy rhetoric that has constructed powerful and lasting impressions of Indigenous peoples and youth as either little more than populations “at risk” or as exceptionally resilient but equally in need of multiple, often paternalistic, interventions in which they are subjects rather than agents. Thus, our research responds to both policy talk and policy action that has been used repeatedly to support Indigenous youth with antiquated narratives. We are also concerned with prevailing characterizations of Indigenous youth manifested in both broader policy language and in non-youth/tribal community member interactions, described more recently in ethnographic research (Lee, 2014; Sumida Huaman, 2014). We focus on evidence of Indigenous youth relationships with their ongoing and daily cultural and language work that is both community-based and itinerant. By offering what we have learned from this study, part of a long-term comprehensive research plan with Pueblo Indian youth in New Mexico, we build on alternative perspectives that address how Indigenous youth can participate in representing themselves, particularly in language maintenance, revitalization, practice, and education.

We take on the prevailing notion of risk because any discussion of Indigenous youth will typically confront “at risk” language and, moreover, funding support for programs that benefit Indigenous youth are contingent upon adoption of the language of risk. While the language of “culturally deprived or deficient” populations first arose in the 1960s (Swadener, 1995), the notion of “at risk” and its associated ideology has been widely deployed since the 1980s, creating an implicit image of groups of “others” who have drifted from a White, middle-class American standard of living (Swadener, 2010). This process pathologizes entire populations and then attaches buzzword labels that quickly become normalized by policy talk and action. For over two decades, youth policy talk has been dominated by characterizations of young people, usually low-income and minority, as troubled, problematic, and deficient (Swadener, 1995, 2010). More specifically, Indigenous youth in North America have been labeled in government research and policy reports as “at risk” in areas that include educational achievement, drug and alcohol addiction, physical and mental health, unemployment, juvenile delinquency, and incarceration. Related policy action has offered limited and competitive funding to address these problems through intervention programs. For example, in the United States, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Tribal Youth Program provides specific grants for American Indian tribal and institutional programs that address any of the following: risk factors for delinquency, court interventions, substance abuse prevention, and mental health services. Less popular in policy talk and action is Indigenous cultural and language revitalization support, although in some cases tribal programs use the mechanisms and language of “at risk” pathology but emphasize local cultural practices for treatment and rehabilitative purposes.

In this current scenario, Indigenous youth are subjects rather than actors; the “at risk” characterization has led to streamlining attention and support to the dangers of delinquency, for example, rather than focusing on how youth are both struggling and striving to engage in social change from within their communities. While our goal is not to qualify existing policy-based services and support, we question the ideology from which these constructions emerge by highlighting research on youth language ecology that provides an opportunity for scholars, educators, and community members to re-examine characterizations of Indigenous youth and to learn what youth offer to the practice of cultural and linguistic work. Following Swadener’s (1995) call to consider how assigning labels to certain populations reflects dogma that stifles and limits authentic dialogue and to reimagine a world where children and families are not viewed at risk but rather “at promise,” this study aims to challenge dominant narratives of Indigenous peoples by focusing on how Pueblo

Indian youth demonstrate interest, participation, and fortification of key elements in their cultural identities and as such, the potential to contribute to multiple levels of policy development.

Seeking balance by re-examining dominant narratives, including the stories we choose to tell ourselves as Indigenous peoples, can be complex as there are some important common threads in Indigenous experiences worldwide: colonization, extermination, and assimilation, *and* resistance, negotiation, preservation, recovery, and revitalization. Furthermore, there is no doubt that Indigenous histories, including those of the New Mexico Pueblos, have been complicated by colonial, national[izing], and neoliberal policies directly responsible for educational, legal, environmental, and cultural harms and disruptions experienced by Indigenous peoples today. For example, research has emerged on collective and historical trauma regarding the intergenerational impact of abusive practices towards First Nations children in Indian Residential Schools in Canada (Bombay et al., 2014). Accompanying this analysis is a striking reminder that forced compulsory schooling of Indigenous children created by oppressive national governments is only one of many diverse policies linking dominant ideologies about Indigenous peoples with the power to act.

Similarly, Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) described the historical underpinnings of “safety zone” theory in the US, whereby safe, controllable, and aesthetically pleasing American Indian cultural practices, like drumming or dress-making, were permissible and even encouraged in the notorious 19th century Indian boarding schools that children were forced to attend. Further, Lomawaima and McCarty provide a critical discussion of power over American Indian communities, namely the federal government’s construction of an idea of a people for a particular subjugating purpose, and American Indian sovereignty and citizenship. In other words, examining Indigenous cultural practices, languages, and education is never just about schooling, but rather involves a longer and more convoluted interplay of U.S. policies that include land removal, the breakdown of Indigenous structures of governance, and the illegality of Indigenous religious practices until the 1970s, to name a few. Therefore, interrogating long-term impacts of educational, social, economic, and environmental policies on Indigenous communities and individuals is a matter of social justice.

Alternative constructions are possible, but bringing new ways of thinking about Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous youth, requires not just Indigenous participation, but also Indigenous leadership, directives and co-construction. Wyman, McCarty, and Nicholas (2014) referred to new research and activism that focuses on dynamic Indigenous youth experiences with their languages and cultures as charting new ground beyond the rhetoric of endangerment. A shift in how we describe the work we do is critical and emergent: Words like “partnership,” “collaboration,” “transparency,” and “full and prior consent” are increasingly used by development agencies and Indigenous communities working together towards shared interests in areas like human rights. This is not to say that there is one sweeping and prescriptive formula for working with Indigenous populations; the “material realities” of distinct populations must continue to be examined and understood in order to create meaningful relationships that can develop into long-term and useful programs (Bajaj, 2011). Indigenous communities, long since considered recipients of policies dictated by non-Indigenous peoples, are and should be the agents of their own transformation. Along these lines, local Indigenous peoples have created spaces to examine the meaning of Indigenous participation in local, national, and global initiatives in educational, economic, and environmental development, and international law and policy recommendations have emerged from documents like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. At the global level, there are increasing opportunities for Indigenous youth to engage with each other and wider audiences on issues like language loss and shift (Klein, 2015), and at multiple levels, there are local, government, and NGO funding initiatives that seek to address social injustices and offer collaborative solutions that are community-driven.

