

**Overview of the Findings of the  
*Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth***

CD  
ENCLOSED

DEVELOPING  
LITERACY IN  
SECOND-LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL LITERACY PANEL ON  
LANGUAGE-MINORITY CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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# ***National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth***

## ■ Identification of Research Questions

- Development of Literacy in language-minority children and youth
- Cross-linguistic and cross-modal relationships
- Socio-cultural contexts and literacy development
- Instruction and professional development
- Student Assessment

# ***National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth***

- 1800 titles initially identified for inclusion in the review
- Reduced to a total of 970 studies based the panel's judgment of relevance to the research questions and technical adequacy.
- Criteria for inclusion
  - Empirical data had to be reported – no thought pieces
  - Allowed book chapters and dissertations when no or little juried research journal research reports were available
  - 50% or more of the research sample had to be language-minority students
  - When experiments, quasi experiments, single subject designs or multiple base-line studies were reported they must have control groups, groups sizes of at least 4 students in each cell, and be conducted for a minimum of 6 months
  - When correlation studies were examined they must have at least 20 subjects or more.
  - Published after 1979
  - Published in English
  - Subjects must be children 3-18
  - Data must be disaggregated for various groups
- Criteria for elimination
  - Serious confounds exist in the design
  - Not relevant to research questions

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

## ■ Findings

- Meta-analyses of 10 studies indicate that first and second-language speakers are **equivalent** in word reading accuracy.
- Meta-analyses of 9 studies indicate that first and second-language speakers are **equivalent** in spelling performance.
- Too few studies in writing to draw conclusions

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

## ■ Predictors of Word-Level Performance

- "Second-language predictors of second-language word-level literacy skills among language-minority students in the primary grades are similar to those identified in decades of research on early reading development conducted with native speakers" (p. 62-63).

## ■ Predictors of Text-Level Performance

- "The same variables have been shown in other work to relate to monolingual's reading comprehension." (pg. 63)... As those shown to predict second-language learners reading comprehension.

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- Language-minority Students Identified as Having Literacy Difficulties
  - Word level: “There are similar proportions of language-minority students and monolingual speakers classified as poor readers...with the exception of oral language skills, the overall profiles of poor readers in the two groups are very similar” (p. 63). Both groups have problems with “phonological awareness and working memory.”

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- Relationship between English Oral Proficiency and English Literacy
  - Measures of oral language proficiency in English ...were not strong predictors of word and pseudo-word reading for language-minority children. (p. 63).
  - Not much can be said about spelling from the current body of research.
  - The crucial role of oral vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension suggest that limited vocabulary knowledge is associated with low levels of reading comprehension in English and English-language learners with a large repertoire of high-frequency and academically relevant words are better able process written texts than English-language learners without such a repertoire” (p.65).

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

## ■ Recommendations for Future Research (Word Level)

- We do not know if emergent literacy skills vary by first-language background, amount of time in country, or preschool attendance or other factors.
- Not clear how early literacy skills in LM children relate to later literacy performance especially reading comprehension. Need longitudinal studies.

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- Recommendations for Future Research (Word Level)
  - We do not know which types of literacy instruction may in early years may be best for LM children.
  - What is the relationship between LM children's word reading accuracy and word reading rate?
  - What is the relationship between LM children's fluency and reading comprehension?
  - What is the development of spelling in older LM children?

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- Recommendations for Future Research (Text Level)
  - What is the development of reading comprehension in LM children compared with ML children?
  - What is the nature of LM children's reading comprehension difficulties?
  - What are the specific skills having the greatest influence on reading comprehension?
  - What are precursors to reading fluency in LM children?
  - What is the relationship of years of L2 instruction and other contextual and demographic features with reading comprehension?
  - Writing research is wide open

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- Recommendations for Future Research (Learning Difficulties)
  - How can we “disentangle the interactions among second-language learning difficulties and such factors as resources in schools, opportunities to learn, socio-cultural context, and psychometric issues” (p. 67.)

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- Relationship of Oral Language Proficiency to Second-Language Literacy
  - Is PA or Oral Language proficiency a better predictor of reading in English?
  - Questions concerning the role of language proficiency in the domains of reading fluency and comprehension are particularly pertinent in second-language contexts, but there is almost no research in this area” (p.68).

