

Effective Early Education Programs that Promote Learning  
the English Language and Tribal Languages and Cultures

Nila M. Rinehart

THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, Head Start has been the nation's cornerstone of services for low-income young children and their families. With the addition of the Child Care Bureau, created in 1995, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services provides much of the funding and concentrated support for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children in early care and education programs. Approximately 28,000 AI/AN children were served in Head Start in 2004 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2005). Approximately 35,000 children were served by the Child Care and Development Fund of the U.S. Child Care Bureau in 2003 (Rinehart, 2005). An additional unknown number of AI/AN children receive care from family members and friends, non-tribal child care, public and tribal schools, and other state, local and private funded early care and education providers. The Kids Count data on AI/AN children measures of child well being from the 2000 census reports that there are 432,994 American Indian children under the age of 6 in the United States (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). One has to wonder where the estimated 85.5% of the AI/AN children are, what is the level of care they are experiencing, what developmental opportunities are they being provided, what is the level of family and community support, and is the tribal culture and language accessible and supported?

Throughout the late 1990s, funding for early care and education programs grew with opportunities for enhancing services. Some of these projects included Early Learning Opportunities Grants, Even Start, and Early Head Start. Although tribal communities were recipients of these funds, along with Head Start and Child Care and Development Funds, the largest service providers for young AI/AN children in tribal communities, little is known about child outcomes and best practices relative to this special population. There is not a central clearinghouse or place for AI/AN early care and education

providers to learn about and share ideas, promising practices, and current research in order to improve services and child outcomes. Lastly, there have been few studies with a focus on young AI/AN children. In summary, there is little known about the status of early care and education for AI/AN children.

This paper examines promising practices in early childhood education programs and activities that promote effective use of English as a primary and/or second language and the programs and activities that are effective in developing, preserving, and/or revitalizing AI/AN language and culture. Additionally, innovative systems, public policy, and unmet research needs are identified.

### Promising Practices in English Language Learning And Retaining Tribal Languages

To grow to their fullest potential, AI/AN children need strong and loving families and communities that care for their needs. Equally important, tribal children need an understanding of teachings about community traditions, tribal values, and language. The center of strength and identity for tribal children comes from belonging to an extended tribal community-family, their participation in cultural activities and in understanding the sacred meanings behind their tribal practices (Strand, 2003). While learning to understand their tribal heritage, AI/AN children are also gifted learners of other skills. Tribal children need a learning environment that nurtures their natural curiosity and their path to knowing. This balanced preparation of tribal children fully enables them to participate in their place in tribal communities as well as in the larger world community. Practice and preparation in their cultural traditions interwoven with math, science and the full range of experiences reflecting all early education learning domains helps them to understand and participate in their rightful place in our universe.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) position statement, “Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Educa-

tion,” emphasizes that children learn and grow to their fullest potential when the home language and culture is valued and integrated within the curriculum and learning environment (NAEYC, 1995). The position statement recognizes that the language and culture of the home is what children know and it is the basis for their unique perspective on life and on learning. This important foundation and framework supports children as they begin to make sense of experiences and construct knowledge. From a very early age, and some would say before birth, many tribal children are taught about their connection to the world. They are taught to honor the reverence of tribal practices and they are taught to think of themselves as connected to one another and to the greater universe. This interconnectedness is essential for tribal children’s development of the self. Language, culture, and the home environment allow children to know who they are and from this, children form the basis for constructing knowledge. It is from these incredible eyes that tribal children see and interpret their world.

The following practices and reflections come from an examination of early care and education and AI/AN education literature, and from my experience in implementing a language revitalization program in the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA) – Head Start program, in Juneau, Alaska.

### *Addressing Language in Program Design*

Given what we know about AI/AN children and the values placed on culture and language, how do educators build learning environments to help children use these strengths to succeed? Tabors (2000) provided a definition that is important to AI/AN children, “A bilingual child is a child who is exposed to two languages, no matter what her level of proficiency is in the two languages.” Given this premise, AI/AN children are bilingual if they have any contact with family members, caregivers, or a community that is rooted in a tribal language or culture. With this understanding, the approach to answering the question of what programs and activities appear to promote effective use of English as a primary and/or second language

and/or are effective in developing, preserving, and/or revitalizing the tribal language and culture must be set in research on best practices for children learning a second language (whether that language is English or a tribal language).

