

REL Southwest Ask A REL Response

March 2022

Question:

What research-based strategies are useful in teaching the Navajo or other Native American languages?

Response:

Thank you for the questions you submitted to our REL Reference Desk. We have prepared the following memo with research references to help answer your questions. For each reference, we provide an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the study's author or publisher. Following an established Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive study articles on research-based strategies that are useful in teaching the Navajo or other Native American languages.

We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, we searched the references in the response from the most commonly used resources of research, but they are not comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References provided are listed in sections with sources in each section in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. We do not include sources that are not freely available to the requestor.

Research References

Carjuzaa, J. (2017). Revitalizing indigenous languages, cultures, and histories in Montana, across the United States and around the globe. *Cogent Education*, 4(1), 1–12, Article 1371822. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1168415>

From the ERIC abstract: “Many educators have sung the praises of Indian Education for All, Montana's constitutional mandate, and heard the successes of Montana's Indigenous language revitalization efforts which reverberate around the globe. Teaching Indigenous languages is especially, challenging since there are limited numbers of fluent speakers and scarce resources resulting from harsh education and language policies imposed by the US federal government throughout the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries. Tribal members in Montana spearheaded a unique licensure process for Indigenous language instructors to revitalize and maintain their languages. Language revitalization as a

culturally responsive pedagogy strategy is enacted through Class 7 certification, as it is known. It took years of work to assure that the authority rests with the tribal nations, where it should be, to decide who should be a language/culture teacher. By embracing culturally responsive pedagogy, a dramatic change to education in Montana to truly promote the espoused democratic ideals of justice and equity has resulted. This multi-pronged approach has absorbed the revitalization of Indigenous languages; all 11 Indigenous languages in Montana, are critically endangered. One of the most successful efforts at Indigenous language/cultural revitalization has resulted from the establishment of Indigenous language immersion schools. The creation of immersion programs within public schools in Montana has resulted in a critical need to provide much needed professional development to Indigenous language instructors.”

REL Southwest Note: Access this article by clicking “Direct Link” on the ERIC landing page.

Carreira, M., & Kagan, O. (2011). The results of the National Heritage Language Survey: Implications for teaching, curriculum design, and professional development. *Foreign Language Annals*, 44(1), 40–64. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ916154>. Retrieved from https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/heritagespanish/files/carreira_kagan_survey_0.pdf

From the ERIC abstract: “This article reports on a survey of heritage language learners (HLLs) across different heritage languages (HLs) and geographic regions in the United States. A general profile of HLLs emerges as a student who (1) acquired English in early childhood, after acquiring the HL; (2) has limited exposure to the HL outside the home; (3) has relatively strong aural and oral skills but limited literacy skills; (4) has positive HL attitudes and experiences; and (5) studies the HL mainly to connect with communities of speakers in the United States and to gain insights into his or her roots. We argue that a community-based curriculum represents an effective way to harness the wealth of knowledge and experiences that HLLs bring to the classroom and to respond to their goals for their HL.”

Hinton, L. (2011). Language revitalization and language pedagogy: New teaching and learning strategies. *Language and Education*, 25(4), 307–318. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ932710>. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232941767>

From the ERIC abstract: “Language learning and teaching of endangered languages have many features and needs that are quite different from the teaching of world languages. Groups whose languages are endangered try to turn language loss around; many new language teaching and learning strategies are emerging, to suit the special needs and goals of language revitalization. The teaching of “foreign languages,” “majority languages,” “heritage languages” and endangered languages is compared in this paper. Because of the paucity of language teaching resources for endangered languages, and especially because of the special goals of learning for language revitalization, individuals and communities and the professionals who work with them are developing novel ways of teaching and learning their ancestral language, to meet the goals of language learners and their communities.”

Inglebret, E., Jones, C., & Pavel, D. M. (2008). Integrating American Indian/Alaska Native culture into shared storybook intervention. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 39(4), 521–527. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ812585>. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20170808161342id_/http://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/elearning/jss/8240/8240Article5.pdf

From the ERIC abstract: “Purpose: The purpose of this clinical exchange is to provide information for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) so they will be able to provide culturally responsive intervention for young children of American Indian and Alaska Native heritage. The focus is on a particular strategy—the integration of culturally based stories into shared storybook intervention. Method: The use of culturally based stories is presented as it relates to sociocultural theory and the expressed priority of Native peoples to revitalize their cultural teaching and learning practices, inclusive of storytelling. Strategies are presented that SLPs can follow in preparing for the use of culturally based stories, as well as in ensuring that the stories that are selected for use are authentic and appropriate for the children involved. The strategies discussed represent the collaborative efforts of Native and non-Native professionals to link a review of pertinent scholarly literature with ancestral knowledge that is derived from tribal elders and tradition bearers of the Southern Puget Salish peoples. The article concludes by illustrating the application of these strategies to a program involving young children of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Conclusion: SLPs can integrate culturally based stories into their language and literacy intervention to encourage American Indian and Alaska Native children.”