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- “The development of reading comprehension [among L2s], like that of word level skills, is highly dependent on effective instruction” (p. 100).
- “All studies showed language-minority students performing less well than their native-speaking peers on measures of reading comprehension. Unfortunately these studies provide little or no information about the reading comprehension instruction that these students were receiving” (p. 102).
- Not enough research in writing to state any conclusions.
- Little is known about how or if PA and oral language proficiency (vocabulary and grammar knowledge) predict L2 students’ spelling development. (p. 129).

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- “English oral language proficiency skills explain a modest proportion of unique variance (3-4%) in L2 students’ word reading scores” (p. 131).
- “PA and WM in English are more robust and consistent predictors of accurate English word reading skills than do English oral language proficiency such as vocabulary and grammar skills”

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- “The review of studies on the relationship between second-language oral proficiency and spelling suggest that there is not a strong relationship between grammatical sensitivity and English and the English spelling skills of elementary –level English-language learners, but that vocabulary skills in English may be related to spelling skills in English” (p. 131).
- “The review also appears to indicate that spelling accuracy among ELL is predicted by phonological processing skills and pseudo-word decoding” (p. 131).

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# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- “advanced ELLs were able to read more fluently than might have been expected given their oral language skills in English” (p. 132).
- “Finding from the available research on SLL suggest that having well-developed oral language proficiency in English is associated with well-developed reading comprehension skills in English – including oral vocabulary knowledge (ability to give definitions), awareness of cognates, listening comprehension, oral storytelling skills, and syntactic skills” (p. 135).
- “English oral language proficiency and English reading comprehension are also mediated by contextual factors, such as home language use, literacy practices, and SES, as well as by differences in instructional and other educational experiences” (p. 135).

# Development of Literacy in Language-Minority Students

- “Well developed oral language skills in English are associated with better writing skills in English” (p. 136).
- “In general, research on the role of English language proficiency in the development of English writing skills in ELLs is limited” (p. 138).
- “The available research suggest that English oral language proficiency is consistently implicated when larger chunks of text are involved, whether in reading comprehension or writing” (p. 139).

# First – and Second-Language Literacy

- “In summary, findings from four of the five studies reviewed previously yielded results that support the interdependence hypothesis suggesting that across a wide range of ages, word reading skills acquired in one language transfer to the other” (p. 202).
- “Six of the seven studies reviewed here investigated the transfer from the first to the second language; the single study that looked at reverse transfer found it to occur from English to Spanish spelling” (p. 209).

# First – and Second-Language Literacy

- “Without exception, these studies provide evidence for cross-language transfer of cognate vocabulary” (p. 214).
- In the aggregate, the results of studies on the transfer of vocabulary knowledge suggest that aspects of word knowledge transfer across languages. In the process of inferring meaning for unknown words, transfer can be negative, as when meaning is erroneously assigned to words based on the influence of the first-language syntax or the meaning associations of cognates are not differentiated in the two languages” (p. 217).

# First – and Second-Language Literacy

- “In summary, all these studies provide evidence for the cross-language transfer of reading comprehension ability in bilinguals...With respect to the influence of level of second-language proficiency, these studies present conflicting findings” (p. 222).
- “In summary, with the exception of Hernandez (1991), all the studies reviewed previously provide evidence supporting the notion that bilingual children who read strategically [using reading strategies] in one language also do so in their other language” (p. 227).

# First – and Second-Language Literacy

- "In summary, the studies reviewed here suggest a number of possibilities about 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> language writing relationships...
  - Beginning writers use what is known about writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> language for forming hypotheses about writing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language.
  - Young children receiving instruction in a 2<sup>nd</sup> language exclusively, writing skills may develop first in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language and subsequently in the 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - For older children with varying proficiencies in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> languages, aspects of writing ability may correlate only for students proficient in the 1<sup>st</sup> but not in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language, suggesting that early in 2<sup>nd</sup> language acquisition these children draw on resources available to them in their 1<sup>st</sup> language.

# Socio-cultural Contexts and Literacy Development

- "Clearly, immigration and refugee experiences can create traumatic situations for children and families: however, there is no evidence that these experiences impede literacy achievement. Literacy outcomes are more likely to relate to home (and school) language and literacy learning opportunities, irrespective of immigration circumstances" (p. 255).

# Socio-cultural Contexts and Literacy Development

- “The most we can say given the available research is that bridging home-school differences in interaction can enhance students’ engagement and level of participation in classroom instruction. This outcome is certainly not trivial, but it is not the same as enhancing student achievement or other types of learning outcomes –effects the existing data cannot confirm” (p. 256).

