



Heritage Voice: Program

Lenape Language Education Program of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania and Swarthmore College

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www.lenapenation.org/lenapelanguage.html

www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/Linguistics/LenapeLanguageResources



About the Program Director: Shelly DePaul



When Shelley DePaul, Assistant Chief of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania and instructor of Lenape language courses at Swarthmore College, was growing up in Pennsylvania, there were only “whisperings” about the Lenape language that left her wanting to learn more. Trained as a historian and teacher, not a linguist, she began studying the texts and grammars available in the various dialects of Lenape (an Algonquian language, also called Delaware, Munsee, and Unami), which use numerous spelling systems and a range of vocabulary variants.

About the Program Director: Shelly DePaul (continued)

As she made sense of these different documents, DePaul began what she describes as an ongoing project: to create language learning material that is accessible to members of the Lenape community of all ages and to raise awareness about Lenape language, culture, and history in Pennsylvania.

Lenape communities living in what is now eastern Pennsylvania, northern Delaware, New Jersey, and parts of New York were among the first indigenous communities to have extended contact with European colonizers in North America. Over time, Lenape people scattered across North America through forced resettlement and lived in Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Ontario, and other places. Others remained in Pennsylvania, intermarrying with the colonists and becoming bilingual in German and English, and, often in secret, passing down Lenape words and cultural practices.

Weskiane mikwi nta tekenink ok nkelsetam kweni nkelsetam ok wemi elankumakik lixsuwak ku nenustamuwen wichi aptunakana keku pemetunheyok shek nenustamen ntehemink. Nkata nuwatun lenape lixsuwakan.

When I was young, I would often go into the woods and listen. I listened to the way that all my relations spoke. I didn't understand the words, but I understood it in my heart. I wanted to know the Lenape language.

Shelley DePaul. (2010). *Conversations in the Lenape Language*.

DePaul has created written and oral materials for children and adults in her community, despite barriers including the dispersed population and difficult choices about dialect variation and orthography. Recordings and written materials have been produced by Lenape communities in Oklahoma and Ontario in the different dialects (Munsee, Northern and Southern Unami). DePaul teaches the Southern Unami dialect of Lenape, but her goal is to be inclusive and encouraging, "to provide an atmosphere where people are permitted to speak, experiment, make mistakes, and even make choices about how words will be used and pronounced in certain families" (personal communication, Shelley DePaul, October, 2012). Her work has been supported by other members of the Lenape community, especially Chief Bob Red Hawk Ruth and Ann Dapice.

About the Program: Lenape Language at Swarthmore College

Program origin

After presenting about her work with the language at a 2008 conference on endangered languages, hosted by Robert Preucel at the University of Pennsylvania, Shelley was approached by Ted Fernald, chair of the Linguistics department at Swarthmore College, a liberal arts college located in traditional Lenape territory.

Fernald asked what they could do at Swarthmore to support tribal language efforts. Following her desire to promote learning and awareness of Lenape, DePaul took up the challenge and offered a class on Lenape Language Study in the spring of 2009.

The class continues to be offered, and she views it as one piece of the continuing project of Lenape language promotion, which has had unexpected exponential benefits for both college students and the community.



Shelley DePaul uses Lenape artifacts and emphasizes cultural content in teaching the Lenape language to students at Swarthmore College.

Program content

The class has evolved considerably over the years it has been taught, and student interest has led DePaul to offer an advanced class and advise students undertaking independent studies on aspects of the language. The curriculum has developed to cover the basic grammar of the language and an impressive amount of vocabulary, as well as cultural and historical information, and culminates in a final project of the students' choice.

Many students choose to make pedagogical materials for their final project, including books and songs for children, YouTube videos, and games. Others conduct more traditional linguistic projects such as analyzing aspects of grammar, interpreting original texts, and contributing to the growing verb dictionary. Students have also translated traditional stories and written original stories in Lenape, which serve as resources for new students. Numerous resources have been created by students, which benefit members of the Lenape community as well as students at Swarthmore and the general public, who can access them online on the website, [the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania](http://www.lenapenation.org).

One of the challenges of teaching a minority language is that there is frequently a lack of materials. Swarthmore student projects are providing welcome resources for learners of the language at different levels.



Student final project: Lenapoly game by Holly Smith

Basic Patterns for Person Marking

For all verb forms, you will use the same prefixes to express person. First person is *I/we*, second person is *you/you all*, and third person is *she/he/they*. For now, we will just look at singular forms, *I*, *you*, and *she/he*.

Note: For third person forms, the verb may just be translated as “he verbs.” Remember that male and female gender is not distinguished on verbs: Any of these verbs could also mean “she verbs.”

