

Spring Term 2009; Teaching Arapaho Through ASLA Facilitator Comments on Class Instruction

January 26, 2009: Class 1. Today was the first day the class met. None of the students in the class know how to say anything in Arapaho. After about 30 minutes of introductions and explanations of how the class would be run, we began. Once the class started English was not used in the lessons. After 20 minutes of beginning instruction the class demonstrated they had full cognition of 20 words. After learning this first set of words I moved the class onto sentences. Examples of several sentences learned were; A rabbit is jumping; a man and woman are walking; a baby is sleeping; men are dancing and jumping, boys are running, a bobcat is eating a mouse. After 15 minutes the class demonstrated they fully knew 18 phrases in Arapaho. In 35 minutes of class instruction the class learned 20 words and 18 phrases. On Wednesday's class students will have to demonstrate whether they have retained what they learned today.

January 28, 2009: Class 2. After making comments on in-house matters and student's up-coming first test, I started class instruction at 9:10 from where we left off last class by presenting students with new Arapaho phrases. By 9:55 the class had burned through 36 phrases in 45 minutes. Students could have gone further but I had to slow things up a bit to accommodate two students who missed the first class and were a bit over-whelmed by what they saw the class doing. Some of the new phrases learned were; a canoe is on top of a car; a baby is falling; a bird is flying; a man is chasing a flying dog; beavers are swimming; a man is swimming by; a horse is standing under a tree; a cat is in a red and white hat; a man is smoking; a woman is sitting on a ball; a dog is sleeping under a car; a girl is chasing a boy; a woman is standing in front of a car.

February 2, 2009: Class 3. Went through about 40 minutes of review with class for the up-coming class, then in the last 30 minutes of class went on to new material that consisted of pluralizing words and phrases already learned, plus increasing language complexity with a few phrases. One example of this was adding onto the phrase a boy is standing so it became "A boy is standing on top of a rock in the ocean." Another example is "A woman is standing in front of a green fence and a man and woman are standing behind the green fence." Another was adding onto "a dog is under a car" so it became "A dog is sleeping lying under a yellow car." Students learned 26 new phrases in 30 minutes.

February 4, 2009: Class 4; Exam Day. All tests are oral exams. Tested three students, individually, over first 18 words and 22 phrases that the class learned during the very first class, and another three students individually and in isolation, in my office after class. All six students got everything correct on the oral exam. I had forgotten my video camera at home so I wasn't able to film this class but will film 5th class on Monday Feb 9. One of the things that is already beginning to happen is when I sometimes say joking things in Arapaho students are understanding the jokes and laughing. They are really excited about how much they have learned after 4 classes, which are over 25 words and 75 phrases in about 150 minutes or 2.5 hours of classroom instruction.

February 9, 2009: Class 5. Tested student, Kyra, in class and filmed her being tested. She completed approximately 58 words & phrases, well over the 40 for the test, in six minutes getting everything correct. Every student in the class got everything correct on the test. After testing Kyra I went over material already learned with class and then in the last 40 minutes moved onto new material that dealt with pluralizing phrases learned. In forty minutes, students demonstrating beginning mastery over 34 new phrases. Some of these phrases are; Deer are lying under a trampoline; I see two cups on a table and two books are under the cups; I see five men riding five horses, they are riding very fast; A bee is flying toward a flower; two men are standing in front of a truck; two girls are riding two horses, they are walking across a river; a woman and baby are smiling. In 3 hours and 20 minutes (200 minutes) of classroom instruction students are demonstrating knowing over 20 words and 130 phrases in Arapaho.

February 11, 2009: Class 6. Took over 20 minutes just to get all the material up (I'll have to get to class earlier to save class time.) Class started at 9 am. Called on first student and worked through new material. Students learned, strawberries, grapes, blueberries, bananas, cheese, crackers, water, milk, bread, and fry bread, in all they began learning 12 new items. After this we went back over older material, With this review session I asked specific questions I Arapaho – what is he or they doing, what color is it, where is he/she or it, which they had to respond in Arapaho. This took a lot more work, to get them to understand what was being asked and to respond back properly then I initially thought it would take. Next Monday's class day is a holiday and I will be away in Canada all next week, so it will be 11 days before I am back in the classroom. We will see how that tie away impacts what they have learned.

