

Introducing the Native Culture & Language in the Classroom Observation (NCLCO)

Introduction

The American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey 2015 (AI/AN FACES 2015) is the first national descriptive study of children and families enrolled in Head Start programs operated by federally recognized tribes (known as Region XI AI/AN Head Start¹; see Bernstein et al., 2018, for an in-depth description of the study). Region XI programs incorporate their unique history, community traditions, and beliefs into their operations and integrate language and culture into the delivery of services to children and families. AI/AN FACES 2015 was informed by a workgroup comprised of Region XI Head Start directors, researchers from universities and Mathematica Policy Research (which conducted the study), and federal officials from the Administration for Children and Families (which funded the study).

Native culture and language are important components of the Head Start experience in Region XI, and therefore a particular focus of the study was to document the Native language and cultural experiences that children attending Region XI programs have in their classrooms. The workgroup members, in particular the Region XI Head Start directors, urged that the study capture the cultural experiences in the classroom in addition to using more common measures of classroom experiences. An observational measure of culture and language in Native classrooms did not exist, so the study team collaborated with workgroup members to develop an observational measure of Native culture and language in the classroom. The Native Culture & Language in the Classroom Observation (NCLCO) records the types of culturally significant materials that surround children in Region XI Head Start classrooms and can capture information on materials' use. The workgroup provided suggestions and feedback on types of items to include in the NCLCO, as well as examples of each item type listed in the final measure.

It is important to note that the NCLCO does not detail the quantity or depth of use of items existing within a classroom, but instead records the presence or absence of a particular item. For example, a classroom with 100 cultural books would be recorded the same as a classroom with one book. The language and cultural practices questions ask whether Native language use occurred in the classroom and, if so, whether it was used in instruction or in conversation. The questions also ask if storytelling following a Native oral tradition occurred. These items capture only whether or not these experiences occurred and not how frequently they occurred. Therefore, if a classroom used Native language in all lessons, it would score the same as a program that included Native language in just one lesson. For the full NCLCO, see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/native-culture-language-in-the-classroom-observation>. To our knowledge, AI/AN FACES 2015 is the only study so far to have used the NCLCO, but other studies have adapted the measure to capture the unique cultural and language experiences in classrooms.² The measure may be further refined before the NCLCO is used in the next round of AI/AN FACES in 2019.

Use in AI/AN FACES 2015

In each participating classroom, trained observers spent 3 to 4 hours completing two observational measures of classroom quality and the NCLCO.³ The measure is separated into two parts. For the **cultural items** portion of the measure, observers noted the presence of such items as cultural and Native language books, signs and labels in the Native language, Native musical instruments, Native food, objects from the natural world with special significance within a given Native culture, and Native dress and regalia. The NCLCO lists examples under each category, which are not meant to be exhaustive of all that might fit into that category. After noting the presence of a given item, observers noted whether the item was used during the observation period.

For the **cultural practices** portion of the measure, observers noted whether Native language was used during the observation and, if so, how it was used (i.e., instruction or conversation) and whether or not storytelling had occurred. Observers also noted whether any other activities occurred that provided children with the opportunity to engage in Native culture.

Findings From AI/AN FACES 2015

On average, 3.2 NCLCO cultural items were observed to be present in Region XI Head Start children's classrooms during the observation period in spring 2016. On average, one of those items was observed to have been in use during the 4-hour observation (see Figure 1 for more findings from the NCLCO).

Native language was used in the majority of children's classrooms in both instruction and conversations during the 4-hour classroom observation (see Figure 2). Storytelling occurred in only a minority of classrooms during the 4-hour observation (see Figure 3).

How Can the NCLCO Be Used?

Individual Region XI Head Start programs can use the NCLCO to observe their own classrooms and note the availability and use of Native cultural items included on the NCLCO. They can then compare their local data to a nationally representative sample of data to see if the availability and use of Native cultural items in their classrooms is similar to or different from their availability and use in Region XI classrooms nationally. The measure can also provide starting points for discussion about the ways that children are exposed to Native language and culture in the classroom. Possible discussion questions are:

How do you or will you implement culture and language in your program and classrooms?

How can you share information based on your own program and classrooms with your community?

¹ In this document, we use the terms American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), tribal, tribe, and Native to refer inclusively to the broad and diverse groups of American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, villages, communities, corporations, and populations in the United States, acknowledging that each tribe, village, community, corporation, and population is unique from others with respect to language, culture, history, geography, political and/or legal structure or status, and contemporary context.

² The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Study created the Cultural Items and Language Use Checklist (CILU, Barrueco, Layzer, & Caswell, 2017) based on the NCLCO.

³ The two measures of classroom quality were the Pre-K Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Pre-K CLASS) and the Early Childhood Environmental Rating System—Revised, Short Form (ECERS-R). More information about these measures can be found in the AI/AN FACES 2015 Users' Manual (Malone et al., 2018), which can be found at <https://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/studies/36804/datadocumentation>.

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Figure 1. Most children in Region XI were in classrooms with at least one type of cultural item. Use during the observation varied.