The 19 Pueblos of New Mexico, the research home for the study described in this article, are a collective example of such a movement occurring in Indigenous communities around the world. They have been successful in catalyzing redefinitions of Indigeneity that respect and draw from what we think of as “traditional” or pre-Columbian Indigenous worldviews, while at the same time promoting innovative ways of thinking about culturally-relevant and sustainable practices in governance, education, and natural resource development that combine to form Pueblo lifeways.

Youth and Language Ecologies

Any examination of youth and endangered local Indigenous languages would not be viable without exploring the connectivity of language practices with their surroundings and taking a comprehensive view of language ecologies that include community spaces, cultural practices, daily experiences, and local schooling. Haugen (1972) referred to language ecology as the study of language and the natural environment. He argued that language is both psychological and sociological, relating its users to each other and to nature. Since Haugen, scholars have reshaped notions of language ecology to include different dimensions of exploration, including politics and power. For example, Creese and Martin (2010) noted, “The study of language ecology is the study of diversity within specific socio-political settings where the processes of language-use create, reflect and challenge particular hierarchies and hegemonies, however transient these might be” (xiii).

Expanding on the work of Haugen and Ricento (2000), Pennycook (2004) examined the notion of language ecology and its increasing presence in the work of language scholars:

The notion of language ecology has been both popular and productive as a way of understanding language and environment, drawing our attention to the ways in which languages are embedded in social, cultural, economic and physical ecologies, and in relationship to each other. It has formed a useful bridge, for example, between arguments about linguistic imperialism and language rights, showing how a dominant language such as English may not always threaten other languages directly but may do so by upsetting an ecology of languages. It has reopened discussion about the ways in which languages cut up the world differently, and thus what may be lost when a language dies (p. 214).

In his analysis tracing emerging definitions of language ecology in research and scholarship, Pennycook also brought forward an important point regarding the interaction of languages within any given ecology, and that is the role of English as a dominant language. In a discussion of the English language, he offered an analogy of English as feral – as a language that has escaped and upset the ecological balance within which other languages, like Indigenous languages, exist. At the same time, he also pointed out that in cases of Indigenous language death in present-day Australia, death occurred, “not because they became less adapted to a changed physical environment, nor because English is better adapted to that environment, but as a result of colonization, genocide, racism, educational practices, and shifting social, cultural and economic contexts” (p., 227). Although Pennycook reminded us of the human agency element in language loss, we also assert that human agency can reverse or transform this trajectory of language interruption and death.

Similarly, Governor Joseph Suina (2004), Cochiti Pueblo scholar, examined the perception of English language as an oppressive language, the link between language loss and cultural loss, and the need to address Pueblo language losses by school and tribal policymakers through partnership agreements based on explicit support of Pueblo language instruction. Through his ethnographic

work with Native language teachers (NLTs), Suina demonstrated that NLTs expressed a deeper fear – that loss of language was inextricable from loss of *cultural integrity*, meaning the complete breakdown of traditional cultural life in the Pueblos, which is guided by an ancestral calendar of community cultural/ceremonial activities (p. 295). This work carried a clear message of urgency to address language loss as a real and pressing problem while increasing the number of spaces where language loss could potentially be curbed.

Drawing inspiration from scholars such as Pennycook and Suina, this article acknowledges Indigenous fears of language loss and loss of cultural integrity and seeks to direct the conversation to include Indigenous youth language and cultural agency. In our work with Indigenous communities, more specifically with Pueblo youth in New Mexico, we assert that in addition to psychological, sociological, and political power, spiritual dimensions of language and the power of silenced and marginalized subsets of populations must also be recognized. Without venturing into discourses of the sacred, we understand spirituality as inherent within cultural practices, including seasonal ceremonial cycles, the oral traditions of Indigenous Creation Stories, and daily prayer practices. These spiritual dimensions again reshape our understanding of language ecology but also provide a compelling rationale for why retaining Indigenous languages is so vital to people like the Pueblos of New Mexico. At the same time, the spiritual dimensions provide opportunity and space for Indigenous youth to be better understood and accessed regarding their engagement in these practices.

While the tribal community homeland is viewed as a primary cultural and linguistically socializing space, and as Indigenous languages rapidly decline, the role of youth as transformative stakeholders within their communities is an important line of inquiry. Youth are a critical population but often underserved and overlooked even in their own local communities as a result of dominant perceptions that they are to blame for cultural and language shift. Meaning, rather than being seen as agents of language and cultural revitalization, youth are viewed as disinterested or incapable of participating in language planning and as contributing to language and cultural loss in favor of dominant languages and popular culture, including social media trends (Lee, 2009; Sumida Huaman, 2014; Wyman, 2012). However, over the last few years, robust qualitative research has begun to debunk such myths of Indigenous youth and their interest in and engagement with language and cultural revitalization (García, 2009; McCarty & Wyman, 2009; Nicholas, 2009). This research emphasizes that youth are important agents in language maintenance and revitalization processes, and advocates for the reconceptualization of youth from subject or recipient roles in services to leaders and conveners in planning and decision-making.

Long-term research collaborations with Indigenous communities have also yielded alternative ways of understanding youth experiences with their languages, taking into consideration their linguistic ecologies, how they are received and treated by other community members, and also how they negotiate their own language experiences. Wyman (2014) referred to this process of negotiation or brokering as *linguistic survivance*, which is “the use of languaging and/or translanguaging to creatively express, adapt and maintain identities under difficult or hostile circumstances,” including dramatic local sociolinguistic shifts and schooling (p. 2). Such ideas open up possibilities for thinking about youth language decision-making and use of translanguaging strategies (Garcia, 2009; Williams, 2002) in a multilingual world. This kind of work transcends dominant discourse of youth as largely disinterested victims “at risk” in order to create opportunity for *authentic discussion* (Swadener, 1995, 2010) about language loss, in particular among a critical new generation who are confronting the meaning of that loss today. Given the nuances of these issues and the opportunities created by examining different angles of research with youth, we need to

identify potential effective sites of language maintenance, recovery, and revitalization and better understand how youth interact with and contribute to those sites.

