

**NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY**



# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**LITERACY IN  
AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS  
FOCUS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

*Literature Review*

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# INTRODUCTION

Children from immigrant families are the fastest growing segment of the child population in the United States. The Office of English Language Acquisition reports that between 1991 and 2001–2002, school enrollment of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students grew by 95 percent. Today, one in five children in the United States comes from an immigrant family (Hernandez, 2004). By the 2030s, language minority students are expected to comprise 40 percent of the school-aged population in the United States (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

While children from immigrant families bring with them unique assets, they also face distinct challenges. Children from this group are more likely than their peers to live in poverty, have less-educated parents, confront issues of racism and discrimination, and grapple with language barriers (Haskins, Greenberg & Fremstad, 2004; Shields & Behrman, 2004).

The broad term “English language learner” (ELL) hardly captures the remarkable diversity of this population. Students learning English represent approximately 180 different native languages (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004) and enter school with widely varying proficiencies in English as well as their primary dialects. ELLs also vary widely in educational backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and length of time in the United States.

Compared with native English speakers, ELLs—of which the largest group is Hispanic—have higher dropout rates and demonstrate significant achievement gaps on state and national assessments (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000; Waxman & Tellez, 2002). Helping ELLs reach the highest levels of literacy is essential to their educational achievement and their chances for life success.

Afterschool programs in which literacy is a component offer the potential to provide ELLs with much needed support, not just academically, but socially and culturally as well. To be effective in meeting the needs of all learners, programs must go beyond what they provide for mainstream students and pay particular attention to the social, cultural, linguistic, and literacy needs of diverse students and families.

Though research on afterschool programs for English language learners is scant, what is available suggests that successful programs for language minority students go beyond academic support to address a broader range of needs, and consistently incorporate cultural and language components in their practices and activities. The studies discussed below identify a number of promising practices, including family literacy programs, school-community partnerships, adult-youth mentoring, and culturally responsive staffing and design.

## Family Literacy

While considerable evidence links parental involvement with student success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), many parents of ELL students are not yet fluent enough in English themselves to support their children’s literacy development. Family literacy programs provide opportunities for

adult family members to acquire English language/literacy skills while empowering them to become more involved in their children's education. Many family literacy programs are conducted during out-of-school hours, forging links and supports between home and school.

In a recent research synthesis, Diane August (2003) identifies family literacy programs as a promising practice for boosting the academic achievement of ELLs and cites a report by Shanahan, Mulhern, and Rodríguez-Brown (1995) that describes a family literacy program called Project FLAME (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando [Learning, Improving, Educating]). The project involved 300 Latino families with children 3 to 9 years old in Chicago. Parents attended biweekly English as a Second Language (ESL)/basic skills classes designed to help parents read to their children in English. They learned how to share books in Spanish and English by talking about pictures, making up stories, or listening to their children read. Parents as Teachers classes met twice monthly, with topics including creating home literacy centers, library visits, and how parents can help with homework.

Program evaluations indicate that the FLAME program led to improved English proficiency for parents, while parent interviews and home observations reflect that parents became more active in their children's education, had more literacy materials, and expressed greater confidence in sharing literacy with their children and helping them with homework. In addition, though the program was not directed at children, data collected from 120 children whose parents participated in the program show significant gains in letter recognition, concepts of print, and cognitive concepts (Rodríguez-Brown, 2003).

In another study, based on 20 years of experience implementing family English literacy in South Florida, Garcia and Hasson (2004) point to evaluation data that show Families Learning at School & Home (FLASH) programs had higher attendance and retention rates among participants than other adult ESL programs. More important, their results show that children who participated in adult literacy programs with their parents outperformed those whose parents did not participate in such initiatives in measures of reading and mathematics.

According to the study's authors, key elements of successful family-centered learning initiatives include ongoing needs assessments using a variety of tools; culturally sensitive recruitment and retention strategies; curricular design and materials emphasizing the development of the family as a whole; qualified personnel who understand the vision and program objectives; and interagency collaboration to meet the broader needs of ELL students and families.

