



LANGUAGE LEARNING

# Profiles



SOFTWARE AND NETWORK SOLUTIONS

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## HOW A MODERN, DIGITAL LANGUAGE LAB IS GIVING VOICE TO AN ANCIENT TRIBAL LANGUAGE.

In an ironic twist of fate, the students at Hannahville Indian School/ Nah Tah Wahsh PSA are learning to speak Potawatomi, their First Nation language, as a second language. “With the loss of so many elders each year, the Potawatomi language was in danger of becoming lost,” said Dawn DeVere Hill, ANA (Administration for Native Americans) Language Project Coordinator, Hannahville Indian Community. “Few of the current generation can speak it, so our goal with the language program is to revitalize the Potawatomi language and culture, to preserve and instill it in future generations.” She added, “If we don’t preserve our past, we can’t learn from what’s gone before us. A part of our heritage will be gone forever.”

Located in rural Wilson, Michigan, Hannahville Indian School was established in 1976 to address the special academic needs of Potawatomi students, while teaching them about their history and culture. What began as a K-8 single classroom is now Nah Tah Wahsh (Soaring Eagle) School – an innovative tribal charter school for grades K-12. As a Michigan Charter Public School, HIS/NTW also draws students outside the Potawatomi nation.

### Preserving Potawatomi culture and language through digital technology.

The Potawatomi nation has eight bands: four in Michigan and one each in Canada, Wisconsin, Kansas and Oklahoma. While each band shares resources and source material for language, the Nah Tah Wahsh school is the first in its nation to incorporate a digital language lab.

The mission of the Hannahville Indian Community Culture, Language and History Department is to provide Tribal Members and their descendants with the best possible choices by implementing various culture programs. Through these efforts come the hope of re-learning traditional values and their Tribal Language as Potawatomi people.

A major component and first step of this revitalization project was to integrate their culture classroom with a Sony Digital Language Lab, which was obtained through a federal ANA Grant. The lab is set up with laptops and headsets that allow students to listen and speak Potawatomi words as part of their class assignments.

“Since the start of the school year, HIS/NTW students have been engaged in language ‘lab time’ each week,” said Hill. “The implementation of the Digital Connections Language Lab in the middle and high school culture/language classroom has provided a positive new tool for language learning and a great aide to language instructors. Audio, video and text-based materials have been developed to integrate with our digital language lab in order to provide rich resources that the students can access during class time.”



Earl Meshigaud, Hannahville Potawatomi Indian Community, Culture Department Director.

## Using digital technology to meet world language standards.

With no Potawatomi language source material available, Eric Janofski, Technology/Media Developer, and the language team have had to build language course content, literally, from A to Z, using the Michigan state standards and benchmarks for World Languages as their guideline. As part of new state requirements, high school graduates in 2011 will be required to have completed two credits of language – and one credit for online education experience. Hill believes that using the Sony software has put their school “ahead of the process” in meeting the criteria of the new world language curriculum. She added, “I feel confident that when we present our progress report to the state, we will be fully accredited.”

In researching language labs, Hill felt that the Sony software was used in the most comprehensive way, with the most effectiveness in the classroom. “The software meets the standards and makes language easier for students to keep fluent,” said Hill. “The Sony software was the most versatile to work with for the student and the teacher. With the ability to quiz, provide assignments, watch video, listen to audio and record at the same time and store in student folders, SANS had all the educational components we needed,” she added.

Hill also values the ability to assess students from recording to grading quizzes. “We build on the lab, using it as our foundation, customizing it as we need to,” said Hill. The instructors incorporate word games and word play to make learning more fun.

## The SANS and Sony technology makes the grade.

The Potawatomi language functions with nearly 80 percent verbs, much higher than English and is different with words being animate and inanimate as opposed to masculine and feminine. “Actual grades have improved since the lab was installed. Students seem to be retaining more because of the continuity – one concept flows to the next and there is order to the way they are taught,” said Hill.



Eric Janofski, Technology/  
Media Developer.

The security and instructional control features of the Sony software are also great tools, according to Eric Janofski. The school has applied the security passwords in Potawatomi. “If a student breaks the code, at least they’re learning the language!” said Janofski. One of the convenient control features is the Sony Web Browser, which enables the instructor to limit student internet access so as to focus on a particular website.

“Students in a lab with headsets are also more focused on their lessons,” said Hill. “Students can easily adapt to the lab – they tune out everything else and concentrate on the subject matter.”

## Preserving the art of storytelling for generations to come.

The school currently has two classrooms for language learning, but their future plans are to have one room dedicated to the Sony language lab – with a complete archive of all levels of materials. “We want to add Potawatomi Level Two to the coursework and develop more video and audio source materials and more comprehensive video lectures.

Hill hopes that through this language revitalization effort, her students and their descendants will someday revive the storytelling heritage that is so integral to their culture. “We have far to go in our revitalization program,” she said. “But look how far we’ve come.”



Students completing assignments in the language lab.