Tribal Institutional Research and Collaboration: Context and Methods

Research Approach and Researcher Positionalities

This study was a collaborative project involving educational researchers at Arizona State University and the Leadership Institute (LI) at the Santa Fe Indian School, a research and community development institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico.¹ This collaboration represents the current era of Indigenous research movements that involve full and transparent collaboration, from the construction of the research questions and funding-seeking stages to study design, data collection and analysis, and to publication and dissemination. Linked with Graham Hingangaroa Smith’s (1992) work on Māori-specific conceptualizations of culturally-based theory and principles stemming from ideals of collective community vision, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) outlined alternatives to the dominant research models by providing an example of Kaupapa Māori Research, which reframes both purposes and methods of research within Indigenous communities and on Indigenous terms. Extending this work by deconstructing colonial research practices linked with archaeology, Atalay (2006) also started with an analysis of the colonial lens and recognized a community of new scholars creating counter-discourses to imperialist approaches as they forge new paths for research practice that dismantle notions of Indigenous peoples as subjects of research (p. 283). Inextricably linked with over several decades of participatory research initiatives, anti-colonial struggles, and interpretive approaches to research *with* rather than *on* Indigenous populations, Indigenous research has developed into an Indigenous-crafted and -driven tool rather than a continuation of the colonial arm reaching into communities and extracting information that is most beneficial for non-Indigenous researchers (Atalay, 2012).

Our research also extends these and subsequent calls to examine research processes, including how research is envisioned and the dynamics of power related to co-creating and asking research questions (Mutua & Swadener, 2004). As researchers, we are also reminded to reflect on our own identities, which can serve as a preface to what we present and inform others regarding what has brought us to this work (Kovach, 2010). In addition to the Pueblo youth involved in this study, three research team members carried out the data collection and analysis, including Elizabeth Sumida Huaman, who served as the Principal Investigator, Nathan Martin, who served as lead on analysis of the quantitative data, and Carnell Chosa, who served as Project Director for this study. All three co-authors have a significant and/or long-term relationship with Pueblo communities: Sumida Huaman, who is Wanka/Quechua from central Peru, has worked with Pueblo communities since 2000 as an educational researcher, and her work to date focuses largely on comparative and international Indigenous educational research in North and South America. Martin’s work focuses on achievement and inequality in education, and since 2014, he has worked to provide doctoral training in Indigenous quantitative research to Pueblo graduate students at ASU. Chosa is a Pueblo

¹ This study was approved by the Arizona State University Institutional Review Board and includes an MOU and approved collaboration proposal with the tribal institution partner, including permission to publish this research. The name of the tribal institutional partner is used in this publication with their permission. No real names of participants are used in this article. Pueblo nations are listed, but not in direct reference to any youth comments or themes generated. Instead, Pueblo communities are referenced with a general “Northern Pueblo” or “Southern Pueblo” designation in youth statements, analysis, and presentation of findings.

of Jemez community member and the co-founder of the LI and founder of several Pueblo youth-focused and youth-led initiatives in New Mexico.

Research Context and Aims

In the state of New Mexico, there are 22 tribal nations, including the 19 Pueblos, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Jicarrilla Apache Nation, and Navajo Nation. The total American Indian population in the state of New Mexico is just under 220,000, or almost 11% of the state's total population, and the total population of the 19 Pueblos has reached upwards of 66,000.² The Pueblos span from the southernmost Pueblo of Zuni to the northernmost Taos Pueblo and are largely situated near or along the Rio Grande River that runs through the state. These Pueblo nations maintain strong cultural and linguistic identities (Sando, 1998). Each Pueblo is governed by both secular and non-secular bodies that oversee the political and spiritual well-being of the entire community (Romero, 1994). Today, political representation varies from Pueblo to Pueblo, so either elections or appointments of leadership occur annually for most, while some operate on multi-year terms. Leadership representing each Pueblo at the state and national levels consists of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Tribal Officials, and Tribal Council. The 19 Pueblo Governors also operate as a conglomerate through councils like the All Pueblo Council of Governors, Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council and Ten Southern Pueblos Council. At the same time, each Pueblo is also a distinct tribal sovereign nation, and there are five different languages spoken among them: Zuni (Zuni only), Towa (Jemez only), Tiwa (Isleta, Picuris, and Taos), Keres (Acoma, Laguna, Sandia, Santa Ana, Zia, San Felipe, Santo Domingo, and Cochiti), and Tewa (Tesuque, Pojoaque, Santa Clara, Nambe, San Ildefonso, and Ohkay Owingeh) (Sims, 2008).

The school community where the Leadership Institute is based is directly affiliated with the 19 Pueblo Governors and serves all 22 tribal nations in New Mexico and other tribal communities throughout the US. The LI was established in 1997 as a think tank program to discuss governmental and institutional policies impacting the tribal nations of New Mexico. Since that time, the LI has also been involved in creating tribal, state, and national policy recommendations in areas including American Indian education, language revitalization, and economic and infrastructure development. The work of the LI is participatory and community-based; an emphasis on local knowledge and respect for Indigenous community values is merged with critical understanding of policy issues and strong support of formal education initiatives for tribal people.

In 2005, the LI created a program of policy education for tribal youth called Summer Policy Academy (SPA). There are currently three levels of the SPA program. First, partnered with universities in the southwestern US, SPA-I trains youth in reading, interpreting, analyzing, and critiquing historical events and current policies impacting New Mexico's Indigenous peoples and involves a strong service component, culminating in a project created by students to serve their communities. SPA-II, was created in 2007 for rising high school seniors and first-year college students. Held at Princeton University, this program broadens policy analysis to the national and international levels, culminating in meetings with New Mexico's congressional delegation to put forward tribal youth recommendations on some of the most pressing current issues, including legislating protection of sacred sites, revisiting the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and addressing the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). SPA-III is a community internship program geared towards SPA-I and SPA-II graduates who are placed in paid positions to gain experience from a broad range of tribal community departments or tribal-serving institutions in the state. Each

² These figures were sourced from the U.S. Government's official Census 2010, available at: <http://www.census.gov/2010census/>

year, SPA draws applicants from around the state of New Mexico, and each cohort is selected by a committee of tribal educators and leaders. Selection criteria honors each student’s leadership skills, interest in policy, commitment to tribal community, ability to think critically about issues impacting Pueblo communities, and includes tribal community service involvement. Each cohort numbers from 20-30 youth and is led by a team of coordinators, planners, and SPA faculty who facilitate discussion and lead lectures on a number of tribal, state, national, and international issues impacting Pueblo and Indigenous peoples, including language loss. Since its inception, approximately 250 tribal youth from the state of New Mexico have graduated from the SPA.