Tabors (2000) provides an overview of bilingualism relative to how much English and the home language is spoken in the home and in the community. These distinctions are necessary to consider when planning for curriculum design and developing effective early care and education programs for second-language learning. Based on a home and community language inventory, professionals can make program design decisions to implement a variety of options:

- AI/AN language immersion classrooms
- Bilingual classrooms in the AI/AN language and English
- English-only classrooms
- Cultural and language enrichment programs for children and their families

Tabors (1997) suggests that children learn language in two ways: simultaneously and sequentially. Simultaneous learning happens when children are learning more than one language at once. In her review of the literature and research on this subject, Tabors reports that teachers and parents often express concern that children will mix up the two languages, or that second language learning might hold children back. However, second language learning yields cognitive benefits. Tabors also contends that children learn languages in relationship to their experiences with them, and they are able to hold each language separate from the other, determining when to use which language.

Sequential acquisition occurs when children begin learning their first language and then begin learning another. Tabors (1997) states that there are benefits associated with this language learning: “second-language learners, even very young ones, already have prior knowledge about language and its uses. In the process of learning a first language, they have determined what communication is all about, and, furthermore. . . [how communication works]. For these children,

then, second-language acquisition is not a process of discovering what language *is*, but rather discovering what *this* language is.” Learning a second language can occur at any age, however, young children are better positioned to take on this task, more so than an adult or teenager who is faced with many more cognitive demands and tasks (Tabors, 1997, p.12). This outlook is supported by Peacock (1999), reflecting on work by Greymorning (1997; 1999), who maintained that “tribal groups that begin AI/AN language instruction at an early age will be more successful than tribes that concentrate on teaching older students.”

Tabors (1997, p. 39) describes that researchers have observed a definite developmental sequence for young children learning a second language:

1. There may be a period of time when children continue to use their home languages in second-language situations.
2. When they discover that their home language does not work in this situation, children enter a nonverbal period as they collect information about the new language and perhaps spend some time in sound experimentation (and children use nonverbal communication).
3. Children begin to go public, using individual words and phrases in the new language.
4. Children begin to develop productive use of the second language.

In making choices about program planning, AI/AN educators are wise in knowing about how children learn a second language (whether the objective is for children to learn the English or the tribal language). It is through understanding what has been learned about language acquisition that appropriate choices can be made for effective planning.

*Curriculum Planning and Development*

In addition to selection of the appropriate language-learning environment, choices must be made about curriculum planning and development. The curriculum in early childhood classrooms serving AI/AN children must be grounded in community values, set in the societal context, rooted in the ebb and flow of community life, and is an emergent and reflective process. This curriculum belongs to the community and comes from the inside out (Rinehart, Tagaban, Focht, & Squibb, 2000). The outcomes are clear and include science, math, language, literacy, creative, physical, social and emotional outcomes. The process for developing these outcomes is inclusive of the children's family and community.

The Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska Head Start program developed a curriculum framework that is imbedded in tribal values and learning outcomes. It is a collection of what we know as the best in relationship to tribal culture, community practices, subsistence life practices, and sciences that relate to our area of the world. The framework responds to the entire realm of child learning domains and outcomes as required by the Head Start Bureau, Alaska State School Standards, and state learning outcomes for young children.