## **School-Community Partnerships**

Even when parents of ELLs are actively involved in their children's learning, schools and families working independently are not always able to provide students with all the resources they need. To expand support for diverse youth and their families, many schools create long-term partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), allowing them to provide a broader array of services.

In a report from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, & Excellence (CREDE), Adger & Locke (2000) outline findings from a national study of partnerships between schools and CBOs. The programs were nominated for their effectiveness in promoting the academic achievement of language minority students.

The 31 partnerships in the study offer programming for at-risk students and families for whom English is not their first language. To provide maximum access, partnerships are located in a wide range of settings that include schools, community centers, university campuses, and apartment buildings. Seventy-five percent of the programs operate during or after school, while others are conducted before school, in the evenings, or on weekends.

Some CBOs focus on serving children from a particular ethnic group, like the Filipino Youth Empowerment Project in Seattle, Washington. Other organizations, such as the Pacoima Urban Village in Pacoima, California, were created to partner with a particular school. The most common type of school/CBO partnership involves a multipurpose organization that provides a range of programming, from tutoring for struggling students to immigration and refugee support services. Many of these organizations offer English literacy instruction for both students and families.

Although the study did not evaluate each of the programs independently, data collected from site visits show positive outcomes related to academic achievement, including increased school attendance, graduation, and college admission rates and decreased discipline and dropout cases among ethnic and language minority students.

The authors conclude that the most effective programs for language minority youth at risk are those that take a broader view of both academic achievement and strategies for supporting diverse learners. They observe that:

Supporting school success may require tutoring in the student's first language, or it may require services that have traditionally been viewed as secondary to academic achievement—for example, health care and advice on pregnancy prevention so that students can come to school, and parent education so that parents can help students with school work. (p. 11)

## **Adult/Youth Mentoring**

In addition to family and community support, culturally and linguistically diverse students need positive adult role models in their life who can provide one-on-one encouragement. Aware of the language and cultural challenges immigrant students face, Marcelo Diversi and Connie Mecham (2005) implemented an afterschool program with immigrant youth in a small northern Utah town and reported on the results. Most of the immigrants were from central Mexico with low levels of formal education and with limited command of the English language. The main issues the students faced were poor academic performance and disengagement from school.

The purpose of the program was to create an empowering adult-youth relationship, especially for students struggling with academic and behavioral issues. The students lacked not only the language of school and knowledge of the American education system, but the cultural skills they needed to navigate successfully in mainstream society. The assumption was that increasing opportunities for youth to experience academic and relational success would make it easier for them to engage in school life and avoid the negative paths associated with disengagement.

The program consisted of 50 Latino eighth- and ninth-graders working with 20 college students, most of whom were Caucasian females. Mentors were trained in issues of immigration, adolescent development, acculturation, and ethnicity. Between the spring of 2000 and the fall of 2003, mentors and students met for an hour and a half twice a week and engaged in activities related to homework, tests, school projects, and acculturation issues. A key focus was increasing students' awareness of biculturalism. Mentors and mentees also took part in informal activities outside school, such as camping trips and festivals, to help students become familiar with various aspects of the mainstream community.

According to the researchers, the project was successful in promoting strong cross-cultural connections, increased student engagement, and improved academic performance (Diversi & Mecham, 2005). During the second year of the program, the average GPA of participants increased from 1.95 to 2.45 between the first and third trimesters. Students reported feeling more connected to school, while school personnel noted a reduction in behavior problems among the youth. The authors of the study attribute these improvements to the safe, nurturing environment created by the program and the individualized attention students received from mentors.