The LI co-designed this study in 2010 to explore mounting concerns about Native language survival and blame (meaning youth often expressed that they were blamed for not speaking their languages) that were being voiced by Pueblo youth through multiple annual youth-focused programs led by the LI, including SPA. The purpose of this study was to respond to informal youth remarks in order to document their language perspectives through critical discussion of LPP, including how youth perceive, practice, and negotiate language issues. While youth were participants in this study, the study aimed to prioritize their voices and experiences and to privilege their ideas and recommendations, which shifted their roles from participants to co-researchers, thus reflecting an emerging “relational ethical framework” that holds researchers accountable to the so-called researched (Chilisa, 2012, 2014). Initial areas of exploration included the following:

1. What are the roles and perceptions of youth towards cultural practices that involve their Pueblo languages?
2. What are the attitudes of youth towards Native, dominant, and other world languages?
3. What are the current strategies in LPP in Pueblo communities, and do they involve youth?
4. What is the current capacity of Indigenous youth in addressing language revitalization issues and recommending policy, and are there challenges to this process?
5. What are youth recommended strategies for language revitalization in their Pueblos?

Because this research aimed to be useful to Pueblo communities, our goals also included gaining strategies from Pueblo youth to better understand, address, enhance, establish, or improve current language efforts.

Data Source

A survey was administered to two consecutive cohorts of SPA-I and SPA-II students in July 2011 and July 2012. Survey questions included a mix of closed- and open-ended questions, and incorporated vital feedback and revisions recommended by youth from a pilot survey of SPA alumni conducted earlier in 2011. As this study was Indigenous and Pueblo youth-centered, we anticipated findings to reflect the perspectives of a population not commonly highlighted in language revitalization research and that would include implications for LPP at the tribal (individual Pueblos) and institutional (the LI, schools, etc.) levels.

In total, 48 Pueblo youth returned completed surveys, representing 77% of Pueblo SPA participants during the study timeframe. Importantly, our sample was restricted to youth with intensive training in historical and current policy issues facing Indigenous peoples in New Mexico and beyond. While results should not be generalized to all Pueblo youth or youth from other tribal nations in New Mexico, our sample still included notable variation (Table 1). The youth in this study represented a total of 18 different tribal affiliations (based on mixed tribal affiliations), including 16 Pueblos. In keeping with the United Nations definition of youth (15 to 24 years old), program

participants ranged from 14 to 20 years in age, and included rising high school juniors, seniors, and first-year college students. While most survey respondents were current high school students, 21% were enrolled at a college and university.

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

Variable	<i>n</i>	% ^a
Sex		
Male	15	31
Female	33	69
Age at Interview		
14 to 16	14	29
17	17	35
18	11	23
19 or 20	6	13
Tribal Affiliation ^b		
Acoma	4	8
Cochiti	4	8
Isleta	2	4
Jemez	6	13
Laguna	5	10
Nambé	1	2
Ohkay Owingeh (San Juan)	3	6
Pojoaque	1	2
San Felipe	7	15
San Ildefonso	1	2
Santa Ana	2	4
Santa Clara	4	8
Santo Domingo	12	25
Taos	2	4
Tesuque	1	2
Zuni	4	8
Mescalero	1	2
Navajo	3	6
School Level		
Secondary	38	79
Postsecondary	10	21

^a Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

^b Categories include responses for youth who reported multiple affiliations ($n = 12$)

Although our analysis was restricted to a small convenience sample, as a collection of Pueblo youth voices these data provided us with important insights regarding youth involvement in Pueblo-

specific cultural, community, and language activities. With few exceptions, the experiences of Indigenous youth are ignored by mainstream educational research, due to sample sizes too small to make “statistically significant” inferences and comparisons (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013; Walter & Anderson, 2013), as well as the challenges of gaining the requisite approval and permissions to work with vulnerable Indigenous populations. Further, in our work we were mindful of not treating Indigenous youth as a monolithic category or running the risk of implicitly assuming that all Indigenous youth share the same cultural contexts or language issues. In this particular case, the Pueblos of New Mexico are a politically and culturally united collection of tribes, making our interest in this project Pueblo-specific and locally relevant. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first systematic look at Pueblo youth language and cultural participation as part of a larger Pueblo research agenda focusing on Pueblo youth recommendations and that directly involves Pueblo institutions as co-constructors of the research.

Results

Involvement in Cultural Activities

Overall, the youth in this study reported high levels of involvement with all cultural activities (Table 2). These activities reflect both daily and special cultural practices in Pueblo communities, as shown by culturally appropriate documentation of Pueblo life by Pueblo scholars (Dozier Enos, 2015; Romero, 1994; Sando, 1976, 1998; Suina & Smolkin, 1995). Notably, about 87% of male and 94% of female youth were involved in at least two of the cultural activities included in the survey. While ceremonial activities and traditional dances were the two most popular cultural activities for both male and female youth, other activities revealed notable sex differences. For example, reflecting local gender norms associated with Pueblo community life (Romero, 1994), female youth disproportionately participated in traditional cooking, while male youth were more likely to be involved in hunting activities.

Youth participants revealed that the most frequent use of Native language occurred in the most popular cultural activities, such as ceremonial activities and traditional dances – meaning, youth were likely exposed to Pueblo languages during these times and in the spaces where those activities were practiced. Youth reported Pueblo language use as less frequent in the more gendered activities, like hunting and traditional cooking. Because Pueblo people view farming corn crops as an ancestral traditional activity, there is heavy emphasis in Pueblos on both maintaining and – in cases where farming has been rapidly decreasing – revitalizing the family and community-based practice of farming. While this practice is a traditional cultural activity, exposure to Pueblo languages in farming is reported by youth as less common than, for example, ceremonies or dances.