The At Yatx'I Satu Kei Nas.a'x Curriculum is rooted in the ebb and flow of the seasons and is relevant to the events happening in the communities and in the subsistence life style. The Tlingit economic year of hunting, salmon fishing, seaweed gathering and berry picking are central elements. The curriculum mirrors the values and beliefs of the community and of the families, and it also recognizes contemporary practices and knowledge. The learning domains include natural sciences, language and literacy, physical/motor, problem solving, and creative arts. Because the curriculum is centered on the seasons, there are "Gathering Places" for the fall, winter, spring, and summer. Within each Gathering Place, there are thematic units. For example, a Gathering Place for fall is Salmon Ecology. Within the unit on Salmon Ecology, there are several choices for lessons and activity plans asso-

ciated with each of the relevant learning domains. All of the lessons reinforce important community values of taking care of our natural resources because nature provides our food and subsistence. The lessons also include Tlingit language words and phrases for teachers to highlight with the children. The activities promote learning about the natural sciences and the ecological life of a salmon. There is a family-based curriculum tied to what the children are learning in the classroom “Family Feathers,” so that parents and grandparents can further the children’s learning. The family curriculum includes video tapes designed to help parents learn about child development and it is tied to a “Family Time Workbook” (CCTHITA Head Start 2002). Furthermore, the lessons have as an outcome the ability for children to meet state early education learning standards. Curricula building on community strengths, values and practices enhance the lives and learning of young children by telling them a rich story about who they are and this story strengthens the children’s success in school.

The need for AI/AN children to understand their own culture, language, and connection to the tribal community is no different than the need all children have to acquire a sense of belonging. For AI/AN children this means that it is important that they have opportunities to learn about their culture, language, and history. This process must be in the earliest years, beginning first with the family and community. Continuity is established when this learning is reinforced and continued through early education programs and later in elementary and secondary schools.

Strategies identified by the English Language Learners Focus Group (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002) and strategies that were identified and implemented in the CCTHITA language program include:

- Learning environments are enhanced with the spoken and, when possible, the written language of the children. There is a conscious effort to extend and add to the children’s language.
- Community elders and language masters are included among the staff either through paid or volunteer positions. They are trained

in language acquisition skills and have a defined role in language teaching.

- Family and community stories are documented and shared and appropriately used as learning tools in the classroom.
- Staff members establish meaningful relationships with the community and thereby have firsthand experience in the lives of the people they serve.
- Resources are provided to provide a rich learning environment that has culturally relevant and authentic literature, art, music, and studies that are congruent with the community activities and embedded in community values.
- Early literacy skills, alphabet knowledge, and phonemic awareness are a focus in classroom activities and are provided using developmentally and culturally appropriate methods.
- Since many tribal languages may not be written, opportunities are created for community dialog to occur to work out agreements on appropriate spellings and language usage to begin documenting the language.
- Publish curriculum frameworks, lesson plans, books, and materials in order to promote sharing. Distribute the resources widely to promote community progress.
- Investigate and learn about language-teaching methods (i.e., immersion classrooms, total physical response methods); use simple language for new language learners, use facial gestures and point to objects to help children in understanding; repeat words and phrases; when children speak in the target language repeat and extend their language, always adding.
- Help children link what they are learning to real life experiences and concrete objects.
- Plan predictable routines so new language learners can anticipate and learn to expect what is coming.
- Write books; develop picture dictionaries in both the home and target language. Distribute these resources widely.
- Involve parents by inviting them to the classroom and special sessions so that they know what is occurring and help them to

extend the learning in the home by providing resources.

- Make available on loan early literacy and family literacy kits/bags. Include writing materials, books, tapes, master cards and readers, and other audiotapes of the target language. Encourage adults to read aloud to children and to tell stories.
- Complete language inventories (surveys, not assessments) of parents and family members in order to inform planning and encourage their involvement in program activities.
- Identify family, program and community resources to help with oral and written translations and new word translations. Also identify resources to assist in developing materials (artists and crafts people).
- Provide summer curriculum development institutes, a place where teachers and community members (including parents) can develop curriculum materials (i.e., books, audiotapes, games, lesson plans, felt board stories, computer program software, family take-home kits). Reproduce these kits so that the resources reach beyond one classroom.
- Use commercial materials to support lesson plans (such as plastic whale and sea mammal figurines for the water table to extend Tlingit stories and songs). (Commercial “Native American” curricula and materials must be carefully reviewed for stereotypical or inauthentic presentation of culture.)