## **Program Design and Staffing**

A national survey conducted in 2001 by California Tomorrow and reported in *Our Roots, Our Future: Affirming Culture and Language in After School & Youth Programs* (Bhattacharya, Jaramillo, Lopez, Olsen, Scharf, & Shah, 2002) reveals that while the vast majority of afterschool programs serve a culturally and linguistically diverse population, few programs report having staff who are trained to effectively serve children and youth with limited English skills. In addition, few programs currently support young people in overcoming language barriers; almost none provide home language support, and only a handful have staff members who speak the languages (other than English) of their enrolled youth and families.

Bhattacharya and colleagues identify three major language needs for ELLs that afterschool staff must be aware of: support in learning English, help in understanding what is going on around them when their English proficiency is limited, and support for maintaining and developing their home languages (p. 49). Afterschool programs that most effectively meet the needs of language minority students include the following “imperatives”:

- Curriculum and experiences that are culturally and linguistically supportive, accessible, and responsive
- Support for youth in developing strong cultural and linguistic identities
- Assistance in gaining cross-cultural skills and understanding

- A desire to address the conditions that produce social disparities and inequalities
- Help in healing the wounds of social distress, exclusion, and discrimination

By incorporating these vital ingredients into the design and implementation of afterschool programs, providers can support youth development on multiple levels. The authors conclude that:

The many options related to staffing, curriculum, and organizational context in the after school arena and the strong partnerships that programs often enjoy with each other and with communities mean that they have the ability to speak to some of young people's deepest personal and social needs in a more holistic way than many other institutions. (p. 70)

## METHODOLOGY

- NWREL conducted an extensive review of research for this literature review, beginning in December 2005 and continuing until March 2006. This process included the following:
- NWREL Information Center staff conducted a search using the keywords “literacy,” “afterschool,” and “English language learners” and numerous associated terms (e.g., reading, out-of-school time, English as a second language (ESL), Limited English Proficient (LEP), etc.)
- NWREL Information Center staff also conducted a search using the keywords “literacy,” “afterschool,” and “at-risk populations,” “immigrant youth,” “Hispanic,” and numerous associated terms (e.g., minority, diversity, multicultural, Latino, etc.), as well as a search using the terms “family literacy” and “newcomer programs”
- NWREL staff reviewed Harvard Family Research Project’s out-of-school time evaluation database for studies relating to literacy and afterschool programs for culturally and linguistically diverse students
- NWREL staff searched existing databases related to second language acquisition and literacy, including the Center for Multilingual Multicultural Research, the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA), the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, & Excellence (CREDE), and the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)
- NWREL staff used a “network” approach, checking reference lists of relevant documents for additional, relevant publications and including those in the review

### Selection of Studies

There is an extremely limited selection of studies relating to literacy in afterschool for English language learners. However, there is an extensive and growing body of research related to instructional approaches for ELLs in regular school settings. We broadened our search to include studies on effective literacy practices for ELLs, with an emphasis on those most applicable to the afterschool environment and which complement the practices highlighted in the National Partnership for Quality Afterschool Learning (NPQAL) Literacy Toolkit.

After the extensive review process, a total of five studies that relate to ELLs in afterschool, and 10 studies of literacy interventions for students learning English were included in the literature review. In addition to the studies we included, 29 other studies were reviewed in the process. Articles/papers/books were chosen for review based on their relevance to the current project. For example, studies of literacy interventions for ELLs in the learner’s primary language, or interventions for ELLs not specific to literacy (such as an asset-based leadership institute), were not applicable to this work and were excluded from the review. Studies that were wholly



qualitative or that had an extremely small sample size were also excluded. Articles/papers/books that were programmatic in nature, or practitioner-directed rather than research-oriented were retained for later review.

## **Limitation of Studies**

The chief limitation is the scarcity of research that actually exists related to literacy for ELLs in afterschool settings. Much of the literature we reviewed based on the search dealt with educational policy (e.g., what educators need to do to improve schooling for language minority students), or was practitioner-directed (e.g., a narrative description of a successful instructional strategy for ELLs), rather than research-oriented. Because of the current emphasis in the field of education on replicable, research-based practices, we attempted whenever possible to include studies that used an experimental or quasi-experimental design.