Moore, R. (2012). Taking up speech in an endangered language: Bilingual discourse in a heritage language classroom. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 27(2), 95–116. <https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1239&context=wpel>

From the abstract: “Faced with the ‘diversification of diversity’ (Vertovec 2010) that seems to define the contemporary world, some have called for a fundamental reorientation of sociolinguistics: from a focus on languages and speakers to a focus on resources and repertoires; from unitary, localized and countable ethnolinguistic communities to diasporized (or even virtual) ones; and from fully-fluent ‘native speaker’ competence to ‘individuals’ very variable (and often rather fragmentary) grasp of a plurality of differentially shared styles, registers and genres’ (Blommaert & Rampton 2011, 6). The ‘super-diversity’ that prompts such reflections, I argue, can and should be discussed together with what seems to be its opposite: the seeming loss of diversity brought about by processes of language shift, obsolescence, and endangerment. Examination of classroom discourse on a US Indian Reservation suggests that in this community, at least, people have long since moved on from the idea that all the competences associated with ‘proficiency’ in language need to coincide in a single person. These students are learning to speak (parler) rather than internalizing a complete grammar (langue); in this respect their project resembles that of (other) denizens of the ‘super-diverse’ metropole.”

Reyhner, J. (2010). Indigenous language immersion schools for strong indigenous identities. *Heritage Language Journal*, 7(2), 138–152. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ912634>

From the ERIC abstract: “Drawing on evidence from indigenous language immersion programs in the United States, this article makes the case that these immersion programs are vital to healing the negative effects of colonialism and assimilationist schooling that have disrupted many indigenous homes and communities. It describes how these programs are furthering efforts to decolonize indigenous education and helping further United Nations policies supporting the rights of indigenous peoples. The fit between place-, community-, and culture-based education and immersion language programs is described with examples from Apache, Ojibwe, Dine (Navajo), Hawaiian, and Blackfeet language programs, illustrating how traditional indigenous values are infused into language programs to help build strong positive identities in indigenous students and their communities.”

REL Southwest Note: Access this article by clicking “Direct Link” on the ERIC landing page.

Additional Organization to Consult

Diné Institute for Navajo Nation Educators, Northern Arizona University – <https://in.nau.edu/dine/>

From the website: “The Diné Institute for Navajo Nation Educators (DINÉ) is a partnership between Northern Arizona University and schools on the Navajo Nation who are participating in the [Yale National Initiative](#). The Institute provides innovative K-12 teacher professional development that elevates curricular rigor and strengthens culturally responsive teaching in public, BIE, and tribally-controlled schools across the Diné Nation...

The DINÉ has three broad goals:

1. Establish sustainable partnerships between Navajo schools and NAU that empower teacher growth and foster mutually beneficial cultural and content knowledge between the partners.
2. Build capacity for culturally responsive, academically rigorous curriculum development and delivery among all teachers in Navajo schools.
3. Enhance and promote teacher leadership and student achievement within Navajo schools.”

REL Southwest Note: On the website, K-12 teachers can find curriculum units by Diné Fellows and Yale National Fellows at <https://in.nau.edu/dine/dine-fellows-curriculum-units/> and https://teachers.yale.edu/curriculum/sort/index.php?page=sort_national_units&skin=h.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- [teaching languages (“Native American Indian” OR “Alaska Native”)]
- [(“evidence-based language instruction”) AND (“Native American Indian” OR “Alaska Native”)]
- [(“teaching strategies”) AND (“Native American languages”)]
- [(“Native American” OR “Alaska Native”) AND (“language teaching strategies”)]
- [(“Native American” OR “Alaska Native”) AND (“language acquisition strategies”)]
- Native American language acquisition strategies
- Alaska Native language acquisition strategies
- Indigenous language acquisition strategies
- Native American language proficiency
- [teaching languages (“Heritage Language”)]
- [(“evidence-based language instruction”) AND (“Heritage Language”)]
- [(“teaching strategies”) AND (“Heritage language”)]
- How to teach AND “Heritage Languages”
- Teaching a Heritage Language—Using descriptors: since 2013 + US + teaching methods

We searched [ERIC](#) for relevant, peer-reviewed research references. ERIC is a free online library of more than 1.8 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Additionally, we searched the [What Works Clearinghouse](#).

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

When we were searching and reviewing resources, we considered the following criteria:

- *Date of the publication:* References and resources published from 2007 to present were included in the search and review.
- *Search priorities of reference sources:* Search priority is given to study reports, briefs, and other documents that are published and/or reviewed by IES and other federal or federally funded organizations, academic databases, including ERIC, EBSCO databases, JSTOR database, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, and Google Scholar.
- *Methodology:* The following methodological priorities/considerations were given in the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized control trials, quasi-experiments, correlational studies, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, mixed methods analyses, and so forth; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected, and so forth), study duration, and so forth; and (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, and so forth.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by stakeholders in the Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest at AIR. This memorandum was prepared by REL Southwest under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-91990018C0002, administered by AIR. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.