### *Politics of Language and Culture*

Teaching or integrating AI/AN culture and languages in schools is a politically and emotionally sensitive issue in most AI/AN communities. There is loss and trauma associated with this issue and many are skeptical and cautious about new initiatives. Many AI/AN communities may resist letting the schools become a place where language and culture are taught because culture and language are the responsibility of the family and community (Batchelder, 2000). These attitudes especially exist toward schools because schools often are controlled by outsiders.

AI/AN parents and families care about their children's success and work at providing the best for them. Because of this inherent need to protect and to ensure their children can fully participate in the outside world, some parents may want English language learning first as the best goal for their children, even when it risks the loss of home language. Overt and covert discrimination is very real and very much alive. When an Indian child learns to be grounded in tribal traditions and languages, their speech patterns are different and they think, interact and perceive their experiences in different ways. "Cultural differences can lead teachers to misunderstand children, to mis-assess their developmental competence, and to plan incorrectly for their educational achievement" (Bowman, 1994).

Also, because of past efforts to assimilate AI/AN people, many parents in the parenting generation have lost proficiency in the tribal language and this will create challenges in revitalizing languages that are risk. With many demands on family life, second language learning may not be a priority.

Lastly, there are many dialects, alphabet systems, proper spelling, and language usage to consider. There may be disagreement among key members of the community in the "right way." Sometimes these disagreements can cause great divisions in the community.

There are many solid reasons why educators should not integrate the language and culture of AI/AN children into the school setting. However, there are many more reasons why responsible educators should. Strategies include:

- Create community conversations about how best to support AI/AN children to succeed and to learn about how best to integrate their language and culture in the schools.
- Create a language consortium, with broad representation and support. The consortium can assist in making critical decisions about language usage.
- Expect there will be those who disagree and professionals will need to find people who can support and encourage them to keep moving forward.

## How AI/AN Children Learn

There have been some debates over how AI/AN children learn. Some assert that AI/AN children have particular learning styles. Learning styles often reported in AI/AN children include a greater capacity for artistic expression and symbolism, visual cognitive learning, and conceptualizing from a holistic framework. As with any theory, we should be cautioned that by concentrating on these learning styles we must not stereotype children and diminish the individuality of AI/AN children because they are all very unique. Research has found learning style differences between cultural groups and within groups, and learning style studies are often contradictory. There is a need for more research in this area, as well as an identification of effective interventions for differences in learning styles (Soleste, 2002). This information is another piece among many to consider when planning an appropriate learning environment for AI/AN children. Planning deliberate classroom environments that are developmentally appropriate, individualized, and rich with a carefully planned curriculum combined with effective teaching methodology is essential for young AI/AN children.

*Staff Development*

Teachers and administrators must possess a level of cultural understanding, be reflective in their practice, and create an environment respectful of diversity (Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003). It is important for children to experience schools that employ caring adults who can relate in a culturally competent manner to the children's culture and traditions. These attributes are important whether or not teachers are representative of the child's community. Just because staff may be from the community does not mean they are able to create a caring environment for children to experiment and grow. In order to teach children, especially children from different and linguistic backgrounds, teachers must know themselves. We all come from different places in life. Our experiences are different, and these experiences have an

enormous impact on our belief systems and in the way we process information. According to U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2002), Strategies for staff development include:

- Provide staff with ongoing training and development on issues related to culture including learning about the historical context of the people.
- Provide staff with training on first and second language acquisition and learning.
- Create opportunities for staff to be involved with the community.
- Provide opportunities for staff to examine their own beliefs and attitudes toward second language learning and cultural issues. Create provocative conversations to allow staff to wrestle with their ideas, biases, truths, and allow for rediscovery.
- Use the help of early childhood experts, theorists, researchers and scholars to share knowledge and skills with practitioners.
- Establish partnerships with colleges and universities to obtain college credit for professional training in these areas; also request the creation of classes to assist in the community's efforts.
- Establish partnerships with other language-learning communities, consortiums, and institutes to share knowledge and adopt models; join and/or establish language consortiums to work in support of one another to further language goals.
- For language revitalization communities, provide opportunities for teachers to learn the target second language (i.e., summer institutes, language coach/mentors, immersion programs for teachers).

