

## ASLA Student Teacher Comments

### **January 27, 2014:**

Class started off very rocky, mainly because I was nervous and rushed myself. I performed the biggest mistake and did not respect the fact that there were people in the class who were hearing Blackfoot Language for the first time. For the first 45 minutes of instruction it was apparent I had lost a few people already. However, after Neyooxet's help, reminding me to slow down and usher people through the language with more ease, the class was able to flow much better. Of course due to this error we lost 45 minutes of strong instruction. On the positive note it seems as if most students are excited and ready to learn mainly because the students sense that this methodology has a feature that they never encountered—active and total engagement. When a specific student was being moved through the material in the front of the class all the other students were whispering the words to themselves. This is an early indication that they are actively listening during the entire duration of instruction.

What I feel strong about is that students showed strong enthusiasm to learn. Also, on the first day we had a pun in which all the students laughed when I called one of the students a “cat” in the Blackfeet.

What I feel weak about is at the moment it is clear that many students will have problems pronouncing the words correctly. I must remember to both allow them time to try and produce the word but also keep their minds engaged in the content and meaning of the word. Performing this operation takes precise timing and striking.

### **January 29, 2014:**

Second day of class was smoother than I anticipated. As I brought students whom I thought had the most troubles on the first day, they showed strong enthusiasm and they went through the first 16 nouns with ease. However, two students were late which required me to back track to the first 16 nouns and allow them to gain footing, which they did. We introduced 10 verbs into the class and most students by the end of the class showed signs of understanding the material. Nevertheless, the biggest problem I realized is that although people were picking the correct image of, “a woman is laughing” it is apparent that some thought I was saying, “a woman is smiling.” In order to correct this I will implement images of a person smiling and of someone laughing to make the word less ambiguous.

What I feel strong about is that I was able to run most of the students through the skills sets in a way that allowed me to not have to correct them when they were wrong (they corrected themselves) and when they were stumped I simply brought them back a few steps to aid them at understanding the current phrase they were being instructed to decipher. For one student who was having constant troubles with “a rabbit jumping” I understood she knows the word dog, so I would have her point to a dog, then another picture that had a dog and a rabbit, then she would be primed to understanding the objective.

What I feel weak about is one of the students who came in late was showing obvious signs of confusion when she went up to the board. Also, I neglected to call two students up to the wall for the verbs we went through today. I will usher them through the skill sets early on next week, after first seeing one of the stronger students move through the material.

### **February 3, 2014**

The day started out great, of the 10 students I have 3 of them are non-Blackfeet and out of them 1 is very strong. In this class I put up the entire skill set 2 and was able to navigate 7 students through the material. However, the biggest fault of the day was that at least two students were overwhelmed with me putting up so many images and at the end of class it was clear that two of the students were guessing and not sure about the material. 1 of the students, when being brought through the skill set, was obviously translating Blackfeet to English. I would say, “ninaawa” and the student would utter, in English, “man.” Also, I neglected to call one of the students to the showcase their cognition.

I feel strong about the fact that I was able to navigate 7 students through the skill set. I feel weak about the fact that a few students were overwhelmed and obviously guessing. I must respect the fact that when I put up the entire skill set 1 that it confused a few students. I must not do that again.

## February 5, 2014

Class started off awesome. Of the two students I feared were “behind” I brought them up to the board and navigated them through the most of skill set 1. Also, they were unaware that it was the first test and all students thus far have gotten 100% on the material. As the two students who were guessing on the previous day were showing confidence and correct cognition with the material I felt the entire class feels more at ease; it is clear that the class wants everyone to succeed. Also, I made sure every student went through the materials at least once. Also, when I uttered command forms of the verbs they learned I didn’t say their names before saying it, yet all students caught it and obeyed the command. This is strong evidence that they are *listening* to the language.

I feel strong that today the class grew confident in one another and we are all becoming more comfortable. Also, it is important to note that out of the 7 Blackfeet students in class five of them are my relatives and 1 of them I playfully tease and the entire class laughs, this is great because ASLA makes learning language FUN. When particular students are showing obvious signs of doubt or stress I tell them, in Blackfeet, “No worries” and have them take a deep relaxing breath; it seems as if this helps students relax and they almost always pronounce their words better after the deep breath. I feel the weakest part of the day was that my testing went slower than it had to be and we lost valuable time by my meticulousness. Overall, things look very good and I have confidence that we will be done testing on Monday and skill set 2 will be mastered and skill set 3 will be introduced.

