



SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO ARE LEARNING A TRIBAL LANGUAGE

It is important to ask families what exposure children have had to written language in English or their tribal language. Do parents or other family members read books in their tribal language? Do children live in a neighborhood where store signs or food in a grocery store are in their tribal language? Do parents or other family members write notes or shopping lists in their tribal language?

Take a moment to remember—writing is not just about learning how to spell and use punctuation (although these are of course important skills typically developed after the preschool years). Writing is fundamentally about a child's ability to effectively communicate ideas, feelings, theories, and hypotheses about relationships and how the world works. When adults intentionally support it, writing can support learning across all domains—math, literacy, science, social and emotional, and physical and motor development. Writing also promotes creativity and persistence, which are important school readiness skills



Writing is a perfect time for children to practice their developing language skills across ELOF domains. There are many ways to support families who have children who are learning a tribal language. Here are just a few:

1. Encourage children to write in whichever language they choose. Accept all levels of children's writing or use of written characters or symbols (syllabary writing).
 - If you are writing what a child says, remember she may use two languages when describing the drawing. As you write what she says, record her exact words
 - If possible, learn about any differences between writing English and the tribal language (e.g., different characters; writing from right to left). This will help you understand what the child knows about writing. Some tribes do not have a written language, or they may use pictures or syllabary writing to share their history and communicate. Talk with families about ways to include storytelling, syllabary writing, or non-written language into the learning environment.
 - Children's writing errors are learning opportunities. Error-free writing is not the goal or expectation for young children. Encourage invented spelling (which could be full of errors), as it shows us that children understand how letters and sounds work together. For children who speak phonetic languages at home—as in, the way the word sounds is the way it is spelled—spelling in English can be challenging, because letters can make different sounds.
 - Take the time to figure out which stage of writing the child is in. It may be different in each language! Understanding which stage of writing children are in will help you decide which supports children need to move forward.
2. Provide print materials in the child's tribal language
 - Make sure children have many opportunities to see their language in writing, such as books and pictures and labels for materials or routines.