### *Family and Community Partnerships*

AI/AN parents and community leaders must be involved in decision making in early education programs, especially in decisions concerning second language learning and curriculum. Empowering families means working in partnership with them to jointly make

the best and most informed decisions possible for the well-being of AI/AN children. According to U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2002), strategies include:

- Identify family and community interests, dreams for the future, strengths and needs. Use this as a basis for planning.
- Share information with parents and the community about the developmental process of learning a second language; investigate with parents the political and social-emotional side of language.
- Provide opportunities for parents to learn about early childhood development, and culturally related child rearing practices.
- Provide opportunities to involve parents in their own second language development by providing classes and by providing at-home projects focused on language and literacy.
- Encourage parents and the community to talk, sing, tell stories, hold conversations with children that extend and enrich their vocabulary in their home language and in English.
- Use the family's home language in verbal and written communication as much as possible.
- Invite elders, extended family, and community members to be involved in the program either as paid staff or as volunteers.

### *Outcomes for AI/AN Children*

Before a teacher can facilitate learning, the teacher must know what learning objectives and outcomes are expected. For many years schools and teachers developed their own outcomes. These outcomes were based on the teacher and school's culture and values. In order to facilitate learning for AI/AN children, teachers and schools need to know what a successful AI/AN child will be like once that child has gone through the educational system. What skills will he or she possess, what things will he or she be able to do in life, what things will he or she have experienced? Only the parents, extended family, communities, and nations into which AI/AN children are born can answer these questions. In early education programs, Head Start has

taken the lead in determining educational outcomes by instituting locally developed plans and outcomes that also respond to national outcomes. These plans are used as a tool to document, for the community and program, the kinds of skills, abilities, hopes, and dreams parents and families have for their children, and what kind of commitment the Head Start program will have to fulfill the need. Teachers and schools can only expect participation and support from families and communities if the family and community's priorities become the teacher and school's priorities.

Many AI/AN communities are documenting their tribal values so that families, schools, and communities can facilitate learning in a way that respects and activates important practices that help children succeed. In this way, the community begins to voice the things that make AI/AN children unique. When these outcomes are further focused by integrating other local, state and national learning outcomes, the combination offers children possibilities to excel in all developmental domains. Strategies include:

- Invite parents and the community to identify what they want their children to be like in the future, what they want them to know, and what they want their children to be. Ask parents to envision their children in the future and build outcomes on these visions.
- Use child outcomes, the culture, natural environment, community happenings, and values as the framework to build a curriculum.
- Integrate local, state, and national child outcomes with locally developed child outcomes.
- Partner with colleges, universities, language institutes, and other professionals to assist.
- Learn from other communities, adopting methods and processes.

### *Assessment*

Now more than ever, early childhood education programs and educational systems must prove their effectiveness. Accountability

is often measured by standardized achievement tests that are not designed to measure true child outcomes. These tests can be harmful to children if they are interpreted and used in the wrong way. Poor test scores among AI/AN children seriously undermine the dignity of AI/AN children, their families, communities, and nations. Educators must be careful about how standardized tests and assessments are delivered and used. Strategies for assessment include:

- “Identify measures and processes that assess first and second language levels of proficiency; use observation, recording strategies, and documentation procedures that are aligned with child outcomes and are meaningful for parents to interpret and understand” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002).
- Consider the use of observational, narrative-rich descriptions of children during a regular classroom day, or when children are in their home environment during a family visit (Tabors, 2000).
- Use principles and guidelines to inform practice, including position statements such as the joint position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, “Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and program Evaluation” (NAEYC, 2003).

In summary, young AI/AN children can attend well-provisioned and safe, aesthetically beautiful early care and education programs that are specifically designed for their tribal community. The curriculum incorporates everyday life in a way young children understand. The curriculum is individualized for the community and child, it is experiential, and it develops children’s physical, cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, and creative skills. The learning environment and significant adults nourish the child’s individual and communal spirit. The children speak and are read to in their tribal language as well as in English. The community is supportive and contributes to their learning. Innovative practices, including research, are shared with practitioners to continually renew and improve outcomes.

