



Witsuwit'en Child and Family Centre
205 Beaver Road, Suite 2
Smithers, BC V0J 2N1

phone 250 847-2244 ext. 4 fax 250 877-5095

Witsuwit'en Child and Family Center Language Nest

What is a Language Nest?

A Language Nest is a language program for children aged birth to five years, where they are immersed in the Witsuwit'en Language. The Witsuwit'en Child and Family Centre provides a safe, home-like environment for young children to interact with fluent speakers through meaningful activities.

The goal of the Language Nest is not to 'teach' children the language, but rather to create an environment where language can be acquired as naturally as infants acquire their first language.



"A Language Nest is not the same as
an existing English-based childcare
program."

Only full immersion in the language makes a program a Language Nest.

We hope that immersing children in the language will have an impact beyond the Nest, through inspiring parents to learn and use the language in their home. Children alone should not have to shoulder the responsibility for revitalizing the language: they will require active support to practice their language skills and see the value of the language and its relevance in daily life within their homes.

“ The ideal Language Nest functions as just one of many strategies for language vitalization in our community.”

Why bother with a Language Nest?

There are two main benefits of a Language Nest. A Language Nest is one of the most effective means of revitalizing a language. Moreover, raising children in the language with a strong sense of identity and culture promotes academic excellence and a lifetime of health. The children are the future of our community, the culture and language. Long-term language revitalization depends on passing the language and culture on to the children and building close relationships between generations.



“The only way to save a language is to teach it to a child.”

Language Nest teachers and parents are ‘baby learning’ in this process. Through cultural teachings and language classes, parents and staff attend a weekly Witsuwit’en Language Class.

Principles of Language Immersion

A Language Nest uses the immersion method to help the children learn the language. But what is language immersion? This word is being used more frequently in a variety of contexts, but sometimes what is labeled ‘immersion’ isn’t true immersion.

What is Immersion?

Language immersion is a method of language teaching that ‘immerses’ students in another language. For example, a First Nations immersion program would present all instruction. Activities and communication in the first nations language; meaning **no English** between the Nest hours.

“True immersion is ALL or NOTHING.”

The most important characteristic of immersion is that **no English** is used whatsoever! All communication is done in the language or by non-verbal gestures.

**“Use lots of repetition
to help build
familiarity with words
and phrases.”**



**Have fun, simple
activities.**

**Repeat, Repeat,
Repeat!**

As your child spends more time in the Nest, they will begin to understand a wide variety of simple words and sentences, though they may not yet be able to speak. They will be able to respond with action to commands like “sit down”, “stand up”, “take off your coat”, but they cannot say it yet. Instead, we use yes/no questions so that they can respond by nodding or shaking head.

Children will continue to parrot the language at this stage but they may also begin to use simple responses in the language, like yes or no. They may also use English to respond to questions. Encourage staff and child to always respond in Witsuwit'en.

After several months, the children will begin to speak!

Their speech will not be perfect, complete or grammatically correct, but they will be using the 'anguage to communicate. It is crucially important at this stage to encourage all children's attempts at speaking. Don't worry too much about trying to correct their speech, as they will continue to learn correct grammar and pronunciation as they receive more input, hearing more of the language.

Essentials of a Language Nest: Achieving Language Immersion

Here are a few essentials we offer to allow everyone to achieve language immersion:

- **No English at all** (because every time English is spoken in the Nest an opportunity to learn is lost)
- Use gestures
- Use facial expressions
- Always respond in Witsuwit'en
- Teach simple words and phrases that learners can use
- Use pictures or objects to convey meaning
- Use your traditional name

Fluent Speakers Among the Elders and Staff

This is how we build our team:

- A successful Nest depends on a team of dedicated staff and parents
- Make sure everyone knows their own responsibilities and the group's responsibilities
- Clarify and discuss everyone's needs and expectations
- Create good paths of communication with staff and parents
- Schedule time for weekly classes
- Schedule time for weekly debriefing with staff and fluent speakers
- Talk openly about challenges
- Including elders is crucial to the success of the Nest
- Respect everyone's differences
- Communicate clearly
- Provide daily learning opportunities for staff and children

"Everyone who works in the Nest should be actively learning if they are not completely fluent."



Getting Parents involved

Parent involvement is essential to a successful Nest.

You may have heard the saying “It takes a family to save a language”. This is very true of the Language Nest. The long-term success of your Language Nest depends on the support and involvement from the parents.

The Language Nest *cannot* be the sole place where the children hear the language. If they are truly to become a new generation of fluent speakers, their language learning must be supported in the home.