# LITERATURE REVIEW OF LITERACY ACTIVITIES FOR ELLS IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

This NWREL literature review attempts to summarize research on literacy practices for ELLs in afterschool programs. Because the body of research is extremely limited, the authors stress the importance of considering the review within the context of the best practices outlined in the introduction. Research relating to specific literacy interventions for students learning English should also be considered, especially where those interventions relate to or dovetail with the practices outlined in the NPQAL Literacy Toolkit. Following the literature review is a discussion of relevant literacy practices and their implications for afterschool programs serving ELLs.

Other than the two studies included in NWREL's earlier review of literature on literacy in afterschool (Britsch, Martin, Stuczynski, Tomala, & Tucci, 2005) in which English language learners were part of the treatment groups (Prenost, 2001; University of California at Irvine, 2001), we found only one additional study related specifically to literacy practices for ELLs in afterschool programs.

## The CORAL Initiative

Funded by the James Irvine Foundation, the Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL) Initiative provides afterschool programming to 37 sites in five California cities. In the 2004–2005 school year, CORAL programs served more than 5,000 youth from low-income, low-performing schools. CORAL youth are predominantly Latino (68 percent) with large numbers of African American and Asian populations. More than half (53 percent) of program participants are designated English learners.

The initiative was launched in 1999 with the goal of promoting academic achievement while keeping student engagement and participation levels high. In fall 2004 the program shifted to a targeted approach to literacy, focusing on concrete strategies for helping children who were far behind in reading skills improve.

CORAL sites were required to adopt one of two “balanced literacy” models—KidzLit or Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET)—designed specifically for use in afterschool settings and reflecting current research-based best practices. Core strategies in both models include independent reading, read-alouds, book discussions, writing, and vocabulary development activities. Between October 2004 and June 2005, youth who attended the programs were offered balanced literacy activities three to four times a week for 75 to 90 minutes each day.

In September 2004, Public/Private Ventures began collecting evaluation data on the programs. Focused on a subset of four to five sites in each city, and a sample of third- and fourth-graders at each of those sites, researchers gathered information from sources that included enrollment, attendance, activity, and participation data; site observations; and individual reading assessments

gathered at two points in time with 383 CORAL youth. Approximately half the sample were designated English language learners, reflecting the larger population served by the initiative.

In an interim report (Arbreton, Goldsmith, & Sheldon, 2005) based on the first nine months of data collection, researchers found that the sample group showed “significant but modest” gains between administration of the fall 2004 and spring 2005 individual reading assessments. Overall, program participants increased about a third (0.31) of a grade level in reading. Youth assessed to be the most behind (two or more grade levels) in reading showed the most significant improvement, gaining 0.78 of a grade level. Significantly, ELLs showed similar average gains in reading levels as participants proficient in English.

According to the researchers, youth whose instructors provided read-alouds and independent reading along with at least one other balanced literacy strategy showed the greatest gains, and individual time spent reading books at an appropriate level of difficulty emerged as a significant factor in predicting reading gains.

Because the study lacked a control group, there is no way to determine whether or not reading gains made by CORAL youth were any different from what might be expected from youth who did not participate in the programs. Evaluation data suggest, however, that when CORAL programming is implemented with quality and consistency it can have a positive impact on youth literacy.

# OPTIMAL LITERACY INSTRUCTIONS FOR ELLS

The process of reading in English—decoding written symbols on a page to arrive at meaning—is similar for native and non-native speakers. There are, however, certain key differences in the linguistic, cognitive, and experiential resources each type of reader brings to the task. These differences include:

1. English language proficiency
2. Background knowledge related to the text
3. Literacy abilities and experiences in the first language (Peregoy & Boyle, 2000)

## English Language Proficiency

English language proficiency refers to an individual’s general knowledge of English, including grammar, vocabulary, and discourse patterns. English oral language development plays an important role in the overall process of English language acquisition. The relationship between oral proficiency and reading is complex, because each area represents an intricate set of skills, and because each skill is dynamic and varies at different developmental stages (August, 2003).