## Innovations in Early Care and Education Systems And Public Policy

Several research projects have been undertaken to provide information to guide public policy, enhance services, and practice in early care and education. The following are a few representative examples:

- The Family and Child Experiences Study (FACES) is a national longitudinal study that describes the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes for children and families in Head Start. The study is providing information about quality and outcomes for young children. The study was initiated in 1997 and continues to provide valuable data (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, August 2003).
- The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project measured outcomes and collected information about programs and family experiences within Head Start programs. The analysis will link program interventions with child and family outcomes (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, retrieved July 2005).
- Head Start Impact Study was launched in 1998 as a congressional mandate as a part of Head Start's authorization. The purpose of the study is to determine the impact of Head Start on the children it serves (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, retrieved July 20, 2005).

Although these studies and many others contribute to the early care and education knowledge base, AI/AN children have not directly benefited from these projects. The body of knowledge that has been gained through these large-scale efforts has not included this special population and there is strong consensus that the unique characteristics of tribal children require specialized approaches to research design and approaches. Additionally, legislative mandates have excluded tribal programs from certain national Head Start research and evaluation activities (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2004).

In 2001, the Head Start bureau initiated a 2-year AI/AN Head Start Research and Outcomes Assessment (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2004). The project was launched to address the following questions:

- What are the research priorities and needs of AI/AN programs?
- What issues should be considered in conducting research in American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start programs?
- How can ACF support partnerships between researchers and American Indian-Alaska Native Head Start programs?
- To what extent are culturally appropriate instruments, measures, and procedures available to assess outcomes?
- What technical assistance would be helpful for program staff in terms of conducting developmental screenings and assessing child outcomes?

A synthesis of relevant studies, articles, reports, theses and dissertations, unpublished documents, and other materials was gathered and the following references are gathered from this synthesis (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2003). It should be noted that relatively few recent studies or resources were found that further contribute to early care and education English or tribal language learning. However, the studies, articles, and other documents found in the synthesis continue to support the use of culturally appropriate practices to help provide contextual links for children's learning.

In 2004 the Head Start Bureau launched an Innovation and Improvement Grant program with one of the priorities being English Language Learners. Several projects were awarded in the planning phase of the project in 2004. In 2005, projects will be selected for a full 3-year implementation phase. Because AI/AN children are considered a special population, they have not been included in this initiative. The rationale for not including AI/AN children is because they are thought to be trying to retain and revitalize their AI/AN language and not necessarily learn the English language. However, if

Tabors' definition of a bilingual child is accepted, then many AI/AN children are indeed bilingual and in need of this kind of support.

In 2002, the Head Start Bureau sponsored an English Language Learners Focus Group and issued a report on findings. The purpose of the session was to solicit specific recommendations regarding effective approaches for addressing the opportunities and challenges presented by working with young children who are English language learners (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002).

In 2005, the Head Start bureau initiated a bulletin on English Language Learners that highlights promising practices and resources for programs to use in serving English Language Learners. Among the many articles in this bulletin is an article entitled "Head Start: An Avenue to Revitalize a Language." This article provides insight into the efforts of the Cherokee Nation Head Start program in continuing the tribal culture and language (Drew, 2005).

The Administration for Native Americans (ANA) funded 23 (116 received) applications from tribal entities in 2003 and 33 (117 received) in 2004 in the area of Language Preservation. ANA grants are awarded from one competitive area at any time. Therefore, while eligible applicants may compete for a grant in each of the three competitive areas (Social and Economic Development Strategies, Environmental Regulatory Enhancement and American Indian and Alaska Native Language Preservation), an applicant may only submit one application per competitive area and no applicant may receive more than one grant in each competitive area, including any existing ANA grants (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, retrieved July 15, 2005). Tribes must choose their priorities between critical areas.