## February 11, 2014

Day went smooth; so far it was the smoothest day. We took down the first skill set (because the students don’t need it anymore) and had the entire skill set 2 and 3 up. All students are cognizant with many short phrases, such as: a rabbit is jumping over a fence, a cat is standing below a chair, an Indian woman is standing in front of a teepee, a cowboy is standing on a horse, a boy is riding a horse, etc... I feel very confident in my students because I can tell that they are all invested in learning the language *with each other* to the point where they are trying to organize getting together on their own. Also, many of the students are getting better at pronunciation despite the fact that we never focus on pronunciation. This is an obvious strength within ASLA, that is we do not do constant repetition of words nor do we read.

## February 13, 2014

First day I utilized TPR in taking information in the images and applying them to the students. For example, they know the difference between “a boy is kissing a girl,” “mice are kissing each other,” “a man is shaking a woman’s hand,” and “a man and a woman are shaking each other’s hand.” with that info I introduced more command forms of “shake my hand” and “shake her/his hand.” within this I introduced animate and inanimate to the students with “take this” (telling them to take something animate opposed to inanimate changes the word). Also, with TPR I introduced time aspect to

which some of the students understood. It is paramount that I make sure all students understand this and not assume all students understood what I was saying.

Students then navigated through skill set 3 much faster than before. At the end of class students wanted more and asked if I could meet them once a week for an extra study group. However, I declined their request for academic reasons (by staying in class we can estimate how much time they are exposed to the language). However, it is clear that students *want* more of the language not because they are afraid to get bad grades, or not learn the material, but because they love the learning process. At this point it is safe to say that I have the confidence and trust of my students.

### **February 24, 2014**

Day of review, hardly anything new was introduced except for the phrase “I see him/her.” At this moment I assumed every student had a strong grasp on the language we had covered and I sent my two strongest students through the second test. It is paramount to remember that each and every test is oral and they must develop the skill of speaking in the language and not just listening; this is, of course, the instructor's duty to work them to that point. Both performed stellar. For the first part of the test they were required to go through skill set 2 on their own, which consists of 36 verb phrases. The next portion of the test was cognition through 36 more locative phrases, i.e. on top, underneath, above, towards, in front, and behind. Although they had to take their delicate time in the first portion of the test, they flew through the second.

## **February 26, 2014**

The entire day consisted of test taking. It was on this day I found out that although all the students are cognitive with words and phrases when I, the instructor, utter them, they have difficulties performing the phrases on their own. This is due to a few factors: 1) some of the words they are still having minor trouble in pronouncing them, 2) some students simply told me they were nervous, and 3) I accidentally administered the test two weeks earlier than scheduled. However, all students passed the test with A's. This is a remarkable achievement seeing that they have only been exposed to the material for roughly 12 hours of instruction time. So, after only around 11 hours of instruction time they can produce, on their own, "a boy is walking, a dog is crying, a baby is crying, a frog is swimming, a girl is jumping, etc..." as for the phrases they are cognitive with, they are: "a cat is standing underneath a chair, a woman is sitting on a ball, a Native American woman is riding a horse, a rabbit is jumping over a fence, a plane is flying over a car, a man is dancing in front of a car, etc..." Each student took anywhere from 20-40 minutes to complete the test depending on the speed they needed to go.

On the side note, for one of the students; as I heard her whisper both very quite and unconfidently the correct way to say "praying," I confirmed this with her and said, in Blackfoot, "yes, Praying." However, I should not have done this nor did I have to. It is vital that when using ASLA that you are patient with the students because if you guide them through the skill sets using the tool of ASLA effectively they will perform at a high level. It is my duty, as instructor, to use the method correctly.

## **March 3, 2014**

I introduced skill set 4 today and found out important things when guiding the students through the new material. 1) They are hearing and understanding basically every phrase that is uttered and 2) Students are still mispronouncing specific words and two or three are having a difficult time hearing the subtle vowel shifts that Blackfoot uses. Because they are having trouble with the vowel shifts I must guide them through the skills sets in a fashion that would strengthen that specific skill. More words were introduced (old people, young people, child(ren), eagle, beetle, and butterfly). Phrases they have heard and understood are, "a man and woman are sitting inside a car, the man is driving." "Butterflies are flying around above flowers" "Native Americans are sitting, the old man is telling them a story" and "Women are dancing on top of a table."