Native Language Use, Planning, and Policy

Advanced language skills were widespread among SPA participants. Overall, 79% of youth in this study were bilingual or multilingual, with Spanish (37%), Keres (34%), Towa (16%) and Tewa (11%) being the most popular languages spoken in addition to English. Furthermore, 60% of male and 42% of female youth reported that they could hold a conversation in a Native language beyond greetings. Only one female youth reported being unable to speak or understand a Native language at all, while the remaining survey respondents could speak or understand a few words or sentences.

Although youth reported an eagerness to have a more active role in shaping Native language policy and resulting programming in their own tribal communities, they also perceived limited opportunities to do so (Table 3). For example, 77% reported that youth should be involved in

language planning and policy, but only 23% reported that youth were actually involved in language efforts at the community level. The language efforts we considered gave an emphasis to more formalized endeavors and programming that serve as examples of the sort of intentional community language activities García, Zakharia and Octu (2012) describe as playing an important role to bilingual community education. However, language efforts can also be informal and involve daily Native language exchanges that youth participate in or initiate without explicit reflection but that demonstrate their language choices, as well as the increasingly globalized contexts and other settings within which youth are interacting outside of their Pueblos.

Table 2
Youth Participation and Native Language Use in Selected Cultural Activities

Cultural Activity		Activity Involvement		Extent Native Language Spoken (%) ^a		
		<i>n</i>	%	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Ceremonial Activities	Total	36	75	92	8	--
	Females	25	76	100	--	--
	Males	11	73	73	27	--
Traditional Dances	Total	35	73	86	11	3
	Females	25	76	92	8	--
	Males	10	67	70	20	10
Traditional Cooking, Plants, and Wild Medicines	Total	27	56	44	44	15
	Females	24	73	50	38	12
	Males	3	20	--	67	33
Agriculture	Total	15	31	47	47	7
	Females	8	24	50	50	--
	Males	7	47	43	43	14
Hunting	Total	8	17	50	50	--
	Females	2	6	100	--	--
	Males	6	40	33	67	--
Traditional Arts and Storytelling	Total	8	17	38	38	25
	Females	7	21	29	43	18
	Males	1	7	100	--	--

^a Of youth reporting involvement in selected activity.

In considering why language planning efforts were underway in their tribal communities, youth offered explanations that stressed themes of language loss, preservation, cultural traditions, and the need for additional support and resources.³ In particular, many youth perceived a strong

³ Less than half of respondents reported that there was no language planning effort in their community or that they were not aware of any such efforts. In general, these youth offered three reasons for why they

concern for a language shift among children as a key reason for implementing language programs. Responses such as, “It was felt that the children were not speaking the language anymore,” “Children don’t know the language that well,” and “Little kids and teenagers are mostly speaking English and the elders fear that our language will not survive” highlighted a perceived fear of survival of the language by older community members.

Table 3
Percent of Youth Agreeing with Selected Statements about Native Language Policy

		<i>n</i>	%
Should youth be involved in language planning and policy?	Total	37	77
	Females	25	76
	Males	12	80
Is Native language a priority to all community members?	Total	32	67
	Females	21	64
	Males	11	73
Are there language planning efforts in your community?	Total	25	52
	Females	16	48
	Males	9	60
Is Native language a priority to youth in community?	Total	15	31
	Females	10	30
	Males	5	33
Are you or other youth involved in language planning or action in your community?	Total	11	23
	Females	10	30
	Males	1	7
Are you or other youth involved in language policy at the tribal, state, federal or international level?	Total	5	10
	Females	4	12
	Males	1	7

Youth provided firm acknowledgement of the power of tribal leadership to unify community members around particular activities and in this case, language issues. Program participants overwhelmingly pointed to tribal leadership as the primary driver of language planning efforts. For

believed this was the case: scheduling conflicts among potential participants, a lack of willingness in the community to engage in planning efforts, and a lack of teachers to provide language instruction. These themes reflect a larger debate in Pueblo and other Indigenous communities that questions where language is best taught and recovered (spaces of language instruction, how (pedagogical methods), and who should teach and reinforce language.

example, one youth stated, “The governors go to the schools and talk to us why they hear a lot of people talking English instead of our language. They tell us that if we don’t speak, the language would be lost, and we are the only people who speak [this Southern Pueblo] language.” Others acknowledged tribal leadership, but offered critiques on direction of policy attention and community involvement: “There are some planning efforts, but the main focus in tribal government is other public policy,” and “I know there are meetings, but I think they should start inviting the whole community.”

Many youth explicitly used the word “loss” when explaining why communities implement language programs. Characteristic responses included: “None of us want to lose the language,” and “My community definitely realizes that we have a language loss problem, and now they are starting with classes trying to reverse it.” Relatedly, many youth stressed the importance of language preservation in comments, such as “The tribal leaders see the loss of our language and want to do everything in our power to preserve it,” and “Because they [tribal leadership] want to keep [this Southern Pueblo] language present and thriving, so that the younger generation can pass on language to future generations.” Responses to the survey questions suggested awareness that language survival is dependent upon both fluent speakers transmitting the language to children and future generations and current speakers (and perhaps learners) retaining language knowledge. In many ways, these youth observations speak to the unique status of Indigenous peoples in the US and in this case, of Pueblo youth who in addition to all the pressures mainstream youth may face, also bear the reality of the loss of their languages – a concern that has been reiterated to them in their Pueblos and that they are actively observing.

Youth also recognized the link between their languages and Pueblo cultural traditions. This is not surprising as other research has demonstrated that youth are aware of cultural practices in their communities that are viewed by community members as inextricable from language practices (Nicholas, 2009). Statements included the following: “Because they want us to learn our language so we won’t lose it because we need it for tradition and culture.” Youth also clearly indicated that language in their Pueblos is often taught through cultural practice: “Its [language program] purpose is to maintain our language and traditions. Most of the time, our language is taught through traditional practices.”

