



## SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO ARE LEARNING A TRIBAL LANGUAGE

Partner with families to learn about their written language. Share the developmental progression for exposing children to the 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. Support parent's as they encourage their child to write in whichever language they choose. Encourage parents to accept all levels of writing (the earliest form is drawing).
  - Remind parents that when they write down what a child says, she may use two languages. As parents write their child's description, have them record the child's 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.
  - Children's writing errors are learning opportunities. Error-free writing is not the goal or expectation for young children. Support parents as they encourage their child's invented spelling (which could be full of errors). 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.
  - Help parents understand which stage of writing their child is in. It may be different in each language! Knowing the child's stage of writing with help you understand what supports to provide parents to help children progress.
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.

