NATIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

An NCAI Policy Research Center Backgrounder*
October 2013

> *NCAI maintains the belief that Native languages are an irreplaceable part of Native religions, ceremonial practices, and cultural heritage. . . . Native languages are in a state of emergency—70 of our remaining spoken languages could become extinct by 2015—and all need <u>immediate</u> support at the local tribal, state, and national levels . . . and NCAI does declare Native languages in a State of Emergency and urges the White House to adopt this proposed Executive Order in order to prevent 70 Native languages from becoming extinct in the next 5 years.* – NCAI Resolution #ABQ-10-021

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) supports the development of Native language immersion and bilingual education through ensuring that American Indians and Alaska Natives have access to develop language and literacy proficiency. It is important to note that Native students come to school speaking Native languages and, in many instances, speaking a variety of other languages, such as Spanish, French, and Russian. This backgrounder provides information on the different types of Native language education models; key features of successful programs and language reform initiatives; and a synthesis of research on how Native language education impacts students' cultural identity and academic achievement.

RESEARCH SUPPORTING NATIVE LANGUAGE RETENTION
Native Language as the Primary Language
Students who enter school with a primary language other than the school language (e.g., English) perform significantly better on academic tasks when they receive constant and cumulative academic support in the primary language for a minimum of four to seven years.[1] Time spent learning the Native language is not time lost in developing academic English proficiency. Students that are provided with sustained, cumulative Native language and cultural instruction perform as well as, or better than, their peers in mainstream classes and on academically challenging tasks. They also have the benefit of developing literacy in a second language.[2] The effectiveness of strong Native language and culture programs rests on the ability of tribes and Native communities to exercise self-determination in the content, process, and medium of instruction.[3]

Programs Focused on Native Language and Cultural Immersion
Strong programs—such as those that feature Native language and culture immersion, language and culture maintenance, and dual language and one-way immersion programs—significantly increase language retention. In contrast, weaker programs focused on a single instructional language, or transitional programs aimed at decreasing bilingualism, have not been found to correlate with high levels of academic achievement.[4] Additionally, strong Native language and cultural programs enhance student motivation, self-esteem, and cultural pride. These outcomes are evidenced in such factors as

* The NCAI Policy Research Center has developed the Backgrounder format to present a working document with content that will be shaped over time based on feedback from tribal leaders and key partners.

improved attendance and college enrollment rates, lower attrition, and enhanced teacher-student and school-community relations.[5]

Language & Cultural Programs Facilitate Community Interaction
These programs offer opportunities to involve parents and elders in the development and teaching of curriculum and cultural practices for Native youth and the community overall. This is a powerful positive factor and one universally associated with enhanced student achievement.[6] Programs also invest in professional development for teachers, and can leverage community resources through "grow your own" approaches to Native teacher preparation and curriculum development.[7]

NATIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION MODELS
There are at least three elements used to distinguish types of Native language education, including:
1. The first language of the student, which includes language(s) spoken in the household;
2. The amount of Native language instruction and curriculum used during the school day; and
3. Programmatic goals, assessments, and institutionalization for permanency.

Because of the endangered status of virtually all Native American languages, Native language immersion has been recommended as the preferred method for teaching Native languages. In the chart below, key differences between various models are presented. Specific emphasis is placed on which models are strong at fostering Native language revitalization and development, and which models are weak and designed to transition students from using their traditional languages.

Chart 1: Native Language Education Models

	PROGRAM MODEL	STUDENT'S 1ST LANGUAGE	CLASSROOM LANGUAGE	GOALS
STRONG & ADDITIVE	*Indigenous Language & Culture Immersion*	Indigenous language (or Mixed with strong community language use)	Indigenous language	• Indigenous language and culture revitalization and maintenance • Full bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy**, though Indigenous language reclamation and oral proficiency can be priority
	Indigenous Language & Culture Maintenance	Indigenous language	Dual language with emphasis on Indigenous language	• Indigenous language and culture maintenance • Bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy • Extension of the Indigenous language and culture into local and national society
	Two-Way Bilingual/Dual Language	Indigenous language (or Mixed with strong community language use)	Mixed Indigenous language and English (90/10; 50/50, etc.)	• Indigenous language and culture revitalization and maintenance • Bilingualism, biculturalism, and biliteracy

