

NATIONAL LITERACY PANEL ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERACY
AMONG LANGUAGE MINORITY CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Update on Activities
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Update on Progress of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth

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Through an award to SRI International and the Center for Applied Linguistics, a project was established to convene a national panel of experts to review and synthesize the available research on the literacy development of language minority children and youth. The project began on October 1, 2001. Since its inception, through three full-panel meetings and a series of small group meetings and conference calls, we have: constituted the National Literacy Panel (NLP), staffed the panel; developed an Intranet website; established the parameters for the synthesis; organized the panel into subcommittees; conducted two outreach meetings; completed a comprehensive search of the research literature; and developed a coding instrument. Each task is briefly described below.

Constitution of the Panel

Through extensive collaboration with IES staff, we constituted a panel composed of 14 researchers with extensive expertise in the area of literacy. [Click here for a list of the panel members.](#)

Staffing

Diane August is the principal investigator and project director for the NLP project. Grace Burkart manages the project at the Center for Applied Linguistics and Marilyn Gillespie manages the project at SRI International. As a result of a comprehensive national search, we have hired four research assistants to help with the project. Jill Woodell is based at the Center for Applied Linguistics and is responsible for helping administer the project and ensuring that the database of research is current. She has an MA from Georgetown University in English as a Second Language and Bilingual Education. Two research assistants are affiliated with the School of Education at Harvard University. Cheryl Dressler has recently completed her EdD in the Human Development and Psychology program and Jennifer Kang is ABD in the Language and Literacy program. The fourth research assistant, Nonie LeSaux is a PhD student in the Program in Special Education at the University of British Columbia.

Intranet Web Site

To facilitate communication during the work of the NLP, CAL has created a password-protected area on its Web site that is exclusively accessible to panel members and others officially associated with the project. The site provides entry to specialized listservs and to an Intranet. A searchable database will soon be added to contain the records on the documents that are coded by the RAs and panelists.

Parameters for the Synthesis and Identification of Key Research Questions

Through extensive discussion at the three full-panel research meetings and in conference calls, we have established the parameters for the synthesis. The synthesis will focus on language minority children ages 3-18 acquiring literacy in a societal language.¹ We will review only research published in peer-reviewed journals and technical reports² dating back to 1980. We have identified six domains to investigate, as follows: the relationship between oracy and literacy, the transfer of skills from first language to second language literacy, the development of literacy, the context in which literacy is developed, effective practice to promote literacy, and the assessment of literacy. Within each research domain, we have identified a series of research questions.

Organization of the Panel

To address the research questions, the panel has been divided into six working groups. Each working group is responsible for synthesizing the research in a particular domain. In addition, the panel has a chairperson, Timothy Shanahan, who is helping guide the panel's work, and two methodologists. David Francis is providing expertise in quantitative methodology and Fred Erickson is providing guidance in qualitative methodology.

Outreach Meetings

Two outreach meetings were held to determine what the research, policy, and practitioner communities considered to be important research questions. There was extensive outreach to ensure robust attendance at the meetings. Through SRI's and CAL's networks of contacts in the field, contact people at key organizations were identified to nominate interested stakeholders who might be able to attend the meetings. In addition, federal agency personnel and personnel at school districts near the two meeting sites were asked to nominate possible participants. Announcements were posted on CAL's Web site and local media were contacted.

One meeting was held at the Los Angeles County Office of Education on September 19, 2002 and a second meeting was held at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC on September 24, 2002. A total of approximately 100 participants attended the two meetings. They were educators from districts and schools, including superintendents, principals, and teachers; parents and parent-teacher representatives; researchers and members of professional organizations; representatives from advocacy groups; and government officials. A total of 41 participants presented oral testimony at the two meetings. [Click here for more information about the outreach meetings.](#)

Comprehensive Search of the Research Literature

The procedures for searching the research literature may be described in terms of four searches: the preliminary search that was conducted during the months of June and July 2001 as a part of the tasks of a working group established to explore the feasibility of a full panel study; a second search in response to modifications of study inclusion criteria made at the first full-panel meeting, in May 2002; a third search in response to

¹ To answer several of the questions, we will also review research on the acquisition of literacy in a foreign language, if the foreign language is English.

² Technical reports will be incorporated if they focus on effective practice, context or assessment issues.

inclusion criteria changes made at the second full-panel meeting, in July 2002; and a fourth search in response to inclusion criteria changes made at the third full-panel meeting in October 2002 .

Preliminary Search. The researchers searched the ERIC, PsycInfo, LLBA, and Sociological Abstracts databases using keywords derived from each of the research questions. The exact keywords used in the different databases varied because each database has its own categorization of keywords and subject headings. In general, keywords defining the population (English as a second language, LEP or limited English proficient, non-English speaking, bilingual, linguistic minorities, and/or immigrants) were combined with keywords describing the research questions. An additional search was made of MEDLINE and the MLA Bibliography using more general keywords, and very few articles were found in those databases.