There has been much debate about how proficient ELLs need to be in English before beginning reading instruction. Some researchers maintain that English reading instruction should be delayed until a level of oral English proficiency has been achieved (International Reading Association, 1998; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), while others (e.g., Fitzgerald & Noblit, 1999) argue that oracy and literacy can develop at the same time.

## Importance of Background Knowledge

Many students learning English lack background knowledge related to both text content and text structure. Research shows that comprehension challenges are lessened when the ELL has prior experience with the content of the text (Fitzgerald, 1995). In addition, proficient readers are “sufficiently familiar with a variety of genres and text structures to use this knowledge for predicting and confirming meaning across sentences, paragraphs, and passages that comprise a text” (Peregoy & Boyle, 2000, p. 239). Knowledge of text structures results from reading a variety of texts in English, and from explicit instruction on text structures.

## Literacy Experiences in the Primary Language

Research points to a strong and positive correlation between literacy in a student’s native language and learning English, and suggests that the degree of proficiency in the primary language is a strong predictor of their English language development (Antunez, 2002). Students learning to read in a second language draw on competencies and experiences in their primary

language, particularly during the early stages of second language literacy development. ELL literacy strategies differ from those of native English speaking readers and writers because they focus on graphic information, translation, and use of cognates (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005).

Literacy experience in the primary language is closely tied to a student's age, prior education, and the socioeconomic status and education level of the parents (Peregoy & Boyle, 2000, p. 241). Some students may have minimal literacy in either their home language or English, and may need to be taught about the practical purposes of written language. For ELLs with literacy in the primary language, transfer of literacy abilities depends on the similarities and differences between writing systems, such as alphabetic, logographic, and syllabic. In addition, some ELLs may be literate in alphabetic writing systems that use letters and print conventions that are very different from English, such as Arabic or Thai (Peregoy & Boyle).

Developing proficiency in a second language is a complex process, and one that takes considerable time. Estimates vary, but some research suggests that oral proficiency takes 3 to 5 years to develop and that academic English proficiency may take 4 to 7 years (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). What matters in the process depends upon the learner's stage of development, but experts are in agreement that the nature and quality of instruction provided to ELLs is a significant factor in their developing literacy (August, 2003; Genesee et al., 2005; Meyer, 2000; Slavin & Cheung, 2003).

In general, the literature shows that ELL students benefit from instruction that explicitly teaches content concepts, along with study skills and thinking strategies. ELLs must also be given ample opportunities to develop English proficiency through interaction. Research also points to the importance of teaching and learning activities that are culturally relevant and draw upon native language skills and abilities (Klump & McNeir, 2005; Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000).

## **Direct and Interactive Instructional Practices**

Genesee and colleagues (2005) performed a comprehensive review of scientific research conducted in the United States since 1980 on the educational outcomes of ELLs. Research on instructional practices was classified into three groups: direct, interactive, and process-based. Direct instruction emphasizes the explicit and direct instruction of specific literacy skills and strategies, while interactive instruction emphasizes learning mediated through interaction with other learners or more competent readers and writers, such as the teacher. Process-based instruction emphasizes engagement in the authentic use of written language for communication or self-expression. Some of the studies reviewed were combinations of these approaches.

The review found that interactive and direct approaches, or a combination of the two, produced significant gains in learning, while the results of process-based approaches were mixed at best. Genesee et al. suggest that "classrooms that combine interactive with direct instruction have much to recommend because they provide instruction in specific reading and writing skills within carefully designed academic contexts" (p. 373). An example of this approach is Saunders

and Goldenberg’s 1999 study on the effects of instructional conversations and literature logs, which is discussed in detail later in this review.

The authors stress that findings about “best practices” does not mean that there is a single intervention that will magically improve educational outcomes for ELLs. Educators must be able to work on multiple levels depending on the needs and developmental stage of the individual learner. Besides a repertoire of strategies from which to draw, educators need comprehensive instructional frameworks, such as the Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy (Tharp et al., 2000), and the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model developed by researchers at CREDE.