	PROGRAM MODEL	STUDENT'S 1ST LANGUAGE	CLASSROOM LANGUAGE	GOALS
WEAK & SUBTRACTIVE	*Transitional*	Indigenous language	Indigenous language used in first school years, then replaced with English	• English dominance; monolingualism, with some Indigenous language and culture enrichment • Instruction in Indigenous language serves as the basis for English language learning
	Mainstream, with Indigenous Language and Culture Pull-Out	Mixed – some use Indigenous, some English, some both	English, with Indigenous language vocabulary drills and activities	• Strong English dominance; monolingualism, with some Indigenous language and culture enrichment • Instruction in Indigenous language serves as the basis for English language learning
	Mainstream with Foreign Language Instruction	Mixed – some use Indigenous, some English, some both	English, with Indigenous language taught as a "foreign" language	• Strong English dominance; monolingualism; limited bilingualism; little or no cultural emphasis
	Structured English Immersion	Indigenous language	English only	• English monolingualism, monoculturalism (assimilation)

**A primary goal of some Indigenous language programs is oral proficiency.
Source: Chart adapted from McCarty, T. (2013). Language planning and policy in Native America: History, theory, praxis. Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.

Key Characteristics of Native Language Education Reform
Research on successful language reform initiatives suggests that there are some key characteristics that must be in place to generate and sustain Native language education reform, including:
- Strong family and community support;
- Family and community governance (e.g., resources, curriculum, and teacher standards and certification);
- Access to curriculum materials in both languages (original language materials are ideal though translated texts may be used in some instances to supplement these materials);
- Ongoing professional development for teachers (pre-service and in-service);
- Access to assessments in both languages;
- Appropriate learning facilities; and
- High academic standards

Getting Started: Successful Implementation of Native Language Education
As communities and policymakers consider developing and expanding Native language education programs, they might consider the following list of some key elements of successful bilingual programs drawn from broader research:

1. Programs should provide a minimum of 5 to 7 years of bilingual instruction to participating students.
2. The focus of instruction should be the same core academic curriculum that students in other programs experience.
3. Optimal language input (input that is comprehensible, interesting, and of sufficient quantity), as well as opportunities for output, should be provided to students, including quality language arts instruction in both languages.
4. The target (non-English) language should be used for instruction a minimum of 50% of the time (to a maximum of 100% in the early grades).
5. The program should provide an additive bilingual environment where all students have the opportunity to learn a second language while continuing to develop their first language proficiency.
6. Positive interactions among students should be facilitated by the use of strategies like cooperative learning.
7. Characteristics of effective schools should be incorporated into programs, such as qualified personnel and home-school collaboration.

NATIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION CASE STUDIES

Research has been developed by and with American Indian and Alaska Native communities that have established Native language education initiatives. The following examples highlight successful implementation and adoption of language programs.

Navajo Nation, Rock Point School

"In the early 1970s, the Rock Point School began one of the first contemporary Indigenous literacy programs. According to program cofounders Agnes and Wayne Holm, English at the time was, for all practical purposes, a foreign language at Rock Point, with nearly all students entering school dominant in Navajo. At the same time, Rock Point students scored near the bottom of all students in comparable Navajo Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools on English standardized tests.[8] The design that emerged was called 'coordinate bilingual instruction,' meaning that separate but complementary time was devoted to learning in each language. Navajo-language teachers (NLTs) taught and interacted entirely in Navajo, and English-language teachers (ELTs) taught and interacted only in English. Externally imposed status distinctions between credentialed (primarily non-Native) and non-credentialed (Navajo) teaching staff were dissolved, as NLTs and ELTs jointly planned, carried out, and evaluated instruction[9]…Longitudinal data from Rock Point show that students there not only outperformed comparable Navajo students in English-only programs, they surpassed their own previous annual growth rates and those of comparison-group students in BIA schools – and they did so by a greater margin each year."[10]