February 16, 2009, National Holiday No Class

During the week of February 16, I was asked to facilitate a language teacher-training workshop at the First Northwest Territories Teachers' Conference.

February 18, 2009: Class 7. Teaching Assistant held review session with class for up-coming test. TA also worked with class on beginning language in Bambi speaks Arapaho video. Learned new vocabulary associated with video: names of the 4 seasons; wake up, owl, go home, young chief, etc.

February 23, 2009: Class 8. Eleven days have passed since I've been in the classroom with students. Decided to see how much they can actually say in Arapaho. A student, Robert, from last year's class was in the room. Robert had no idea that I decided to call on him to say as much Arapaho as he could. I called on him, and he said 20 words and 52 phrases in Arapaho before I asked him to stop; Robert said these with no problem, even though an entire year had passed since he had learned and used these phrases, and he was more than willing to keep going but I wanted students enrolled in the class to have their turn. One-by-one I called on the other students in the class to the same task. All students called on successfully said at least 20 words and 20 phrases in Arapaho and also demonstrated that they understood an additional 50 phrases said in Arapaho by saying what the Arapaho phrases meant in English after hearing them said in Arapaho. In all the class has now had approximately **7 hours** of classroom instruction and are working on an ability to express themselves in about 180 ways in the language. Their learning curve is now a rate of a new phrase every 2 ½ minutes (over 8 classes and 7 hours of instruction) since beginning instruction on January 26.

February 25, 2009: Class 9. Held brief review with class. Have noted problems creeping in with one of the two (50ish) older students in class. Odd sounds are creeping into how they are pronouncing words in Arapaho. It isn't too uncommon for many students to run into this type of pronunciation problem, these two students are mispronouncing far too many words. I think part of the problem is they have told me that they go home and practice talking Arapaho. With no one there to check on how they are saying these words I believe they are saying them wrong and it is sticking. I will have to figure how to get this corrected. Began testing. The test consists of saying 20 words in Arapaho and then hearing 60 sentences said in Arapaho and demonstrating understanding of what was said. Kyra was the first student tested decided that she wanted to say as much as she could in Arapaho. In the end she produced 50 phrases in Arapaho in about 20 minutes, and of the remaining 30 Arapaho phrases, she demonstrated complete understanding of them.

February 26, 2009. Continued testing students during my office hours. Brian tested the first and like Kyra, he wanted to go beyond 20 words to see how much he could say in Arapaho. In all he produced 20 words and 23 phrases in Arapaho and then went to show he understood 37 phrases in Arapaho. Eric came in after Brian and wanted to show me how much Arapaho he knew. By the time he finished he had produced 20 words and 42 phrases in Arapaho, and demonstrated he understood the remaining 18 phrases when said to him in Arapaho.

February 27, 2009. Eean tested today. Like the other students he wanted to say as much as he could in Arapaho, even though he was only he was only being tested on 20 words in Arapaho, he produced 20 words and 30 phrases in Arapaho, then went on to demonstrate he knew what another 30 phrases meant when said to him in Arapaho. On Monday I will finish testing and move students to the next level of language competency. Thus far these students have achieved this level without my drilling them or having them go through repetition after repetition of these words and phrases. In fact I am surprised that these students have wanted to show me how much Arapaho they know during a test.

March 2, 2009: Class 10. Tested Mary in class, who said 20 words and 16 phrases in Arapaho, plus demonstrated that she understood the remaining 44 phrases when said to her in Arapaho. Mary completed the oral exam in 25 minutes. After testing Mary I brought Eric up to go over food items that was first introduced on Feb. 11. Eric was able to say 8 of the fist 12 in Arapaho. After class I tested Marice and Mike during my office hours. Mike and Marcie are married are the oldest students in the class this year and are probably in their 50s. Marcie finished her test in about thirty minutes getting all 20 words and 60 phrases correct. Mike followed Marice and was able to say 20 words and 16 phrases in Arapaho, before going onto the Arapaho to English part of the oral exam. All students in the class got everything, plus some extras, correct. One of the most difficult sentences they were given Arapaho was – A baby is sitting on a chair in front of a boy sitting between two boys standing. They also know this as Honoh'oehihi 3iiokuut nee'eetebe tei'yooneh'ih' 3iiokut teesiihi 3ii'ookuutoone' neehii3ei neniisi3i honoh'oehih'o' 3ii'ookuu3i – A boy is standing behind a babysitting on a chair between two standing boys.