## **Learner-Centered Approaches**

In a 2002 synthesis of research on effective teaching for ELLs, Waxman and Tellez found that while much of classroom instruction for ELLs tends to be whole-group and teacher-centered, students learning English benefit most from interactional, learner-centered approaches. Their report identified seven instructional practices found to be most effective—collaborative learning communities, multiple representations, building on prior knowledge, instructional conversation, culturally responsive instruction, cognitively guided instruction, and technology-enriched instruction.

Studies of collaborative learning communities found that they “encouraged a strong form of social cooperation and discourse that *in turn drove language learning*” (Waxman & Tellez, 2002, p. 10), and fostered social as well as academic growth. Lengthy, meaningful instructional conversations between teacher and students were also effective in helping ELLs gain awareness of social context of the classroom, while drawing upon the knowledge, skills, and values of the learner.

The research reviewed by Waxman and Tellez indicated that students’ limited background knowledge—knowledge often assumed to be held by all students—correlated with poor academic performance, but that cognitive learning strategies, including scaffolding instruction, were beneficial for removing individual barriers to success. Providing multiple representations through the use of realia, graphic organizers, and pictures, and the use of technology-enriched instruction, were strategies found to make classroom instruction more meaningful for ELLs and assist them in learning higher order thinking skills.

## **Integrating Content and Language Development**

Grounded in scientifically based research as well as best practices of sheltered instruction techniques, the SIOP model (Echevarria et al., 2004) is a comprehensive lesson planning and delivery system composed of 30 instructional strategies grouped into eight components. The components include lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application, lesson delivery, and review/assessment. The SIOP is designed to provide teachers with a framework to teach content to ELLs in strategic ways that make the

concepts comprehensible while promoting the students' academic English language development.

Two studies showed that ELLs whose teachers were trained in implementing the SIOP model performed significantly better on academic writing assessment than ELLs whose teachers had no exposure to the model (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2003).

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning**

A broad research base supports the connection between culturally responsive instructional practices and academic achievement for diverse learners (Klump & McNeir, 2005; Waxman & Tellez, 2002). Culturally responsive instruction has also been found to improve self-confidence and self-esteem for ELLs by emphasizing existing knowledge, increasing the transfer of school-taught knowledge to real life, and exposing students to knowledge about other individuals or cultural groups (Rivera & Zehler, 1991, cited in Waxman and Tellez, 2002).

As Au (2002) observes, "The main difference between culturally responsive instruction and other approaches to the education of students of diverse backgrounds...is that an effort is made to teach students in a manner that does not require them to give up the values of their home cultures" (p. 405). Specific practices related to literacy include actively valuing the students' home language and culture, providing multicultural and multilingual literature, and being aware of ELLs' different meanings and uses of literacy (Au, 2002; Jiménez, 2005; Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson, & Tlusty, 2000).

Jiménez (2005) explains that effective literacy teachers of ELLs must understand that their students want and need to be literate in order to contribute to the needs of their families. His research found that many ELL students play an essential role in their families and communities as "language brokers," helping parents and other family members by translating important documents or serving as interpreters. Jiménez (2005) argues that "language brokering, both oral and literate, should be formally recognized as a legitimate and commendable activity" (p. 15) and that students should be provided with instructional methods and curriculum that are more relevant to their needs and desires.

An ethnographic study by Godina (2004) illustrates the disconnect that can happen between literacy needs and practices at school and home. For five months, the author observed 10 high school students of Mexican background with varying degrees of bilingual ability in Spanish and English. Data collected through interviews, observations, literacy artifacts, and the use of key informants revealed that students demonstrated very different literacy practices in their homes and communities than they did at school, where educators viewed these students only in terms of their limited-English status.