## **March 6, 2014**

The class displays cognition of most concepts at this point and can understand the phrases I give them. However, they cannot produce the phrases independently and need assistance. At the end of this class period the students have had, in 6 weeks, roughly 12 hrs of language instruction, plus four additional hours to administer tests. One student asked me the total number of phrases they can produce and be understand. The answer to that question is a matter of understanding how the language is being made sense of in their minds. At this point, only skills sets 2, 3, and 4 are up, which is roughly 160 total images. This indicates that they have been taught over 160 phrases and can manipulate and change the phrases if they please. For example: they have been taught the phrase, "a

woman and her dog are running along a fence” if they desired to say, “a many men are running along a river” they can because they are implicitly learning the grammar. Class remains enjoyable, which is also important and made possible through ASLA

### **March 10, 2014**

This day proved to be a difficult day for me. I mispronounced words and began to self-doubt myself. Simply slowing down and taking a few deep breathes helped out and I was able to bring myself up to awareness of my language “miss fires” and clean up my speech. An interesting not is that keep mispronouncing the word table but, remarkably, the students correct me. This is very interesting because 1. They *know* the word for table 2. They have faith in me as an instructor that I taught them the correct word at the beginning of the class and 3. They have the confidence to correct and help their instructor. At the end of class I was largely disappointed with myself thinking I didn’t do well but one student actually came up today and told me that they had a good day of learning.

### **March 13, 2014**

Today was an interesting day on many accounts. 1. Some students are not pronouncing ending of nouns but by the end of the day I had made it clear as to why they must pronounce words correctly. The words ‘man’ and ‘my father’ are distinguished with a subtle vowel shift at the end of the word and one student was saying “my father” when instructed to say “man.” I worked through this by going all the way back our picture of a bear thinking and asking them “what is the bears name?” to which they are to reply, in a thick Blackfeet accent, “Winnie nahk pooh” then took them a picture of a mother kissing her baby and saying (in Blackfeet), “This is this babies mother, my mothers name is Olivia and my Father name is Vic.” Then for confirmation they understood I asked them “what is the name of your father?” to which they answer then I would say to class, “his/her fathers name is \_\_\_\_\_.” Class understood and started nouns with more attentiveness. 2. One student was told, “pigs are standing behind fence” and the student went directly to a picture of pigs, but it was the wrong picture. However, the remarkable feature is that the student went on to say the correct phrase for the picture; she looked at it and said, “pigs are standing on top of a rock.” This caught her by surprise. This may indicate that the language is and implicit thing to her and that, when not clouding her own skills within Blackfeet, the correct phrase will simply slip out of the mouth, implicitly. This was a happy moment for the entire class. And finally, 3. A woman walked into the room and started to look for something, perhaps she had been in the room earlier that day. One of the students in Blackfeet said, “this white woman is half crazy” and everyone laughed then, as she was leaving, said, “goodbye white man” and everyone laughed again. These show that people are now have listening skills, production skills, and comfort within Blackfeet. It shows that we are not only acquiring skills within the language but developing relationships and friendships that are rooted in both Blackfeet and the methodology. This is important to mention because in order for endangered

language is survive they must not only be taught but they must also be a part of a social group, a community. This class is inducing an environment in which all who are a part of it are becoming friends. This is important and very enjoyable. At this point, at the end of week 7 they have had approximately 14.5 hours of language instruction.

March 17, 2014

Class was basically a repetition of previous days. Students are show casing that they are cognate with all phrases I introduce. Nothing special happened today other than solidifying cognition. Student's pronunciations are getting better and they are finally paying attention to the subtle vowel shifts in the language. The new phrase introduced was a picture of The Beatles Abby Road album, where they are walking across Abbey Road. I said, "men are walking across Abby Road, they are called the Beetles (Beatles)" (Ninaiks aiki'tawaatoomiyaawa aabi mohsoko, aanistaayaawa Nahk Poonisayiiks).

March 19, 2014

The most interesting thing about this day was that one student has been getting "sitting under" and "standing under" confused *every* time they are up in the front showcasing their cognition. Rather than working them through the material as I always do I become somewhat stern, which led them to self-correct and said correctly "a cat is sitting under a chair and then to "a cat is standing under a chair." Then even went further by saying "cats lying under a chair." That is when I realized that although it is a good thing that I am their friend in this class that I also need to be firm and assert my authority. It is good to be kind and friendly, but are times that they must realize I can be disappointed in them. I was very pleased the student self-corrected and a few students approached me after class and explained that they made the connection of the distinction of sounds. At the end of this week they have had 17 hours of instruction. A couple things to note is that they are getting more involved in both the Blackfoot culture and how words are used when spoken. Without translating they've learned the vocative "ooks" (something one says after something embarrassing that releases tension and makes a situation funny), they understand the word for skiing and how it means, "Standing Sledding," then the word for trampoline, which is "jumping apparatus."

March 24, 2014

Everyone seems to understand the material and every phrase I introduce. They were given the differences between Restaurant and fork (where we eat at and what we eat with) and drawing board and pencil/pen/camera, (where we make marking at and what we make markings with). The difference between the two is one subtle sound at the beginning of both words. The main reason why I wanted to make this leap is because most learners and non-speakers of the language do not respect or understand that "iit" and "it" have clearly different structures and meanings (people will spell words like

“Pikaani” as “pihkaani” without understanding that the “h” changes the word completely (sometimes making it into a non-word). I personally feel this is an important feature to stress. However, students do not know my reasoning behind teaching this and they simply accept the lesson.

