

Review from Tribal College Journal

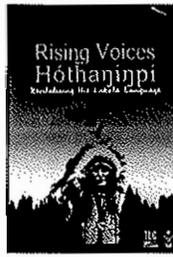
*Rising Voices: Revitalizing the Lakota Language*

Directed by Lawrence Hott and Diane Garey

Florentine Films (2015)

57 minutes

Review by Richard Littlebear



This documentary is about the revitalization of the Lakota language. *Rising Voices* is an apt title since three elements of a successful language revitalization program are showcased: elders, youngsters, and "outsiders."

The elders recount the detrimental effect of language oppression by government boarding schools. These elders bear invisible scars inflicted by this experience, which has also had a generational effect through language loss, loss of sacred place names, and loss of spiritual references. Yet these elders are dedicated to their language, transcending the punitive manner in which the "White man's education" was imposed. They realize they are losing a valuable asset, which reinforces the positive self-images of being Lakota.

The youth of preschool age are uninhibited in their use of Lakota. They are happy to speak Lakota in full, coherent sentences. One teacher regretted that her students will move to kindergarten classes which may not continue Lakota language teaching. That is the problem with many immersion language programs: sporadic funding. Lack of funding does not encourage continuity from preschool to at least two years of college.

The "outsiders," non-Lakota people who know the Lakota language in oral and written form, are invaluable to this Lakota language program. They know the language well enough to teach it, a remarkable accomplishment. Equally remarkable is that they have earned the trust of the Lakota people because of their dedication to the continuation of the Lakota language. Their acceptance sends a message to all Indigenous people that those from the "outside" can learn our languages and be able to teach them.

For the audience at large, this documentary presents an in-depth view of a functioning, successful language immersion program. I encourage people to view this documentary because, as one of the teachers states, it provides hope, and it does so in a highly organized, professional manner. ▲

*Richard Littlebear, Ed.D. (Northern Cheyenne), is president of Chief Dull Knife College and the author of numerous articles and essays on language revitalization in Indian Country.*