

## ACE<sup>3</sup> Project

The Arizona Centers of Excellence in Early Education (ACE<sup>3</sup>) project was an Early First Reading collaborative partnership that included two school districts (Gadsden Elementary and Somerton Elementary), a regional Head Start agency (Western Arizona Council of Governments), the Cocopah Indian Tribe, Arizona State University (ASU) and the Southwest Institute for Families and Children (SWI).

ACE<sup>3</sup> started in 2003 and served approximately 1,300 children in four preschool Centers from two LEAs and two non-LEAs in and around the cities of San Luis and Somerton, Arizona (Yuma County) including the Cocopah Indian Reservation. The area lies on the Mexico-United States border and is an enterprise community and empowerment zone (EZ/EC).

All children in the project were eligible for free-reduced lunch and 95% were English Language Learners (ELL). The Centers provided these children with the skills necessary to be ready to read English and to excel academically by meeting the following goals: 1) Provide print-rich environments and science-based early reading curricula that increase preschool-aged children's oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness and alphabet knowledge, 2) Help children with special needs through direct instruction, classroom based assessment, and family-teacher collaboration, 3) Involve parents in family-centered literacy activities, peer mentoring, programmatic home-school linkages, and 4) Build community support for early literacy.

Doors to Discovery and Phonemic Awareness in Young Children: A Curriculum formed the core curriculum that focused on science-based early reading skills. Intensive professional development was provided through on-site training and mentoring. State-of-the art web-based

and DVD/CD delivery were used to educate professionals as well as parents, community and tribal members. To promote continuity of school experiences, the project had an active partnership among preschools and elementary schools in the four educational agencies. For example, preschool, kindergarten, and elementary teachers worked together to align their reading instruction curriculum and instruction. Project effectiveness was assessed using formative and summative evaluation, including longitudinal pre-post, experimental versus control group designs.

The results of the project effectiveness showed that ACE<sup>3</sup> was successful. The data indicated that the children who participated in the project responded to the intervention and showed greater gains in early literacy skills compared to a comparison group on standardized measures of English vocabulary and phonological awareness both in preschool and kindergarten. The results also showed that the project was effective in terms of reducing the risk level for ELL children and the need for additional instructional help in kindergarten.