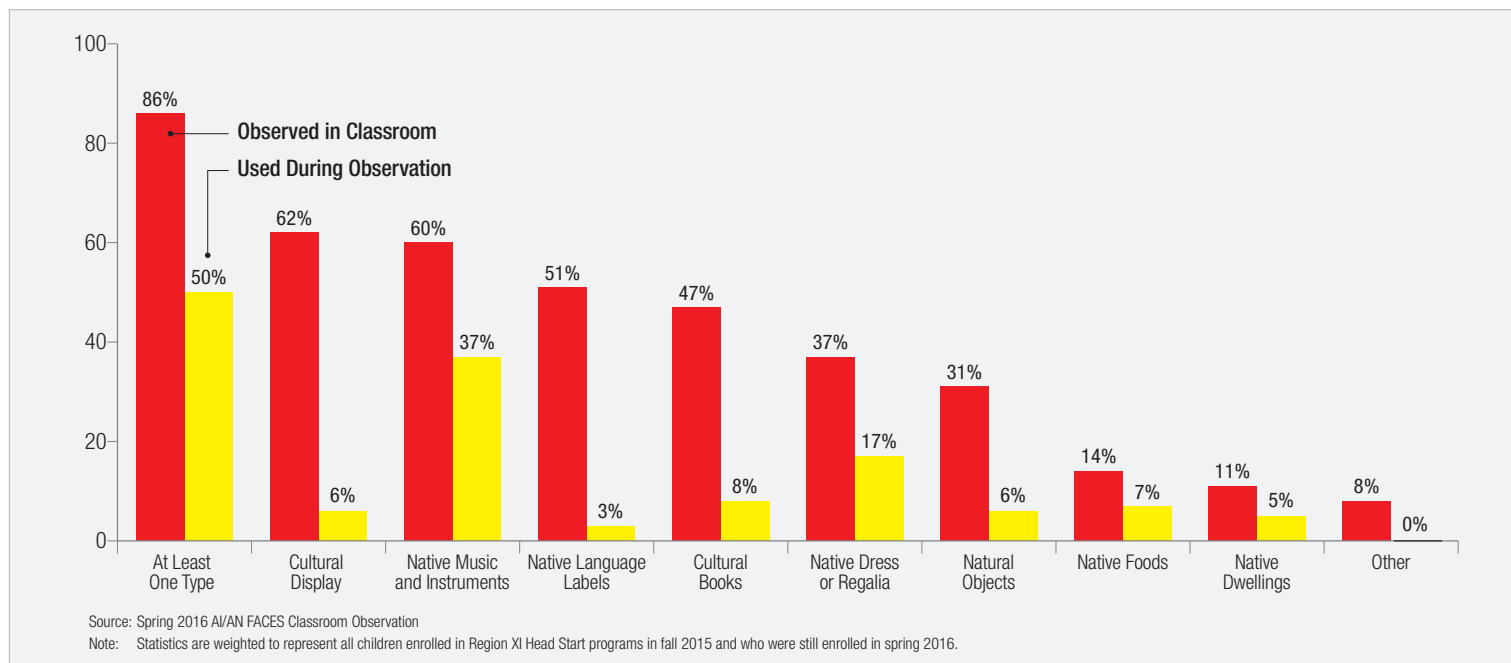


Figure 2. Almost two-thirds of children were in classrooms where Native language use was observed, and it was most often used in lessons.

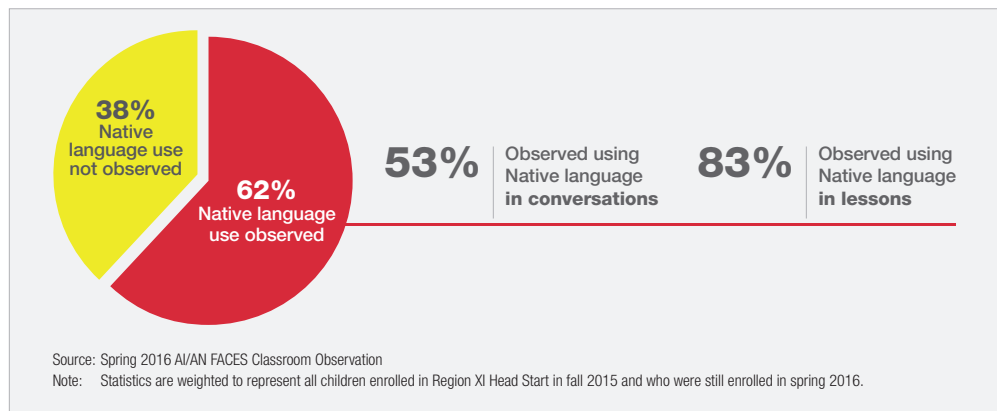
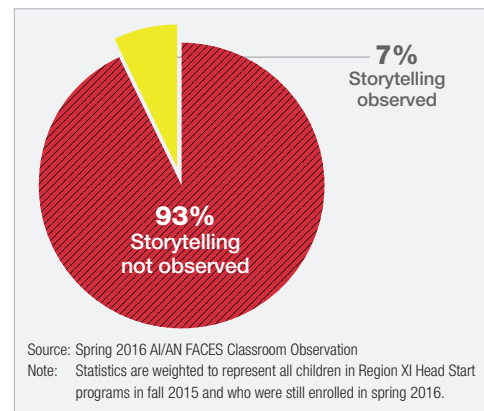


Figure 3. Few children were in classrooms where storytelling occurred.



References

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