Navajo Nation & Native Hawaiian, Rough Rock-KEEP Partnership

"In 1983, anthropologists and reading specialists from the Hawai'i-based Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) came to Rough Rock for the express purpose of determining whether the culturally compatible reading strategies proven effective with Native Hawaiian children would work with Navajo students.[11] The Rough Rock-KEEP collaboration lasted five years, during which it was found that approaches that had been successful with Native Hawaiian students needed to be significantly modified to produce successful outcomes with Navajo learners. By the end of the five-

year period, the Rough Rock-KEEP partnership blossomed into a local teacher-led initiative, [known as] the Rough Rock English-Navajo Language Arts Program (RRENLAP), which served approximately 200 students each year in grades K-6…Longitudinal data from RRENLAP show that after four years in the program, students' mean scores on criterion-referenced tests of English comprehension increased from 58 percent to 91 percent. On standardized reading tests, RRENLAP students' scores initially declined, then rose steadily, in some cases approaching or exceeding national norms. When individual and grade cohort data were analyzed over five years, RRENLAP students demonstrated superior English reading, language arts, and mathematics performance compared to a matched peer group who did not participate in the program. Not surprisingly, RRENLAP students also were assessed as having stronger Navajo oral language and biliteracy abilities; they became stronger in both languages and had the benefit of additive bilingualism."[12]

Yup'ik, Manokotak
"In Alaska, two or more languages are spoken in many Native villages: the Native language as spoken by elders, the Native language modified by English, English modified by the Native language ('village English'), and 'standard' or 'schooled' English.[13] In the 1990s, [Manokotak] remained an almost entirely Yup'ik-speaking community. Systemic problems within the local K-6 school, which was implementing an all-English curriculum, were evident in the high levels of student attrition, poor standardized test performance, student disinterest, and strained student-teacher and community-school relations…Using research on effective bilingual and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) approaches and data from a community survey as starting points, Manokotak began a school restructuring process. The result was a Yup'ik immersion program with a strong ESL component, which started in kindergarten with four hours of instruction in Yup'ik and one in English, progressively increasing English instruction to 4.5 hours by the fifth and sixth grades…At the end of the program's initial year, kindergartners exceeded the district's expected means for their performance on standardized tests, while first and second graders achieved below expected means. By the second year, all student groups exceeded the district's expected means. Moreover, community feedback, student and family self-reports, student writing samples, behavior reports, and teacher observations showed improved student self-esteem and school-community relations."[14]

Note: Much of the content was drawn from McCarty, T. L. (2011). State of the field: The role of Native languages and cultures in American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian student achievement. Tempe, AZ: Center for Indian Education. (Available online, http://center-for-indian-education.asu.edu/sites/center-for-indian-education.asu.edu/files/McCarty,%20Role%20of%20Native%20Lgs%20&%20Cults%20in%20AI-AN-NH%20Student%20Achievement%20%5B2%5D%20%28071511%29.pdf) and from Pacific Policy Research Center. (2010). Successful bilingual and immersion education models/programs. Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools, Research & Evaluation Division. (Available online, http://www.ksbe.edu/spi/pdfs/bilingual%20immersion%20full.pdf)

End Notes

---

[1]McCarty, T. (2013). Language planning and policy in Native America: History, theory, praxis. Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters; Francis, D., Lesaux, N., & August, D. (2006), Language of instruction. In D. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners. Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth.* (pp. 365–413). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum; Lindholm-Leary, K.J., & Borsato, G. (2006). Academic achievement. In F. Genesee, K. Lindholm-Leary, W. Saunders, & D. Christian (Eds*). Educating English Language Learners.* (pp. 176-222).