March 26, 2014

The toughest day yet; I challenged the students to produce the phrases they learned on their own and it was met with much problems. Most students choked and were not listening to themselves say the things they were saying. For instance, the first student said, “a woman is standing *in front* of a teepee” correctly then went on to a man is standing under a plane but said a man is standing in front of a plane. He wasn’t listening to himself. However, as the instructor I feel this is my own fault for neglecting to focus on creating independent speakers. The interesting thing to note is that I was watching the students who were sitting lips move and get things correctly (the things the student standing was trying to produce) so I had the student who was getting things correctly to stand up and showcase their knowledge but they got performance anxiety and was unable to produce the correct forms as they were able to do while sitting [Professor Greymorning comment: This is a common assumption to make and is not accurate. The reason the student got these phrases wrong is not because of performance anxiety but because the instructor can’t read lips accurately, which is a skill one must be trained in and even then is not foolproof. So the instructor only thought the student was mouthing correctly]. This indicates that they *know* what and how to say things but that they are *not* confident and showcasing their knowledge and with respect to language revitalization it is paramount that we produce *confident speakers* [Professor Greymorning comment: Again this is a common assumption stemming from the instructor’s desire for this to be the case. It is language teacher’s responsibility to create and lead students to this level of knowing their language not to assume that this is the case.]. Students were then able to get plural verb phrases but still struggled with prepositional phrases mainly because I was giving them too much support during past instructions. This day revealed a lot for me as an instructor in what I need to do. One of the things I realized is that although they can understand nearly everything I say that I must slow down and make sure they can say these phrases on their own! Quality above quantity is crucial. The question then is; if our goal is to save our languages, which puts us closer to that goal, to build a foundation that produces people who have a limited lexicon but can competently speak that gives them the ability to expand on that ability or to produce people who speak a limited amount of words and understand many phrases but can only speak words?

April 7, 2014

It was the first class after Spring Break. The objective now is to get students to produce and say phrases on their own. For the first half hour of class I gave instruction so they can hear the language then after that I put my strongest students on spot and had them produce things on their own. It went smoothly with all students showing promise, some are better than others but it is clear that there is no competition amongst students because they are more invested in helping each other out.

April 9, 2014

Class was completely left for students to produce phrases and I spoke minimally. It was a day completely for the students to talk. Again, strongest students went first and so on. Each student was given ten minutes to go through as many phrases as they possibly could. They have plurals mastered but show troubles with prepositions. However, class is progressing toward creating speakers.

April 14, 2014

Today the class was exactly the same as the previous class. Each student was allotted time to go through the material and say the phrases they know how to say. One student I was able to tell didn't want to go up and speak, but I encouraged her anyways and she went up and didn't do too well, I made a mental note to inform her that she merely needs to shift her attitude and at the end of class I told the students that they need to *want* to speak the language, the student smiled and told me thanks. The biggest thing to note was that one student one struggling with a phrase I started saying things in Blackfoot to help her but she told signaled to me she didn't want help so I remained silent and then the student then produced the correct phrase. Sometimes we just need to be patient and allow the student to take their time (important to note that it was only about 45 seconds she took).

April 16, 2014: No class today

April 21, 2014

Class followed same path as previous classes. Of the 10 students in class only 2 of them are struggling in producing the phrases. All are nearly 100%

April 23, 2014

Started class off testing. First three students that went got nearly everything right and all scored more than 100% due to adding extra words and describing things with more

language than they needed. The last student that was tested became extremely distressed and froze but was still able to produce certain phrases. However, class time ran out and the rest of the students tested outside of class. The students who froze improved greatly when we got back together to do their test. Some students took an hour whereas the strongest students only took 20 minutes to complete the test. However, all students at least got the score of 100/100.

April 28, 2014

Introduced foods and colors today, everything went smoothly. Class knows what to expect and everyone was excited for more. Now that their ears are more apt at hearing the sounds of Blackfeet they pick up on words and phrases faster than they have ever done before. One girl had heard the word for green only once then was able to produce it on her own. One student brought in her kids and they sat in on the lesson; one of them actually participated and was ushered through some fruits, she did well and the class cheered her on. It was a lovely thing to happen in a class that reminded us that this methodology is perfect for children and that they learn effectively through it and that our language healing is really, like everything, for the children. Class was fun because upon hearing that everyone got at least a 100% on the test everyone was in good spirits. However, there is a undertone of sadness as the semester nears the end because people don't want their language expedition to end. All students expressed a desire to continue learning the language.