March 4, 2009: Class 11. Worked with student on foods, concepts of eating and drinking and began introducing them to future tense. It is interesting hat they have realized this in the form of “about to” instead of will or going to. They are beginning to understand that when attaching an adjective, especially color and number, to a noun there is case agreement. So if the noun is plural and they are adding a color to the noun then the color must pluralize, as well as show animate/inanimate agreement. We worked on other concepts in the language like “A deer is an animal and food” and I eat deer because I like the taste of deer meat. It took them a bit to understand the concept of animal. At the end of class they learned a rhyme in Arapaho “Biibinotno noh bii3ihtoo senoo noh cocoo. Nisikocoo

heetbii3ihinoo, seeyeiiniihi hiisibiinoo” – Berries and table, plate and bread. I’ll eat cake, before I go to bed. It took about 6-8 minutes before they were able to figure out the rhyme. The hardest part for them was figuring out the future tense for eat, before and go to bed. They managed to figure it out without my using any English in the last 8 minutes of class. We will continue with this next week.

March 9, 2009: Class 12. More than half the class was out sick today. Worked with those students in class on concepts of food preparation and consumption. After an hour of instruction students had an understanding of an additional 26 phrases within this language-learning category. Students have now been exposed to 8 ½ hours of classroom instruction and have approximately 198 phrases in the language.

March 11, 2009: Class 13. Students received an hour of classroom instruction today. Spent first 35 minutes going over older material with students, and last 25 minutes students were introduced to new skill set that dealt with clothing. Students learned 8 clothing items, and 4 phrases that dealt with clothing in 25 minutes. At this point in 9 ½ hours of classroom instruction students have acquired a working language base of over 20 words and 190 phrases. This equates to having learned a new word or phrase every 2.5 minutes of classroom instruction. In addition to this, students have the ability to interchange parts of all the phrases they have learned to create new phrases that can triple their language base.

March 13, 2009. Was asked to run an in-service for some of the language instructors on the Wind River reservation in Wyoming, about 600 miles from where I live. I decided to take with me Robert Hall, a student who took the Arapaho class with me from February to May 2008. Robert’s ability to present things in Arapaho totally impressed Elder Arapaho speakers plus his answers to Elders’ questions were so effective that he was asked him to return to show others how well versed he is in the Arapaho language. I thought I should add this because I am frequently asked if Elders can understand students who take my Arapaho class. So this answers that question; they can understand them. This is not to give anyone the impression that students who complete one term of study using ASLA become fluent speakers; it is simply to state that the volume of things that these students can say is quite extensive and complex and that first language speakers of Arapaho have no problem understanding what these students are saying in Arapaho.

March 16, 2009: Class 14. Note; Students will have their mid-term exam beginning next class. This will consist of their being able to say 20 words and 20 phrases in Arapaho and understand 60 phrases in Arapaho when spoken to them. Although this is supposed to start on Wednesday, two students have decided they want to take the test tomorrow, Tuesday. Because of the up-coming test, I started the class with a review session. I felt the students that I started at the beginning of the review class took longer then they should have to get through the review. The last 15 minutes of the class was spent on new material that dealt with clothing. The class is still sitting around 20 plus words and about 190 phrases that they know in Arapaho.

March 18, 2009: Class 15. Tested two students on the Arapaho part of the test. Both students got everything correct. This is an oral test delivered one student at a time and requires students to produce a total of 20 terms and 80 phrases in Arapaho.

March 20, 2009: All but one student has taken the mid-term. All students have gone beyond the 40 Arapaho terms and phrases required of them for this test. One student in particular produced 20 terms and 77 phrases all in Arapaho, then went on to translate another 11 phrases from Arapaho to English, totaling 108 ways of expressing himself in Arapaho. Thus far the worst any one student has performed was to get 98 out of 100 correct, missing only 2 points. All other students have gotten 100+ on their mid-term exam.

March 23, 2009: Have begun getting students to think about creating sentences on their own that can lead to conversations. Also identified weak areas that need to be reinforced. Student comprehension is very good. Started prepping them toward learning dialog for a story.