Released in 2000, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework is intended to guide HS programs in their curriculum planning and ongoing assessment of the progress and accomplishments of children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2003). Relative to this initiative is the Head Start Bureau's National Reporting System (NRS), which AI/AN programs completed nearly 16,000 NRS assessments in 2003-2004. Although the bureau cautions reading too much into

the data, the following findings are relative to AI/AN Children in Head Start. American Indian children in Head Start show growth in understanding spoken English, vocabulary, in letter recognition, in early math skills. The greatest gains were made in letter recognition and early math skills (Shultz, 2004).

### Unmet Research Needs and Recommendations For Additional Research

Many studies have contributed to the early care and education and family development knowledge base (i.e., studies in brain development, the effects of poverty on the educational outcomes of children, the effects of domestic violence and child maltreatment on young children) (Hixon, S., personal communication of the National Indian Head Start Directors Association, 2004). These studies have been used to guide practice and program development and are valuable resources to the early care and education profession. However, research specific to the AI/AN population needed and highlighted by many of the authors cited in this paper.

When working with AI/AN children and families, it is critically important to use research as a tool to help better practice. However, there have been few studies that focus specifically on AI/AN children. Being such a small percentage of the overall population, the AI/AN population is often left out. When studies are brought about, AI/AN communities are forced to make comparisons across tribal groups, which can be very problematic. Although there are many similarities among AI/AN tribal groups, we are also very different. AI/AN people speak different languages, some of them are written, but most are not. Our tribal histories are different. We live in small rural communities and large urban ones. Some live in close-knit tribal communities, and many do not. Our social systems are structured differently as are our governments. Lastly, there are always differences, even among families that are affected by demographics, socioeconomic status, and many other variables. All of these issues make research and the interpretation of research challenging.

The following is a summary of research needs as identified by my own practice, by many of the authors cited in this paper, the AI/AN research agenda for Head Start programs, the National Indian Head Start Director's Association, and the English Language Learners Focus Group.

### *Tribal Identity and Culture*

Differences in educational outcomes for AI/AN bilingual children and English-only children; effective ways to promote AI/AN language instruction in a multi-language environment; developmentally appropriate teaching practices that support second language learning (English or tribal language); effective practices in teaching/revitalizing the AI/AN language; case studies of community tribal language revitalization projects; links of culturally relevant/tribal language enhanced programs to academic child learning outcomes.

*Early childhood education.* Data on long-term educational outcomes for AI/AN children who attend Head Start as compared to AI/AN children who do not; more information about learning styles in AI/AN children; the content and structure of Head Start instruction (effectiveness of mixed age groups, benefits or drawbacks of full day versus part day); classroom strategies and interventions that accommodate differences in learning styles; how and if learning strategies (styles) change over time; socialization of learning styles; appropriate screening, assessment and outcomes measurement (birth to 5).

*Health and development.* Ties of tribal identity, language and culture to social and emotional well-being and links to educational outcomes.

*Staff and staff development.* Effects of teachers' attitudes and methods of interacting with children and links to educational outcomes; strategies and best practices in teaching methods for teaching second languages.

*Family and community involvement.* Parents' disciplinary practices and their effects on children's mental health and educational outcomes; family involvement in programs that are embedded in the family's culture and language; family participation in tribal language revitalization programs; effects of family involvement on student achievement.

*Accessibility of research findings.* In the review of literature concerning the topic of this paper, there are many important research projects, papers, and information that can contribute to daily practice in teaching young children. The problem that exists is making the outcomes of research projects and recommendations accessible to teachers and administrators who are in the process of working with and designing programs for young AI/AN children. There is not a clearinghouse of materials, resources, and research available to the AI/AN early care and education community in the topic areas addressed by this paper.

### Summary

The strategies addressed in this paper are possible goals. Our nations must realize the essential gift that children bring to our futures. We must learn to nourish every child by providing every essential that children need to grow and thrive in our world. The broader community must understand that there is not one right and true way and that many perspectives are desirable and are necessary for survival and growth. We must all recognize that the only thing stopping us from providing young AI/AN children with the essential things they need to grow and learn so they can assume their rightful place in our world is us.