New York: Cambridge University Press; Rolstad, K., Mahoney, K. & Glass, G. V. (2005). The big picture: A meta-analysis of program effectiveness research on English language learners. *Education Policy, 10,* 572-594; Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. (2002). A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement: Final report, Executive summary. Santa Cruz, CA and Washington, DC: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE); Greene, J. (1998). A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of bilingual education. Austin: University of Texas, Thomas Rivera Policy Institute; Thomas, W.P., & Collier, V. (1997). *School effectiveness for language minority students.* Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education; Willig, A. (1985). A meta-analysis of selected studies on the effectiveness of bilingual education. *Review of Educational Research*, *55*, 269-317; Cummins, J. (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In California State Department of Education (Ed.), *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework.* Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center, California State University, Los Angeles.

[2] McCarty, T. L. (2009a, January 9). State of the field: The role of Native languages and cultures in American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students' academic achievement. Policy paper prepared for the Promising Practices and Partnerships in Indian Education Working Group and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Indian Education Programs, under contract to Kauffman & Associates, Inc., Spokane, WA.

[3] Brayboy, B. M. J., & Castagno, A. E. (2009). Self-determination through self-education: Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous students in the USA. *Teaching Education, 20* (1), 31-53; Castagno, A.E., & Brayboy, B.M.J. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 78* (4), 941-993; Demmert, W.G., Grissmer, D., & Towner, J. (2006). A review and analysis of the research on Native American students. *Journal of American Indian Education, 45* (3), 5-23; Demmert, W.G., Jr., & Towner, J. (2003). *A review of the research literature on the influences of culturally based education on the academic performance of Native American students.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. (Available online, http://www.nwrel.org/indianed/cbe.pdf)

[4] Romero-Little, M. E., McCarty, T.L., Warhol, L., & Zepeda, O. (2007). Language policies in practice: Preliminary findings from a large-scale study of Native American language shift. *TESOL Quarterly, 41* (3), 607-618; McCarty, T. L. (2009a, January 9). *State of the field: The role of Native languages and cultures in American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students' academic achievement.* Policy paper prepared for the Promising Practices and Partnerships in Indian Education Working Group and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Indian Education Programs, under contract to Kauffman & Associates, Inc., Spokane, WA; McCarty, T. L. (2009b). The impact of high-stakes accountability policies on Native American learners: Evidence from research. *Teaching Education, 20* (1), 7-29.

[5] McCarty, T. (2013). Language planning and policy in Native America: History, theory, praxis. Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters; McCarty, T.L., Romero-Little, M. E., & Zepeda, O. (2006). Native American youth discourses on language shift and retention: Ideological cross-currents and their implications for language planning. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 9* (5), 659-677; Nicholas, S. E. (2009). "I live Hopi, I just don't speak it": The critical intersection of language, culture, and identity among contemporary Hopi youth. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 8 (5), 321-334*;* Wyman, L. T. (2009). Youth, linguistic ecology, and language endangerment: A Yup'ik example. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 8* (5), 335-349.

[6] Brayboy, B. M. J., & Castagno, A. E. (2009). Self-determination through self-education: Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous students in the USA. *Teaching Education, 20* (1), 31-53; Castagno, A.E., & Brayboy, B.M.J. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for Indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 78* (4), 941-993; Demmert, W.G., Jr. (2001). *Improving academic performance among Native American students: A review of the research literature*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (available online, http://eric.ed.gov80/PDFS/ED463917.pdf); Demmert, W.G., Grissmer, D., & Towner, J. (2006). A review and analysis of the research on Native American students. *Journal of American Indian Education, 45* (3), 5-23; Demmert, W.G., Jr., & Towner, J. (2003). *A review of the research literature on the influences of culturally based education on the academic performance of Native American students.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. (Available online, http://www.nwrel.org/indianed/cbe.pdf).

[7] *Id*.

[8] Holm & Holm, 1990, p. 173.

[9] Rosier & Farella, 1976, p. 380).

[10] Holm & Holm, 1990, pp. 177-178); McCarty, 2011, p. 5.

[11] Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993.

[12] McCarty, 2011, pp. 6-7.

[13] Hartley & Johnson, 1995.

[14] McCarty, 2011, p. 27.