March 24, 2009: Tested last student this morning. Student produced 20 words and 61 phrases in Arapaho and demonstrated understanding of 26 additional phrases when said to her in Arapaho. This year's students have demonstrated themselves as the strongest group of learners who have taken this class thus far. Out of the three exams taken thus far, all students got everything correct on the first two exams, and only two points has been missed by one student on the mid-term, while all other students have gone beyond 100% by producing phrases in Arapaho beyond what was required of them to say for the exam.

March 25, 2009: Class 17. Filmed student, Brian, translating things I said to him in English into Arapaho. In less than 8 minutes he translated 20 words and 72 phrases from English in to Arapaho. After this students learned 32 new phrases in about 30 minutes. At one point I asked a student, "Do you drink milk" kooheben be3enec (be3enec literally means breast water). He got confused and first said in Arapaho "I drink breast" then realized something was wrong with his phrased but changed it to I eat breast, at which point students, one-by-one began to realize what he said and broke out laughing. The student kept asking: what, what? Then realized what he had said and corrected himself then broke out laughing. Students have really bonded together and are not fearful at making mistakes, generally knowing that they will either figure it out or get help from one of their classmates: they laugh a lot in class and really enjoy each other and the class.

April 8, 2009: Two weeks have past since the last time students were in class. Because we had started new material before Spring Break the material hadn't had enough time to settle in with the majority of students. Started by having students tell me what they were able to say of the new material. Individually students struggled. As a group a fair amount was said between them. Once I got an idea of where they were with this material I was able to plan on how to get them progressing with it.

April 10, 2009: Students had requested that we hold a class on Friday because I was away on Monday. Although I had ideas about what we would do on this day, it took a much different turn. I had originally planned to work with the class on concepts of wearing various items of clothing. This didn't last too long and somehow things shifted into more complex forms of the language that dealt with questioning and negative forms for answers. While this started off with a fair amount of difficulty, it ended up surprisingly well, with students generally understanding how the grammar changes when answering a question in the affirmative versus when answering a question in the negative.

April 13, 2009: Students are getting over their Spring Break slump. Class was a very good class. I introduced them to two stories in Arapaho, Co'ou3ih'ohut & Notkoniihii and had them tell me what they could pick out from the stories. Class also got exposed to possessives and a limited number of body parts along with continuing with foods, preparation, acts of eating, drinking, clothing and counting.

April 15, 2009: Increased class exposure to things that involve clothing and introduced them to adjectives. Class started to gain an understanding of how adjectives work in the language. Worked mostly with colors as they attach to inanimate and animate things, and young and old, and new and old. The class moved through, and demonstrating their understanding of about 28 of these types of adjectives in the last 20 minutes of class.

April 20, 2009: Began reviewing material for class final language exam. The final exam will consist of their knowing how to say about 12 new words and 48 phrases in Arapaho, as well as translating 60 phrases from Arapaho to English when spoken to them. This exam is an oral exam, nothing is written, and students are tested one at a time. While this is a very intensive exam, students are excited about getting to it to show what they know.

April 22, 2009: First half of class was a review session, then tested first student in the back half of class. It took Brian about 38 minutes to get through 60 Arapaho words and phrases making up the first part of the test. He came back on Thursday taking about 42 minutes to finish the exam. I actually tested Brian beyond the scope of the final, and in the end he produced a combination of 63 words and phrases in Arapaho, and translated 65 Arapaho phrases into English, effectively going beyond the 120 word/phrase final by 8 phrases.

April 27, 2009: Tested Eric today during class time. Eric went through his first 60 Arapaho words and phrases in less than 20 minutes and then went on to translate 70 phrases from Arapaho into English, going beyond the test by 10 phrases.

April 29, 2009: Tested Kyra today, after twenty minutes Kyra said 20 words and 74 phrases in Arapaho, and then went on to translate an additional 49 phrases from Arapaho into English, totaling 143 and exceeding the 120 word/phrase exam by 23 phrases. Eean followed Kyra and said 20 words and 70 phrases in Arapaho followed by 67 Arapaho phrases that he translated into English, totaling 137, going 17 phrases beyond the test. Kyra and Eean went through the test so fast that it was difficult for me to keep up writing down what they were saying so I actually think that they produced more than what I have reported. I will look more closely at the testing instrument this week to get a more accurate count, and will most likely post their exams here.