# Socio-cultural Contexts and Literacy Development

- “One fairly consistent finding across a number of studies is that language-minority students’ reading comprehension performance improves when they read culturally familiar materials... However, the language of the text appears to be a stronger influence on reading performance: Students perform better when they read or use material in the language they know better. The influence of cultural content is not as robust...Students’ cultural affiliations are frequently confounded with SES – for which,...there is strong evidence of an impact on literacy outcomes – rendering interpretation even more problematic” (p. 256).

# Socio-cultural Contexts and Literacy Development

- The influence of Parents and Families
  - Language-minority parents express willingness and often have the ability to help their children succeed academically.
  - More home literacy experience/opportunities are generally associated with superior literacy outcomes, but findings in this regard are not consistent, and precise conclusions are difficult to find.
  - The relationship between home language use and language-minority children's literacy outcomes is unclear.

# Socio-cultural Contexts and Literacy Development

- The influence of Policies
  - The research base does not permit firm conclusions (p. 257).
- Language Prestige or Status
  - Possible costs for 1<sup>st</sup> language maintenance
  - Lower prestige of Spanish may affect teachers' assessment of student competence and thus result in low-level instructional practices (p. 258).

# Instruction and Professional Development

- “The findings of studies that have compared bilingual and English-only approaches must continue to be interpreted with great caution. The Institute of Education Sciences is currently funding three evaluation studies employing experimental or quasi-experimental methods and will compare outcomes for students instructed in English-only with those instructed with some use of the native language” (p. 398).

# Instruction and Professional Development

- “The findings of all five studies [PA and Phonics] are consistent with the solid findings of 1<sup>st</sup> language research. The NRP examined 52 studies of PA instruction and another 38 studies of phonics instruction. Both conferred clear benefits on children’s reading development, as determined by a wide range of measures...” (p. 427).

# Instruction and Professional Development

- “Fluency instruction benefits native and appears to similarly benefit ELLs. There is a clear need for more research into the most effective way to teach oral reading fluency to children who are learning English as a 2<sup>nd</sup> language” (p. 429).

# Instruction and Professional Development

- “The three studies of vocabulary instruction for ELLs reviewed here yielded findings consistent with those of vocabulary studies of native speakers. However, there is a great need for more investigation into what constitutes sound and effective vocabulary instruction for ELLs” (p. 431).

# Instruction and Professional Development

- “.... These few studies [on ELL reading comprehension] did not show a consistent advantage for comprehension strategy instruction. Given the small number of studies reviewed here, it is impossible to determine the best way to facilitate reading comprehension for ELLs” (p. 433).

# Instruction and Professional Development

- "Common instructional routines may need to be adjusted to make instruction in the literacy components maximally effective with ELLS. Unfortunately, authors often have been silent in describing such adjustments" (p. 437).
- "We can enhance literacy development of ELLs with better instruction" (p. 447). "Most interventions had a greater impact on decoding and fluency than on reading comprehension" (p. 448).
- "It may be that what is needed is sound reading instruction combined with simultaneous efforts to increase the scope and sophistication of these (ELLs) students' oral language proficiency" (p. 448).

# Instruction and Professional Development

- “In the aggregate, however, it appears that what works with native-speaker populations *generally* works with ELLs. In fact, instruction that emphasizes literacy components confers a learning advantage to ELLs. The effect sizes for such teaching tend to be in the moderate range, meaning that its benefits are large enough to be important.”
- “Effect sizes for ELL are lower and more variable than those for native ES students, suggesting that such teaching is likely to be necessary, but insufficient for improving literacy achievement among ELLs.”

# Instruction and Professional Development

## ■ School Change Factors

- "Importance of mobilizing [all] staff to focus on the needs of ELLs, even when students are few in number. Doing so shows very positive results.
- Efforts must be sustained and comprehensive.
- Schools worked with staff at local universities who assisted with staff development and school change efforts and documented the process of the changes that occurred, for both the students and the school, over time" (p. 522).

# Instruction and Professional Development

## ■ Special Education

- “One important issue raised by these studies is the manner in which students are identified as learning disabled and the assessments used to track their progress... Studies should be designed to differentiate between a language delay and a reading disability” (p. 539).
- “The studies reviewed in this section investigated a variety of techniques designed to improve the language and literacy development of language-minority students with special needs. Of interest is that approaches grounded in different theoretical models were to be promising” ..behavioral, cognitive, interactive, and holistic (p. 537).

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