

## Unit 7

### Section 7, Activity 11

#### Model answer

This is a model answer. You may have taken different notes.

To answer the question posed by the authors in the introduction: *What are the opportunities and challenges of teaching writing in support of endangered language revitalization and reclamation?*, I have taken the following notes to summarise the points they make in answering it:

#### Opportunities

- writing is simultaneously an attraction and a source of marginalization or discouragement for learners in educational settings
- On the positive side, promoting and teaching writing creates opportunities including raising the status, visibility, and longevity of Indigenous language education initiatives
- Schools are a key site for language reclamation (LR) efforts
- writing holds a central role in these educational LR endeavours
- writing is simultaneously a strong attraction or source of LR opportunity, and a difficulty, or source of LR challenges
- opportunities, including the visibility of text as a source of pride and status; and personal and professional empowerment through the integration of writing into existing literacy practices

#### Challenges

- Language reclamation initiatives are often squeezed into the margins of formal education, work, and family life
- include struggles for legitimacy among teachers and learners and the emergence of new hierarchies among dialects
- it is necessary to develop critical and creative ways that teachers and learners may approach literacy in LR settings to minimize potential drawbacks and enhance opportunities
- limited access and exposure; LR education opportunities often receive scarce resources compared to dominant language education (McCarty 2013).
- learners are less likely to see the language written in public or online spaces, as the lower status of Indigenous languages often translates into their absence in the linguistic landscape

- linguistic, especially orthographic, standardization and the creation of written norms. Most nation-state education systems function with a standard language ideology whereby a standard is viewed as neutral, necessary, and superior to other varieties (Silverstein 1987)
- As Weth and Juffermans note, “It is in this way that writing can be tyrannical: It influences processes of language change and creates social distinctions between ‘literate’ and ‘illiterate’ speech, correct and incorrect forms, and ignorant and knowledgeable speakers and writers”(2018, 6)
- Language standards represent an unavoidable, and almost always challenging, aspect of LR literacy education – they are not neutral
- production of norms creates a distinction between correct and incorrect writing, where there may previously have been a range of spoken language without a clear hierarchical ordering
- limited exposure to writing in these languages, making them seem difficult to learn, is exacerbated by a focus on producing the proper forms of literacy, whether in terms of standardization or a focus on form over meaning in some language classes
- The prestige of written language can boost pride, while the production of written materials can foster interaction in and about the language

## **Literacy**

- Learners are wary of errors, and the pressure to write “correctly” means that they may have a harder time with self-expression
- Literacy is often associated with writing and reading specifically; however, text-based literacy is just one form of meaning-making and is inevitably characterized by context-specific practices and significance (Street 1984; Menezes de Souza 2002).
- The dominance of alphabetic literacy over other forms of meaning-making has been critiqued in the context of Indigenous education in particular.
- Writing is a desired and even cherished aim for many. The high status of writing in society, and especially in schooling, can provide benefits for Indigenous writers.
- Logistical and political benefits of writing include wider information sharing and democratization of knowledge. The power to access and interpret information gained from text can make writing and reading “a liberating, revolutionary activity” (Weth and Juffermans 2018, 2).
- “alphabetization” is an important step toward developing critical awareness and political engagement (Freire 1970)
- the prestige and transformative power associated with literacy means writing is often viewed as a cornerstone of efforts to raise the status of a minoritized group (Fishman 1991).
- From a pedagogical perspective, literacy is likewise encouraged as a central educational goal.

## Experiences

“The teacher went on to recount that after a choice was made to teach only one variety, at the end of the semester some students gave feedback that they would have preferred the other variety, or both. The teachers felt unable to please all the students in the class. While some students may indeed desire to have one variety, as is common in foreign language teaching, in LR contexts some learners may appreciate an approach that leaves room for the varieties they hear among their family and on the street. The gains in simplicity from choosing one variety come with potentially steep costs in omitting the knowledge and experience learners bring to the classroom. This is the case in any language education setting; however, in our observations it is especially significant in LR pedagogy that aims to support previously marginalized voices.” (page 298)

“These readers’ and writers’ experiences illustrate the double-edged sword of alphabetic literacy for endangered language learners and even teachers. On the one hand, gaining new insight into one’s heritage language can be a positive experience, as discussed below. On the other hand, learning a purportedly correct way of writing that you and your family do not know and that your own name does not reflect might not serve goals of strengthening intergenerational transmission and community cohesion.” (page 299)

## Lessons learned

- The challenge for LR practitioners and supporters, then, may be to recognize where the practices and ideologies surrounding writing are beneficial and where they may be harmful to a project’s goals.
- Even when an Indigenous language was a person’s first spoken language, many encountered the written form only later in life. Considering the specific needs of such learners in designing curricula and texts may help to support their learning process and potential frustrations.
- Successful LR programs may benefit from exploring ways to counteract deep-seated assumptions about correctness and standard in language and literacy.
- writing can serve to bring languages forward into new domains and purposes, such as writing letters to distant community members, producing poetry and rap lyrics, or allowing a language into official spaces like schools
- making the most of the material and social nature of writing
- Teachers of endangered languages may also benefit from avoiding hard-line purism and a focus on form, while giving greater consideration to meaning and contexts for written expression
- Adopting a less purist approach to written norms may help empower multilingual writers, whether they be teachers or students
- stress the importance of ongoing reflection and attention on the part of teachers and LR advocates to consider the contexts and purposes of writing, and to avoid excluding emerging writers through form-focused choices