Language diversity is vitally important as each language expresses unique cultural ways of viewing the world around us. Unfortunately, languages are sometimes lost as fewer people utilize them. At Akwesasne, many residents recognize the importance of language learning, continuing the oral tradition, and encouraging frequent practice of the Mohawk language in order for future generations to continue to enjoy the language of their heritage. Culturally relevant education, such as classes in Mohawk language, is a way to keep students interested in school, and successful after school.

**Cultural Learning in Mohawk Schools**

- Legacy of Ray Fadden (Aren Akweks in the 1930s: helped to reintroduce teaching of Mohawk language, history, and culture into the school curriculum)
- Akwesasne Freedom School: Dedicated to “preserving Mohawk language, continuing Mohawk ceremonies, songs, dances and traditional cultural practices; promoting the principles of good mind, peace and strength given to us by the Creator through the Peacemaker; preparing students to be active participants in both our traditional community and Western society; encouraging students to have pride in, understanding of and sufficient knowledge to practice Rotnionhs:n:ni customs and promote cultural values; teaching students to be responsible, independent and hold a positive self-concept at the same time they display respect for others, especially Elders and the knowledge they possess; preparing students to be teachers of future generations”

**Mohawk Language Instruction**

- Carole Ross, Language Instructor at St. Regis
- Mohawk Language: 11 letters, but over 400 sounds!
- Created a Mohawk-translation book
- “Our language is a gift from our Creator, if we don’t learn it. We cannot hear the voices of our ancestors.”

**Story Telling**

- Chief Tom Porter, orator and helped to establish Freedom School
- Writes stories side by side with English and Mohawk to encourage learning traditional languages
- White Roots of Peace: group of Haudenosaunee who travel around the country encouraging embracement of traditions

**Akwesasne Cultural Center**

- Shows the importance of cultural education: The Cultural Center provides educational kits for schools and other organizations
- Provided cultural classes in 1970s to curb dropout rates
- Museum exhibit focusing on lacrosse and traditional arts

**Language Learning and Education**

- Why is this important?
- Challenges public schools to be more inclusive of diversity
- Culturally responsive teaching: students are interested
- Language learning helps students with life challenges and opens access to jobs
- Language learning, and other forms of oral learning increase memory and cognition
- “The mission of the Education Department of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe is to promote, support and respect the culturally-relevant and academic needs of our community members by empowering life-long learners through quality educational learning opportunities and experiences.”

**Sources**

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