The study found that Mexican-background students were often relied on by Spanish-speaking family members at home to translate important documents or mediate transactions in the community, but the English they were taught in school ignored these real-life responsibilities. Within the school environment, informal literacy practices such as contentious language play,

note-passing, and assisting white peers with Spanish homework indicated students were tapping into a bilingual reservoir of skills, but these practices were not acknowledged in the school environment as having value.

If, as Au (2002) asserts, “our goal with students of diverse backgrounds, and with all students, is to promote ownership of literacy” (p. 398), literacy instruction for language minority students must take into account their individual backgrounds, needs, and motivations for becoming literate in English. Meyer (2000) proposes that discovering each student’s particular “yearning goad”—the drive to know more about a specific topic or area of study—is the vital ingredient that will enable ELLs to overcome barriers to learning.



## STUDIES OF SPECIFIC LITERACY INTERVENTIONS

The Reading First legislation included in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requires that every K–3 reading program provide systematic, research-based instruction in five areas of literacy identified by the National Reading Panel (NRP): phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies (National Reading Panel, 2000). The NRP’s recommendations, while based on an extensive review of research, public hearings, and discussion, did not include studies on second language learning and reading.

The studies discussed below affirm that practices that promote literacy for native English speakers are also effective with English language learners. However, there are a number of considerations unique to ELLs that must be taken into account when implementing these practices, and activities may need to be adapted or modified to better support the needs of students learning to read in a second language.

### Phonemic Awareness and Phonics

Training in phonemic awareness—the ability to hear individual speech sounds in words—is the foundation of beginning reading instruction. Children who are not native English speakers may have difficulty distinguishing and pronouncing phonemes that are not present in their primary language. They may also be confused by phonemes in their first language that conflict with English phonemes (Antunez, 2002; August, 2003).

Phonics instruction teaches beginning readers about the relationship between letters and speech sounds, and how to apply this knowledge to reading and spelling. Students who already read in their first language may be challenged by the fact that some letters represent different sounds in the second language than they do in the first. Students who are not literate in their own language or whose language doesn’t have a written form might need to be taught about the functions of print. And children whose first language uses a different writing system than English, such as Chinese or Arabic, will need clear explanations of the similarities and differences between their primary language and English (August, 2003; Peregoy & Boyle, 2000).

Research shows that systematic training in phonemic awareness and phonics can improve literacy outcomes for ELL students learning to read in English. For example, Lesaux and Siegel (2003) investigated the development of reading in a program designed for children who enter kindergarten with little or no proficiency in the language of instruction.

Conducted in a Canadian school district, the longitudinal study involved 978 second grade children, 188 of whom were ELL students. Most of the second language learners were immigrants to Canada, and most had begun the same schooling in mainstream English classrooms at the same time as their English-proficient peers. ELL children in the sample spoke a total of 33 different languages. None of them were yet receiving ESL instruction, and they could not read in their native languages when they entered kindergarten.

In kindergarten and second grade, participants completed standardized and experimental measures including reading, spelling, phonological processing, and memory. All children received phonological awareness instruction in kindergarten and phonics instruction in first grade. Classroom teachers and school resource teachers provided the interventions three to four times a week for 20 minutes. Training consisted of a variety of literacy practices, including a combination of activities with an explicit emphasis on sound-symbol relationship as well as independent activities such as cooperative story writing and journal writing using invented spelling.

By the end of second grade, the ELL speakers' reading skills were comparable to those of native English speakers. Significantly, ELLs outperformed native speakers on several measures, including word reading, rapid naming, word spelling, and arithmetic (Lesaux & Siegel, 2003, p. 1017). These findings support the notion that ELLs benefit from a model of early identification and intervention, and suggest that bilingualism may have a positive effect on the attainment of early reading skills.

A study by Swanson, Hodson, and Schommer-Aikins (2005) examined the effects of direct, systematic phonological awareness instruction for seventh-grade poor readers, most of whom had English as their second language.