When considering why youth were not involved in language planning or action in their communities, survey respondents – and especially those youth preparing for or currently attending college – reported scheduling conflicts with school and work obligations as key obstacles to participation, as well as difficulties with transportation.⁴ More worrisome, some youth stated that their lack of participation in language planning efforts was due to negative perceptions of youth in community, such as, “They [community members] think youth are immature.”

Youth-Recommended Strategies for Language Work

Using open-ended questions, youth were asked to summarize “one thing” that they wanted non-youth community members, youth community members, and non-Native people to know about their languages, respectively. Regarding non-youth community members, responses were categorized along two major themes: *language and identity* and *language teaching*. Youth wanted their community members to know that they understood the link between language and its significance to

⁴ Only four youth reported that they themselves were currently involved in community LPP, noting their experiences taking classes and completing SPA community service projects as examples of their participation.

Pueblo identity and cultural practices, in responses such as, “Our language . . . helps us to find who we are and how we fit in the world” and,

One thing that I would like non-youth community members to know about my Native language is that it is sacred to me. It is sacred to me because it holds deeper words and definitions that I would not be able to say in English, and to me that is special. It’s special to have its own way of life, to be different and beautifully unique. And that’s my community.

Youth also had compelling words to give to non-youth community members regarding language teaching, emphasizing that they do care about language loss but want compassion and patience with language learning, which as one youth stated, was particularly difficult after being exposed to English for so long. Other statements included the following:

There are youngsters like me who really do want to learn the language and the meaning behind it all. When the elders get mad and shake their heads when they talk to us in [Southern Pueblo language] and we don’t respond it makes me feel like a bad person. They shouldn’t do that but teach us.

We youth can’t just learn our language from the things you speak to us during dances or ceremonies, we need you to teach us and help us understand because we are not just going to automatically learn it. Be kind and understanding when we don’t respond to greetings or other words. Help us or our language will be lost.

Youth responses demonstrated that they not only wanted other community members to know that they understood the importance of language in their communities and to their identities as Pueblo people, but that they also wanted help from their communities.

Regarding what youth wanted other Pueblo youth to know about their languages, responses focused on reinforcement of the importance of language as a representation of family, community, and Pueblo cultural identity, which they expressed through statements of *encouragement* to their peers:

I would like other youth to know that when our elders say that we are the future, it is true. If we want all the beautiful things that are a part of our culture and traditions, we need to be work to keep it. It is our responsibility to ensure that our language lives one for our children and future generations to come.

Our language is important not just for the sake of language but there is a higher power that has watched over us thousands of years and this is our one way to talk to Her and say thank you, praying for guidance and things like this can be achieved in our language. There’s a deeper purpose for language.

While youth were encouraging of their peers – recommending taking advantage of existing community-based language programs, embracing the possibility of learning one’s own language, and reclaiming language as part of their proud cultural identities as Native people – some statements simultaneously included critiques of their peers. These statements included fear of language and cultural loss directly linked with how this was impacting others in the community: “Youth need to listen to their elders and ask questions about the language and culture,” and “We need to stop

thinking about ourselves and start thinking about each other and our culture.” Statements like these implied that youth were aware that they had a responsibility as language learners to engage with other community members, but most importantly, to believe themselves that language was important to preserve and recover.

Overall, youth reported two aspects about their language that they wanted non-Natives to know. First, youth described their languages as “*unique*,” “*sacred*,” and “*precious*”, for example:

We have a unique system of communicating and are more in tune with the world around us. We all are different, it is very condescending to hear the greeting “How” because of all of the stereotypes that exist in media. In all honesty they will always be there and no way to avoid it but I want them to know that there are more than just ONE language of Native people.

Further illustrating this theme, youth noted that they wanted non-Natives to know that their languages should not be judged on the fact that they are not widely spoken or universal languages, but that these languages are distinct and important to the world’s Indigenous peoples and that this point alone was enough to merit their support. As such, youth wanted non-Natives to empathize with Native language loss, asking hypothetical questions about what would happen if English was lost: “...our Native language is the first language we had spoken. To lose it would be devastating and heartbreaking. It would be like you losing how to speak your first language, which is English.”

Second, other youth stressed that *non-Natives could serve as advocates* for Native languages through actions like actively supporting legislation for Native languages – for example, “Not to take pity on the Native Americans but just to help protest at the federal government level to get funds to set up Language Preservation Programs within *every* Native community” (youth emphasis).⁵

At the end of the survey, youth were asked to provide three strategies that they recommended for language revitalization in their community. These responses, which included both ideological and concrete suggestions, were coded into three general themes so that ideas about what youth believed should be done could be conveyed for consideration by community members. The most popular strategies proposed by youth involved expanding *community-based language action*, including nonformal language instruction programs that take place out-of-school and in community spaces. Youth proposed apprenticeships and opportunities for intergenerational mentorship and community language teacher training – as in, “Offer tribal member language program teaching at different levels, from beginning to advanced and make those that are advanced start teaching alongside teachers in the program.” Other youth recommended giving more emphasis to language in existing community activities and ceremonies or providing more space for informal practice and language skill acquisition through daily routine interactions. They commented that Pueblo families had a responsibility to enforce language policy in the home and that language learning should be targeted towards toddlers, and small children. Recommendations included that children should “speak with elders, parents, aunts, uncles, anybody who's fluent in the language in order to learn and try to become fluent,” and be exposed to language through storytelling. Relatedly, youth also suggested *comprehensive school-based language programs*, including classes and for-credit course electives in local

⁵ The advocacy that Pueblo youth believed should be exhibited by non-Natives as well as Natives reflects understanding of federal Indian policy and the U.S. federal government’s trust obligation to American Indian tribes, which has failed tribes like the Pueblos on many fronts, from language preservation funding support to education and health care services.

Pueblo-serving schools that combined language-learning with teaching of Pueblo history and that directly involved Pueblo community members and elders.

Other youth recommendations offered ways to *identify and revisit commitment to language and values in the community*. In these responses, youth emphasized individual responsibility, responsibility of community members to each other, and collective support for all community members. For example, youth stressed the importance of an individual commitment to language: “Stay with your words. People will say ‘I will always be there’ for stuff but they don’t,” and “Keep it going and make sure it won’t go away.” Other responses highlighted the responsibility of community members to each other to support language learning. For example, “Everyone helping out, elders, adults and kids all working as one to strengthen the language,” “Not being judgmental upon others who are not fluent but learning,” and “Help make adults understand how youth have a hard time speaking the language. Help the adults teach instead of just saying ‘You should speak [this Southern Pueblo language]!’”

