



Standards of Practice

Native Language Enrichment

Native languages throughout the state of Arizona are endangered. Many native languages have been passed from generation to generation orally, and with them, the stories, customs, and life of a people. Native languages are inseparable from cultural identity and spirituality.

Since every community is different, language stabilization and acquisition strategies will also differ from one place to another, allowing them to be consistent with local customs. The concepts of language, identity, culture, and spirituality are highly complex. One can and should ask whose responsibility and privilege is it to teach a native language. The answer may be unclear and likely varies from one context or community to another. Further confusion may be inevitable now that the schools on tribal lands are involved in the teaching of native language and literacy.

A significant factor to revitalize native language is largely dependent on reinforcement in the home. Parents choose, for a variety of valid social reasons, not to teach their children their native tongue or they themselves do not speak their native language. Success of language preservation efforts depends strongly on family support and participation. If family members do not reinforce and support their children learning their native language, success will be difficult. Therefore, language revitalization initiatives should be interwoven with efforts for family involvement because preservation of native language cannot prevail if the leadership does not originate in the home.

Every means possible to promote native language and the virtues of bilingualism must be utilized. For example, use of radio announcements airing speakers' testimonials, could be a part of a community effort to save/maintain a language.

- Within each community, native language transmission can occur at different levels:

Individual level: Native speakers help latent speakers and non-speakers learn the native language by utilizing existing language learning material, taped stories, and by creating new materials.

Family level: Family reunions and family-based summertime and weekend language immersion activities are organized; families are encouraged to limit the intrusion of English-language media; and parental support groups are established to further encourage native language.

School level: Schools develop curriculum for mother (family)/child programs. Fluent native speakers teach non-native speaking parents the traditional language. This methodology will ensure that children learn and maintain the language.

Community level: Senior citizens centers are encouraged to have seniors use their native language with young children, for example in "language nests" at local preschools and Head Start centers; community

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seminars in the native language are promoted; community meetings and conferences about native language are organized, language institutes for families and communities are held, programs for parents of children in bilingual programs are developed; and “banks” of language learning materials are created and available to all community members.

Tribal Nations level: Elected officials are encouraged to use and promote the native language; networks of Native American language supporters are developed across tribal boundaries.

Communities recognize that lessening the threat of native language extinctions will mean both individual and group attitudes must be changed. These changes must permeate throughout the entire community.

- Within each community, native language early literacy transmission occurs at multiple levels and simultaneously:

It is understood that from birth, all young children are exposed to different languages, cultural values, beliefs and assumptions within the family and in the context of their community. Children absorb powerful messages from people, the environment, and the community that shape their identity, social and cultural values. How infants, toddlers, and young children interact within their environment and respond to experiences is heavily influenced by the values and beliefs of the family and others who care for them.

Because culture has a powerful impact on early learning, early childhood education professionals need competencies in learning about the families, cultures, and languages of children in their care to challenge their own assumptions about differences. Early childhood education professionals must be knowledgeable about their own cultural values and how their experiences can influence learning and development. This will allow them to be better equipped to deliver services in a culturally sensitive manner to all young children, including infants and toddlers.

Children’s early experiences with oral and written language, both formal and informal, provide essential foundations for all of their learning. Therefore, it is expected that centers, implementing Native Language early literacy programs will use the following Early Literacy Standards of Practice when teaching young children in center based settings.

Standards of Practice for Early Literacy in Early Childhood Education Settings:

Standard #1: Provide daily opportunities *in the identified Native Language* for children to develop listening and understanding skills.

- Provide daily opportunities for children to listen to stories, rhymes, songs and conversations as appropriate for the age group.
- Talk to babies and toddlers with simple language, frequent eye contact, and responsiveness to their cues and language attempts.
- Talk to preschool children using sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure within the context of the learning environment.
- Tell and retell oral stories to children.

Standard #2: Provide daily opportunities *in the identified Native Language* for children to speak and practice communicating throughout the day.

- Engage children in reciprocal (back and forth) conversations about topics that are of interest to them.
- Provide opportunities throughout the day for children to verbally express their thoughts, feelings and understandings.
- Provide for a balance of child and adult conversations.

Standard #3: Provide opportunities *in the identified Native Language* for children to develop the ability to distinguish between sounds

- Frequently play with young children by talking to, singing to, and doing finger plays.
- Include books with rhyming words and alliteration in the shared reading experiences.
- Introduce culturally appropriate nursery rhymes to young children by reciting them frequently.

Standard #4: Provide children with daily opportunities to learn about books, their purpose, and how to handle them.

- Share age-appropriate books *in the identified Native Language* with children on a daily basis by reading to the child on an adult's lap or together with one or two other children (infants, toddlers and preschool), or in a large group (preschool).
- Allow children, even babies the opportunity to handle books.
- Reread books, especially favorite ones.

Standard #5: Provide children with opportunities to practice using drawing and writing materials.

- Provide simple writing materials such as crayons and markers and large paper for toddlers to explore and manipulate.
- Provide ample variety of writing materials that are readily accessible to preschool children throughout the day and throughout the child care setting including outdoor environments.
- Model purposeful writing for children such as making recipe for making traditional foods, lists of traditional foods or materials needed for an activity, making a birthday or get well card for a child or writing a recipe.

Standard #6: Provide opportunities for children to begin to develop alphabet knowledge.

- Use the names of the letters throughout the day within the context of writing children's names or modeling writing for preschool children.
- Incorporate the names of letters into interactive songs and games.

Standard #7: Provide books that are reflective of the child and family's language and culture

- Provide books that are written in the language that is spoken in the child's home.
- Provide books that reflect the child's culture or ethnicity in a non-stereotypical manner.
- Provide books that reflect the child's family structure in a respectful manner.

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Additionally, grantees providing native language early literacy training to teaching staff should follow the **First Things First Community-Based Professional Development for Early Care and Education Professionals.**

RESEARCH NOTES:

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