### References

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2003). *Kids count pocket guide: American Indian children*. Baltimore, MD: Author.

- Batchelder, A. (2000). Teaching Dine' language and culture in Navajo schools: Voices from the community. In J. Rehyner, J. Martin, L. Lockard & W. Sakiestewa Gilbert (Eds.) *Learn in beauty: Indigenous education for a new century*. Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University.
- Bowman, B. & Stott, F. (1994). Understanding development in a cultural context: The challenge for teachers. In B. Mallory & R. New (Eds.), *Diversity and developmentally appropriate practices: challenges for early childhood education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska Head Start. (2002). *Family time workbook: Family feathers, Video Extension Activities*. Juneau, AK: Author.
- Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska Head Start. (2002). *Family Feathers: Understanding and guiding your preschool child: Tips and tools from parents, professionals, and elders*. (Video series). Juneau, AK: Author.
- Drew, R. & Grass, R. (2005). Head Start: An avenue to revitalize a language. *Head Start Bulletin*, 78. Retrieved Jan. 31, 2006, from [http://www.headstartinfo.org/publications/hsbulletin78/hsb78\\_19.htm](http://www.headstartinfo.org/publications/hsbulletin78/hsb78_19.htm)
- Greymorning, S. (1997). Going beyond words: The Arapaho immersion program. In Reyhner, J. (Ed.), *Teaching indigenous languages*. Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University.
- Greymorning, S. (1999). Running the gauntlet of an indigenous language program. In Reyhner, J. (et al.) (Eds.), *Revitalizing indigenous languages*. Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1995). *A position statement: Responding to linguistic and cultural diversity recommendations for effective early childhood education*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2003). *A position statement: Early childhood curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation: building an effective, accountable system in programs for children birth through age 8*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Peacock, T. D., & Day, D. R. (1999). *Teaching American Indian and Alaska Native languages in the schools: What has been learned*. Charleston, WV:

- ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Pewewardy, C., & Hammer, P.C. (2003). *Culturally responsive teaching for American Indian students*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Rinehart, N. (2005). [Interview with Linda Killscrow regarding American Indian and Alaska Native children participating in Child Care and Development Fund program].
- Rinehart, N., Tagaban, J., Focht, D., & Squibb, L. (2002). Including AI/AN culture in the curriculum. *Proceedings of the Head Start Bureau Child Development Institute*, Albuquerque, NM: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau.
- Shultz, T. (2004, September). *Head start national reporting system update. Proceedings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual ALANPB National Conference*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Soleste, H. R., & Tharp, R. G. (2002). *Theoretical perspectives, research implications of the learning styles of American Indian and Alaska Native students*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Strand, J.A., & Peacock, T.D. (2003). *Nurturing resilience and school success in American Indian and Alaska Native students*. ERIC Digest. ED471488.
- Tabors, P. (1997). *One child, two languages*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Tabors, P. (2000). Bilingualism in early childhood education. *Proceedings of the National Head Start Child Development Institute*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau.
- U.S. Head Start Bureau. (2005). *Head Start program fact sheet: fiscal year 2004*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- U.S. Head Start Bureau. (2003). *The Head Start leaders guide to positive child outcomes: strategies to support positive child outcomes*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- U.S. Head Start Bureau. (2004). *Establishing a research agenda for American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- U.S. Head Start Bureau. (2003). *A summary of research and publications on early childhood for American Indian and Alaska Native children*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- U.S. Head Start Bureau. (2003). *Head Start Family and Child Experience Survey (FACES)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- U.S. Head Start Bureau. (n.d.). *Head Start Impact Study*. Retrieved July 20, 2005, from [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/impact\\_study](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/impact_study)
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2002). *The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2000*. Retrieved July 15, 2005, from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-15.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved July 15, 2005 from <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ana>
- U.S. Head Start Bureau. (2002). *English language learners focus group report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- U.S. Head Start Bureau. (n.d.). *Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project*. Retrieved July 15, 2005, from [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ehs\\_resrch/index.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ehs_resrch/index.html). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.