Finally, some youth offered recommendations for incorporating *media technologies* in language instruction and *conducting additional research*, which have both been controversial topics in the Pueblos. Because Indigenous peoples and Pueblo Indian nations have been among the most historically exploited populations in research – with research conducted on cultures and languages without their consent – communities like the Pueblos are wary of potential outsider access to cultural material, including language. Yet, several youth made mention of research as a strategy for language revitalization, while stressing that youth should have a clear role in developing questions, soliciting opinions, and conducting interviews with community leaders, elders, and other youth. Furthermore, the daily operations for many people in the U.S., including Pueblo youth, involve the use of many instruments of technology and their expressions, including social media and new media. Pueblo youth recommended using all “available resources” that could be reviewed by youth. They suggested using print media for language and the development of orthography: “It may be taboo to write the language, but I would prefer to have workbooks and other tangible materials as long as they are used for all the right purposes and are not leaked out to the wrong eyes.” Youth also suggested using new media for language access and learning (language CDs and videos and general computer software “for an interactive learning process”), as well as using telephones and digital devices “in a respectful way.” These comments in particular offer tribal leaders, community members, school-based stakeholders, researchers, and youth themselves insight into the rich questions that youth-as-researchers might ask and have unique access towards answering.

Discussion: Youth at Promise

We expected this research to expand our understanding of the link between youth, Native languages, tribal community spaces, and cultural practices. We also intended to provide insights to benefit both individuals and communities, whereby Pueblo youth demonstrate their current roles and potential as change agents while communities gain additional Native language perspectives from youth generations. We hoped that findings would outline the significance of youth participation in policy development, especially in their own communities, and that this work could contribute to the long-term habit of seeking out and including Indigenous youth in crucial conversations that they could ultimately direct and sustain.

So, just as critically deconstructing widely accepted policy talk and action norms and challenging mainstream policy language are part of the process of realizing full agency, so is questioning local assumptions. As a result, we challenge ourselves and Indigenous community stakeholders and policymakers to deconstruct, to critically explore, but also to envision. Rethinking

Indigenous youth as an “at promise” (Swadener, 1995) population offers more than a buzzword recall; “at promise” gives us the permission to recognize what youth are already doing and what more they could do for themselves and their communities. Following this call, our work urges educators and community members, especially youth, to offer multiple reconceptualizations of Indigenous communities and peoples at promise.

The most important outcomes of this study are related to the explicit attention that youth have taken as stakeholders in language issues and as resistant to colonial assimilation, even hundreds of years after colonization. Equally important as this recognition is the space that has been created to openly discuss and debate language issues for the first time among youth gathering together in the SPA program. We could hope that what Memmi (1991) referred to as the “total revolution” of adolescents that upsets the stagnation of colonized structures will take a unique form, directed by Pueblo youth. There remains considerable work yet, especially as youth not only resist assimilation but also replicate viewpoints to which they form strong affiliations. For example, Pueblo youth already have developed strong ideas regarding language revitalization. The most controversial topic raised was the use of technology, including writing and recording, in order to promote the use of Pueblo languages or to preserve them. At this time, tribal policies are split, where some Pueblos have prohibited the writing and distribution of language via any form of media – visual, print, or social. Other Pueblos are developing orthographies and allowing the distribution of writing language amongst their tribal members.

Although there are no clear answers to the choices that youth face in terms of how best to maintain and revitalize their languages, there are newer and emerging collaborative and community-driven efforts to address language issues. Over the course of the past four years, more Pueblo communities are partnering with schools that serve their children by developing tribal policies and programs to support language learning in the schools. One Pueblo, for example, restructured their early childhood learning to become a language immersion school. Several other communities have developed policies to offer their language classes in schools that serve Pueblo students. Further, a number of Pueblos are working with Pueblo scholars in higher education and research institutions, like the American Indian Language Policy Research and Teacher Training Center at the University of New Mexico in order to assess language use and develop community-specific strategies.

We hoped to contribute to these efforts and to offer our research to a discussion that deepens understanding of the complex and dynamic contexts and agencies of Indigenous youth in relation to community. As such, we believe that the following assertions summarizing overall findings demonstrate an explicit link between community spaces, cultural practices, mainstream pressures, and language usages and highlight important stages in the lives of Pueblo youth in this particular study, including transitions away from their Pueblos:

- a. Most Pueblo youth are involved in cultural activities, and most of these activities provide opportunities, though not always fully realized, to engage with Native languages;
- b. Pueblo cultural activities provide space for meaningful language interaction across generations; however, language uses in community activities directed towards youth are more common during culturally-based occasions as opposed to daily practice;
- c. Most Pueblo youth already possess Native language skills, including bilingual (Native language/English) ability;
- d. Pueblo youth are concerned about the current status and continuity of their languages and are able to articulate firm beliefs about the importance of their languages;
- e. Pueblo youth are eager to be more involved in language programming, although perceive few opportunities to do so;

- f. Pueblo youth overwhelmingly want for their own non-youth community members to know that they care about the link between language and cultural practices;
- g. Strategies for language revitalization recommended by youth encompass school, community, and home spaces and include strong pronouncements about how this can be done and by whom.

As language is intimately and inextricably linked with Pueblo cultures, worldviews and lifestyles, exploring how youth see themselves in the community dynamic was a critical start to addressing the challenges and strategies for maintenance and revitalization of endangered languages and cultural practices. So, there are several realizations that emerged that we believe need to be explicitly stated. First, engaging in cultural practices that involve language constitutes the “Pueblo way of life” (Dozier Enos, 2015). Dozier Enos argued that this concept is one way of viewing the living elements that make up a particular set of cultural practices inherently Puebloan, such as land, language, and spirituality, the foundation for sovereign nationhood that drives Pueblo people to maintain identity that transcends political realms, and consideration of external influences, like Western education. We add that perhaps because there is no singular way to approach a “Pueblo way of life,” youth offer strong examples of how there are multiple ways of being Pueblo and that being Pueblo *is work* – cultural and linguistic socialization within community and commitment to that work despite the tremendous pressures that youth and the institutions with which they are affiliated face, like schooling and Pennycook’s “feral English”. The globalization of education through neoliberal policies and capitalistic foundations is real, and Pueblo youth face these daily through teaching practices in schools that are geared towards standards and testing that are frankly uninterested in the “Pueblo way of life.”

