



**2017 Project Directors Meeting**  
In Pursuit of Higher Education for All



Language Documentation and Revitalization:  
Research Implications for Native Children 0-5

Presented by:  
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**ISSUE**

Endangered language documentation can provide critical resources supporting language reclamation and revitalization (LR), but there are many questions about how documentation benefits LR, and how these practices impact Native communities.

This research supported by NSF Award # 1500720




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**BACKGROUND**

**Language Revitalization Issues Today**

An increasingly growing phenomenon of language shift towards English and away from Native languages is occurring across many tribes in the U.S. today.

**What comprises language documentation and its relationship to LR?**

Linguists have little guidance on how to structure their research activities and products to ensure they will be of use to the communities with which they work.




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## BACKGROUND

### **Preliminary research suggests LR has far-reaching linguistic, academic, social and health benefits.**

Link between LR and benefits to individuals and communities is not well-understood or documented and receives little attention within academia.

### **LR increasingly focuses on infant and preschool age children.**

Research on language development among children ages 0-5 in endangerment and LR contexts is especially lacking.

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## KEY QUESTIONS

- How, why, and to what extent does documentation benefit LR efforts? What are the methods for identifying and evaluating these benefits, and how can we achieve better cohesion between documentation practices and LR goals?
- What are the benefits of LR, including linguistic benefits (language competence and use) and extra-linguistic benefits relating to academic success, cultural survival and aspects of personal well-being?
- (How) does child language acquisition differ in maintenance, endangerment and revitalization situations?

Investigating these questions requires a broad range of skills and expertise, intensive and sustained collaboration between researchers and practitioners in academic and Native language communities.

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## OUR APPROACH

- Created and convened an interdisciplinary group of scholars and practitioners to examine research on language endangerment and revitalization across disciplinary and professional divides.
- Conducted a workshop on October 13-14, 2016 in Washington, DC to set a research agenda and convene 20 researchers and practitioners representing a variety of disciplines and communities including: descriptive and applied linguistics, public health, language pedagogy, psychology, psychiatry, indigenous studies, education and child development.

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## OUR APPROACH

- Surveyed existing research to establish what is known, identify gaps, and examine methodological concerns and areas needing further exploration and research.
- Explored four core topics:
  - Young learners in LR;
  - Documentation methods and products in support of LR;
  - Linguistic outcomes and benefits of LR; and
  - Extralinguistic outcomes and benefits of LR.
- Shared findings and preliminary recommendations with 20 DC-area researchers, funders, and federal agency representatives (Ruth Rouvier).

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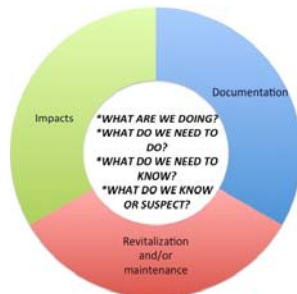
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## OUR APPROACH



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## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

White Paper summarized the findings, recommendations, and plans to be shared with academic, agency, funding and community partners. Title: *Language documentation, revitalization and reclamation: supporting young learners and their communities (2017)*.

- Deficit model predominates.
- Little research on children 0-5 and interdisciplinary and community-based research.
- Existing research is scattered, not widely disseminated and often difficult to find.

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## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Limited academic attention on these issues, no clear disciplinary or institutional “home” for research.
- Family and community are critical in shaping early brain development and language acquisition.
- Acquisition research mostly on standardized, politically dominant languages.
- Generally research does not address multilingual influences, language development sequences, and timelines likely to be different in LR contexts.

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## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Successful LR projects draw their direction and analytical framework from the community.
- LR is inextricably tied to cultural revitalization; shifts epistemological perspectives making interrelationships within a community more salient and changes in perspectives and behaviors possible.
- Documentation can generate excitement and pride in language within a community and develop skills and capacity for language work, but may also drain attention and resources from community revitalization efforts.

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## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Documentation goals may not align with revitalization; learners need basic, well-understood and well-described language, presented through a functional framework.
- Production of revitalization-focused materials is not widely valued within the linguistic community, and LR work carries risks for funding, tenure and promotion.
- Global indigeneity is associated with negative health factors.
  - Social disparities are often seen as determinants of health disparities.
  - LR linked to improved resilience, pre-natal care, retention and graduation rates; and lower rates of diabetes and suicide.
- Emphasis on respect in Native American cultures linked to an enhanced sense of tribal identity that is protective in aspects of health and well-being.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Shift to a "strength" model in examining language maintenance situations and comparing this to LR efforts aimed at young children.
- Improve coordination, communication and collaboration; create professional networks and institutional infrastructure to improve sharing of knowledge and connecting research with practice; and develop "system of monitoring" language/culture/health outcomes in revitalization or maintenance contexts.
- Expand scope of language documentation: acquisition (L1/L2); child language use; child-adult language use; language shift; documentation of and through revitalization; and sociolinguistic research on documentation and revitalization.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prioritize research on child development and language acquisition in LR:
  - Nature of input being received;
  - How linguistic, cognitive and social development is occurring;
  - How to enhance and support the learning process;
  - How cognitive benefits, such as increased executive function, inhibition, and focus are utilized differently (e.g. ceremony and cultural practices vs. work or school) in different communities; and
  - Contextualize children 0-5 within their families and communities.
- Create new research paradigms and protocols for documentation;
- Understand "health" as it is defined by communities, and language and cultural health as determinants of "health";
- Incorporate community-generated definitions of language outcomes and social determinants of outcomes; and
- Elevate the status of revitalization within linguistics and academia.

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## NEXT STEPS

- Create a permanent body that will engage in regular workshops and/or conferences to pursue and share collaborative research with scholars, practitioners, and tribes.
- Develop and pursue collaborative and multidisciplinary research to address identified needs and to identify promising approaches towards enhanced outcomes and impacts of documentation in LR and language maintenance initiatives. (e.g. Language Nests and full native language immersion programs in Head Start)
- Continue with Literature review (ongoing)
  - Continue to collect, review and summarize research papers and additional popular press articles that directly relate to these issues, in order to create a library of existing research.

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## NEXT STEPS

- Share preliminary findings and recommendations, discuss implementation and solicit feedback from workshops. (e.g. ICLDC Workshop conducted by Ruth Rouvier in March 2017)
- New Research Projects (ongoing). Develop collaborative and interdisciplinary research projects among working group participants and outside challenges to investigate key questions and explore new methodologies identified by the working group.

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Thank you for listening!

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