First person: n-

Second person: k-

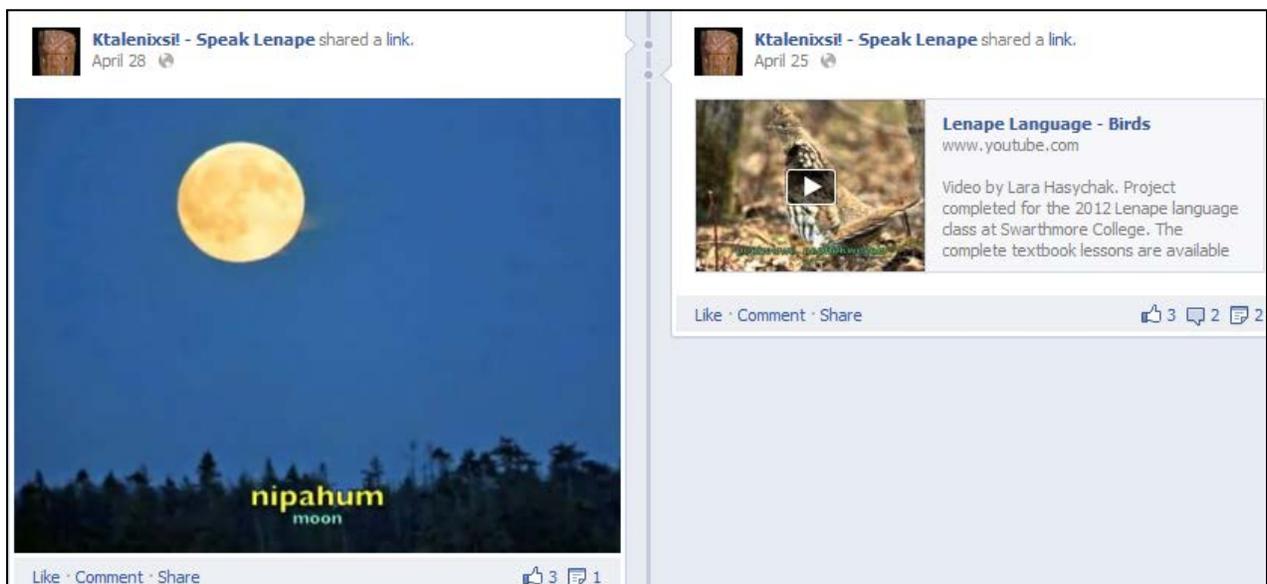
Third person: ø

Student final project: Excerpt from Lenape Verb Dictionary by Elizabeth Bogel-Allbritten

Program successes

Collaborations between higher education institutions and indigenous communities around language revitalization have potential for mutual benefit in a variety of ways. At Swarthmore, engaging students in language learning, research, and creating teaching materials in the language has been an effective combination for the Lenape program. DePaul notes that, despite her perception of a history of exploitive relationships between academics and indigenous people, this program has resulted in very successful collaborations. "I listen, and I take advice from the linguistics students. I like to hear their perspectives, because they see it in a whole different way," she notes. "On the other hand, the linguists need to get into the community, sit through ceremonies, understand tribal ways, and let the people explain the significance of the words, concepts, and stories that they know" (personal communication, Shelley DePaul, October, 2012).

For many students, the class provides a first opportunity to learn about indigenous issues in general, through an indigenous perspective in particular. One student reported that, before taking the class, "I had never met an Indian" but after taking both the introductory and advanced classes, he was interested in and aware of American Indigenous issues. Students find learning about the culture and history of the original inhabitants of the place they live to be meaningful, and they gain greater awareness of the historical and political dynamics of minority and endangered languages and cultures, an unexpected outcome of the course. Others noted that the class changed their perspectives not just of the language and history, but also of their natural environment: "When I'm walking around on the ground, I'll have more of an air of respect...definitely it changes the way you view where you're living." Learning about a non-Indo-European language is also attractive to some students, several of whom took the class because of the opportunity to study an "obscure" or rarely taught language.



Student YouTube videos shared on the Lenape FaceBook group page, "Ktalenixsi!- Speak Lenape"

Rather than waiting to have a perfect curriculum or consensus on dialect and orthography, this program has moved forward with the idea that language must be spoken to survive and, through its use, new agreements about forms will emerge.

Linguistics students find studying Lenape especially engaging, because there is so much work to be done, and it frequently requires working with archives and primary sources rather than simplified data sets provided by professors. A linguistics student who took the introductory and advanced classes, and continued to work on language materials beyond the classes, noted about this work, "It was real! I was actually doing my own research...kind of being on the front lines." The processes of research and discussion around contentious issues have kept students engaged, which both students and DePaul contrast to the study of more standardized languages like French or Spanish. The sense that this is an ongoing project, that real contributions can be made, and that learning Lenape is an important act of cultural preservation makes it an exciting opportunity for students. At the same time, they make important contributions to community language efforts. One student said of the language, "it's so alive right now. The experience of learning it is a very interactive one that you don't get with a more common language, because your French professor's not going to change the textbook if you don't like the way it's written."

Although difficulties exist in the teaching of an indigenous language that has multiple dialects and writing systems in a higher education context, as DePaul notes, the language work that has been produced and the amount that students have learned speaks for itself. "There is great encouragement for the future of the language in the knowledge that there is much interest on the part of various individuals, communities, and institutions to work toward its preservation," she says. Securing funding has been an ongoing challenge, but so far the program has been successful in securing grants and funding through Swarthmore College and the University of Pennsylvania. DePaul and other program supporters would like to see this kind of class at more institutions, as an effective way to introduce students to local and national histories that they are often not aware of and to allow institutions to be better resources for the indigenous communities in their area.

DePaul plans to continue to develop her teaching materials with the input and collaboration of students and to continue to make all of the resources created available online. "There may be a point when we want to put them on a dusty bookshelf, but now is not that time," she says. The students participating in this ongoing project, and the Lenape community members who appreciate the materials they produce, would clearly agree.

Reference

DePaul, S. (2010). *Conversations in the Lenape language*. Swarthmore, PA: Lenape Nation of PA Language Project.

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/Linguistics/LenapeLanguageResources/pdf/ConversationLenape.pdf>

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The Heritage Voices Program Profile on the Lenape Language Education Program in Pennsylvania was prepared by Haley De Korne and Miranda Weinberg (Educational Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania) for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Washington DC.

The Heritage Voices Collection is designed to spotlight individual heritage language speakers and programs. The information presented does not necessarily represent the views of the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages or the Center for Applied Linguistics.



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