Only articles in refereed journals and relevant references from five major reviews were included. The reviews were: August and Hakuta, 1997; Fitzgerald 1995a, 1995b; Garcia, 2000; Gersten and Baker, 2000a, 2000b; and Kamil, et al, 2000. *Ulrich's International Periodicals Dictionary On-line* was used to determine if a journal is peer-reviewed. For those that did not appear in Ulrich's, additional information was obtained on-line or through phone calls to the journal publishers.

Second Search. The second search focused on obtaining: formerly excluded document-types, such as dissertation abstracts and technical reports; formerly excluded studies that measure teacher, rather than child outcomes; and formerly excluded studies that involve language-minority children in contexts where English is not the societal language.

Supplementary searches of several databases were performed. In most cases, the relevant citations and abstracts were downloaded into EndNote or Excel, and then imported into a Filemaker Pro database for coding. The ERIC search, however, yielded a number of citations that lacked an abstract. In those instances, supplementary procedures were used to obtain the relevant abstracts.

Third Search. The third search focused on obtaining technical reports that describe interventions (i.e., technical reports that are relevant to Research Question 5, as revised subsequent to the May 2002 meeting) and formerly excluded studies that involve foreign language literacy acquisition. Such studies were required to meet several criteria for inclusion: relevance to Research Question 2 or 3; explicit connection to reading, writing, or literacy; and explicit statement of subjects' age(s). All abstracts retrieved in the third search were imported into the FileMaker Pro database and coded.

In addition, the 1,553 abstracts generated by the preliminary and second searches were reviewed in light of modifications to inclusion criteria. Specifically, all articles that had been rejected because they were (1) not about ELL/LM students, and (2) because the target language was not the societal language, were re-examined. Those that could not be re-rejected on the basis of other rejection criteria (for example, document type), that were relevant to Research Questions 2 and 3, that specified

subjects' age(s), and that were explicitly connected to reading, writing, or literacy were coded "accepted." Eighteen abstracts involving foreign language literacy acquisition were added in this way to the set of "acceptable" abstracts.

Fourth Search. One part of the fourth search targeted studies that examine the literacy development of populations relevant to Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act. These populations include Native Americans, Hawaiian children, Alaska Natives, Puerto Ricans, and Pacific Islanders whether or not a language other than English is spoken at home. Secondly, it targeted studies that examine first language literacy outcomes for language minority children. Thirdly, it targeted studies that examine literacy development for creole and pidgin speakers. Finally, it targeted studies where literacy-related components (vocabulary, metalinguistic awareness, and phonological awareness) are the dependent variables.

Currently, the database consists of a substantial number of studies in each domain: the relationship between oracy and literacy (128), the transfer of literacy from a first language to a second language (127), the development of literacy in second language learners (254), the context in which literacy is developed (151), efforts to improve literacy outcomes for second language learners (157), and assessment (44). Hard copy of most of the research articles relevant to their research domains has been sent to the panelists. The remaining articles have been ordered and will be sent shortly.

Coding Instrument

The project director conducted a national search to locate an appropriate coding instrument for research syntheses that the panel could adapt for its purposes. She located a variety of instruments currently in use by various national organizations including the National Reading Panel, the National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators (EQI Quality Review Tool), the American Psychological Association and the Society for the Study of School Psychology (Procedural Manual for Review of Evidence-Based Interventions), and the What Works Clearinghouse (Design and Implementation Assessment Device, Version 0.3). The What Works Clearinghouse Design and Assessment Device proved to be the most useful. Drs. August and Francis adapted the instrument so that it could be used for coding a variety of study types including group comparisons, correlational studies, and qualitative studies. During the development process, they solicited extensive feedback from the panel and used this feedback to revise the instrument. The panel has reviewed and approved the newest version of the instrument. To establish interrater reliability, the research assistants are coding 12 studies using the instrument. The studies have been randomly sampled from the six research domains and reflect the different methodologies employed by the studies. The coding will also serve as a basis for additional revisions to the instrument. The research assistants will meet with Drs. August and Francis in mid-December for this purpose.

Coding and Electronic Database

We are currently turning the Word version of the coding instrument into a FileMaker Pro format. The objective criteria of the studies will be coded offline by the research assistants and then exported to six databases aligned with the research domains.

Panelists, through passwords, will be able to access the coded studies in their domain, review the work of the research assistants, comment on the work of the research assistants, and code the quality criteria for the studies in their domain.

Next Steps

The panelists are beginning to sort the research in their respective domains into conceptually coherent categories and to read the research studies in preparation for writing the first draft of the report. After the meeting in mid-December to establish interrater reliability, the research assistants will begin coding and exporting the studies to the six databases.

The fourth panel meeting will be held in March 2003, at which time the first draft of synthesis sections will be considered. Between this meeting and the next, the full report will be drafted, reviewed, and revised. The second set of outreach meetings will be held in September 2003, at which point the public will be encouraged to respond to the report. The fifth and final panel meeting will occur in October 2003, to review the final draft of the report and consider the feedback received at the outreach meetings. Following that meeting, final revisions to the report will be made, and the report will be submitted to the Institute of Education Sciences in February 2004.

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