Ways to get parents involved:

- Offer afternoon or evening classes
- Have parents volunteer in the Nest for 2 hours a month
- Hold weekly meetings
- Establish an Open Door policy
- Invite parents to participate in Nest activities
- Have parents organize an Open House twice a year

Note All quotes in this document are taken from the *First People's Language Nest Handbook*.



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Language Nest Schedule 2018-2019

- 8:15-9:00 AM** Drop-off times (greet in Witsuwit'en every morning)
- 9:00-10:00 AM** Total Physical Response with toys and body, with a weekly focus on one thing (for example, animals, cars, trucks, body parts)
- 10:00-10:30 AM** Snack time and diapering with Witsuwit'en words
- 10:30-11:30 AM** Outside play, gym time or a walk
- 11:45-12:00 PM** Transition into lunch. All staff and fluent speakers sit with children and engage them in Witsuwit'en immersion.

All non-Witsuwit'en conversations must take place in the boot room.

- 12:15 PM** Diapering and rest time
- 2:00 PM** Afternoon snack
- 2:15 PM** Activities in Witsuwit'en (painting, colouring, art, floor play, puzzles, books, drumming, singing)
Repeat! Repeat! Repeat!
- 3:00 PM** Pick-up time
- 4:30 PM** Last pick-up time for those who have approved arrangements.

Snecalyegh! We look forward to another full year of the Language Nest.

Note Language Nest parents are required to attend the weekly Language Nest classes every Tuesday, 5:30-8:00 PM. Your child could lose their space if you do not attend classes.



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Language Nest Vocabulary

Common Phrases

Say it again	kwa za 'idiiniih
our	niwh
Speak slowly	Negus yez 'idiiniih
Who is that?	Ndii nuda' 'itikh?
It tastes good	ts'olniih
Yes, it tastes good	Ts'olniih
No, it tastes bad	Mi' ts'olniih
My name is	Siy sozii' ...
Thank you	Mesiyh
Here you go	Nah
Give it to me	De'
fell down	nel bez

Pronouns

i	siy
you	nyin
we	'anu
you guys	niwhnii
his/hers/it	bi
their	hibi

STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Here are some strategies that will help you encourage the children's language development. Remember, in an immersion environment, all of these strategies would be done in *your* language. The examples here are given in English. ³

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE
Ask a yes/no question: This allows the child to respond with a yes or no or a simple nod of the head, which tells you she/he understands the question.	<i>Do you want a glass of milk?</i>
Ask a choice question: This allows the child to respond with a choice that is provided in the question itself. It shows that the child understands the question and allows her/him to respond with an easy answer.	<i>Do you want a glass of milk or a glass of juice?</i>
Ask an open-ended question: This requires the child to both understand the question and ask for what they need.	<i>What do you want to drink?</i>
Imitation: The child is asked to repeat the model provided by the adult.	Caregiver: <i>Look, I am rolling the clay. You are too. Can you say, "I am rolling the clay"?</i> Child: <i>Roll clay!</i>
Imitation with open-ended question: The request for imitation includes only a question prompt.	Caregiver: <i>Look, I am rolling the clay. You are too. What are you doing?</i> Child: <i>Roll clay!</i>
Recasting (imitation with correction): The adult responds to the child's spontaneous language by repeating the child's sentence with the correct form.	Child: <i>I runned really fast!</i> Caregiver: <i>Yes! You ran really fast, didn't you?</i>
Modeling: The adult models a target form, such as the past tense.	Caregiver: <i>I washed my hands then I dried my hands, now I'm ready to eat. What did you do?</i>
Scaffolding: The adult provides the sentence structure to support the child's own attempt at speaking.	Caregiver: <i>Look, here is a big dog. This dog is big, and this one is _____.</i> Child: <i>Little!</i> Caregiver: <i>Right! And this dog is standing, and this one is _____.</i> Child: <i>Sitting!</i>
Focused stimulation: The adult provides several example sentences to the child, and then asks a question that requires the target form.	(Target is the verb swimming .) Caregiver: <i>Look, the dog is running, the cat is running, and the bear is running. Is the fish running?</i> Child: <i>No, the fish is swimming!</i>
Expansion: The adult responds to the child's spontaneous language by including additional information.	Child: <i>Baby sleeping!</i> (Said about a doll.) Caregiver: <i>Yes, your baby is sleeping, isn't she? She must be tired. We should be quiet so we don't wake her up, shouldn't we?</i>
Prompting: The adult gently reminds the child of the expected response.	Caregiver: <i>What do we say when someone gives us food?</i> Child: <i>Thank you!</i>
Reinforcement: Praise the child for appropriate language use.	Caregiver: <i>I like the way you said "thank you"!</i>