Second, youth resistance to assimilation takes different pathways based on where they might be on a spectrum of resistance, meaning, while all youth are experimenting with their own agency in language and cultural maintenance and revitalization, they are engaged in different ways. Some youth are resisting *tentatively* – offering ideas that emphasize language awareness and family involvement in general. Other youth are doing so *boldly* and offering ideas that demand the role of schooling as central to language, or asking for tribal innovation regarding language technology. However, despite the tentative or bold elements to their current language work or aspirations regarding this work in their communities, they are all bravely acknowledging a problem. This acknowledgement pays homage to generations that struggled through painfully restrictive language policies and whose efforts have made possible an environment where language loss and shift are being discussed.

Third, building on the fact that cultural and language participation is both a way of life and work, and that youth are both tentative and bold in their efforts to address language maintenance and fortification, we must also acknowledge the power of the challenges they face. Pueblo communities, while rural, are not in isolation from Western standards of living or mainstream popular culture that reflects commodification and commercialization. Because of prolonged and inevitable contact with non-Pueblo ways of life, opportunities for economic growth and development, and individual and family socioeconomic mobility, we must consider what youth engagement looks like and can look like on a daily basis. How can Pueblo youth continue to be engaged with their home communities on these and other vital concerns that arise, even when outside of community? Here, the notion of “Pueblo youth engagement” embodies both the individual’s yearning and responsibility to community and the community’s embrace and enfolding of the individual (Chosa, forthcoming). Pueblo communities too have a clear responsibility to youth when it comes to the work of maintaining their engagement with individuals, and youth involvement and direction of LPP is one important testing ground for this practice.

Concluding Remarks

Traditional Native Americans believe that everyone and everything exist in an integrated and pervasive system of relationships. One resident of Santa Clara Pueblo puts it this way: “We are part of an organic world in which interrelationships at all levels of life are honored. Our relations to the place we live – the land, water, sky, mountains, rocks, animals, plants – is tangible. Our sense of social relationships leads us to respect all who have gone before and all who will follow, our elders as well as our youth.” (Naranjo, 1995, p. 16)

Tessie Naranjo, a Tewa scholar from Santa Clara Pueblo offered a gentle reminder of Pueblo worldviews regarding interrelationships that are sustainable and that provide us all with a guideline for how to live carefully and respectfully with each other and in this world. At the heart of this study is the assertion that Pueblo cultural practices and languages offer a new way of understanding social justice, which is Naranjo’s Tewa explanation of the “honoring of all levels of life” – a life that celebrates those who practice, reclaim, and revitalize their Indigenous ways of living and knowing. Pueblo youth at promise are redefining what it means to be Indigenous in contexts largely dominated by neoliberal development agendas. These agendas have long since impacted schooling for Indigenous populations, but Indigenous peoples, including Pueblo youth, are resisting, negotiating, and transforming those experiences in ways that reframe Indigeneity. Of this process, de la Cadena and Starn (2007) wrote, “Indigeneity, in other words, is at once historically contingent and encompassing of the nonindigenous – and thus never about untouched reality” (p. 4). While we do not propose to define Indigeneity for any individual or community, the interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous elements in the lives of Pueblo youth is both junction and impasse where careful and deliberate decisions about language and cultural practice must be made.

Programs like SPA and other out-of-school education opportunities can fill a gap, especially as school-based pressures increase through state standards and national testing. Nonetheless, schooling also has a responsibility to enhance and expand opportunities for Indigenous and Pueblo youth while also building and supporting Indigenous rights to reclaim and strengthen their languages and cultural practices. Further, as asserted by Pueblo youth in this study, Indigenous community spaces have an equal, if not greater, responsibility to serve as places where language fortification work can also be developed and grown. Because Indigenous youth are critical observers and actors in this arrangement, and perhaps because of the strong sociocultural grounding provided by tribal communities like the Pueblos, we owe our time and effort to supporting young people to cultivate and experiment with solutions and strategies that will shape their futures and those of their children, coming very quickly behind them.

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About the Authors

Elizabeth Sumida Huaman

Arizona State University
esumidah@asu.edu

Elizabeth Sumida Huaman is Wanka/Quechua and Japanese. She is an Assistant Professor of Indigenous Education at the School of Social Transformation and affiliated faculty with the ASU Center for Indian Education, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, and School for the Future of Innovation in Society. Her work focuses on comparative and international Indigenous education research with Indigenous communities in the U.S., Canada, and Peru. Through her research, she is committed to preserving the link between Indigenous languages, lands and cultural practices, and community-based pedagogies. Recent publications include works in *Cultural Studies of Science Education* and *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, and the edited volume, *Indigenous innovation: Universalities and peculiarities* (Sense).

Nathan D. Martin

Arizona State University
ndm@asu.edu

Nathan D. Martin is an assistant professor in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. He earned his Ph.D. in Sociology, with a graduate certificate in Education Policy Research, from Duke University. His research focuses on inequalities in postsecondary education, and global shifts in labor, work and class mobilization. Recent publications have appeared in *The Sociological Quarterly*, *Research in Higher Education*, and *Journal of College Student Development*.

Carnell T. Chosa

The Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School
CTChosa@SFIS.k12.nm.us

Carnell T. Chosa is from the Towa-speaking Pueblo of Jemez. He is a graduate of the inaugural Pueblo Indian Doctoral Cohort with a Ph.D. in Justice and Social Inquiry in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. He is also the co-founder and co-director of The Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School, a community development and youth leadership initiative that serves New Mexico's tribal communities. His interests are developing youth and community engagement programs, exploring concepts of community contribution, and researching youth perspectives on issues that impact tribal community.

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