The study was conducted in a largely bilingual, low socioeconomic junior high school in Southern California. A treatment group of 35 mostly ELL students participated in small group instruction sessions that emphasized phonological awareness at the phoneme level and incorporated explicit linkages to literacy. The treatment was administered in the participants' school setting over a 12-week period and involved approximately 45 minutes a day of contact with a trained instructor (speech assistant). Lesson plan tasks included phoneme segmentation, manipulation, and blending instruction.

Following the intervention, researchers compared the performance of the treatment group with the performance of 33 students from the same school and grade level who were waiting to receive phonological awareness treatment. The post-treatment scores of the treatment group were higher for all measures.

The authors conclude that poor readers, including bilingual students who have English as their second language, can benefit from direct, systematic instruction that emphasizes phonological awareness and is linked to literacy. They point out that this line of research "supports the contention that older students with phonological awareness deficiencies, including those of ELL status, can learn to read efficiently if instruction serves to resolve deficits that restrict fluent reading expression" (Swanson, Hodson, & Schommer-Aikins, 2005, p. 339).

Research reviews by Slavin and Cheung (2003), and August (2003), found positive effects from Stuart's (1999) experimental study of Jolly Phonics, a systematic phonics program implemented with Bangladeshi children in England.

The initial intervention involved a sample of 112 inner-city schoolchildren, most of whom were five-year-olds. Eighty-six percent of the subjects were ELLs. Children were assigned to one of two groups, a phoneme awareness and phonics group, and a group based on Holdaway's (1979) Big Book method. Children in the former group received 12 weeks of daily intensive, structured phoneme awareness and phonics teaching using the Jolly Phonics materials. Children in the latter group (BB) received 12 weeks of daily teaching for the same amount of time, using the more holistic Big Books approach.

Prior to the intervention, children were pretested on measures of spoken and written language, phonological awareness, and alphabet knowledge. Posttest results 18 months after the intervention revealed that children in the Jolly Phonics group scored significantly higher than the Big Books group in measures of phoneme awareness, phonics knowledge, and the ability to apply those skills in reading and writing (August, 2003). Though these results are promising, Slavin and Cheung (2003) point to serious problems with pretest differences, making it difficult to interpret these findings with complete confidence.

A follow-up study of the program (Stuart, 2004) reported on data from 101 seven-year-olds (85 of whom were second language learners) remaining from the original sample. While Stuart found lasting influences of early phoneme awareness and phonics teaching on word recognition and spelling skills for both ELLs and native English speakers, he discovered that this early training was not sufficient to "bootstrap" the development of language comprehension in the second language learners.

Another program discussed in Slavin and Cheung's (2003) best-evidence synthesis is Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 1999, 2001), a comprehensive reform model that "provides schools with well-structured curriculum materials, emphasizing systematic phonics in grades K-1 and cooperative learning, direct instruction in comprehension skills, and other elements in grades 2-6" (Slavin & Cheung, p. 23). The program also focuses on professional development for teachers, one-to-one tutoring for struggling readers, and family support programs. Success for All has two variations for ELLs: A Spanish bilingual program, *Exito para Todos*, and an English language development (ELD) adaptation. Evaluation data for the program indicate that the effects on achievement for ELLs, while not entirely consistent, are substantially positive.

## Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is a key factor for beginning reading as well as reading comprehension. Children acquire vocabulary in their primary language indirectly, through interaction with fluent adults. Students reading in their first language have already learned 5,000 to 7,000 words before they begin formal reading instruction (Biemiller & Slonim, 2001, cited in August, 2003). In contrast, ELLs whose parents are not fluent in English typically do not have large vocabularies in the second language, and may have limited understanding of English grammar and syntax.

Researchers emphasize that vocabulary must be taught explicitly and that ELL students need to be instructed in specific strategies for deciphering word meanings (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Teachers must also be aware of the distinction between language used for everyday

communication (BICS, or Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and academic language (CALP, or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) (Cummins, 1992, cited in Antunez, 2002). Acquiring CALP is central to ELL's academic success, and often the area in which they require the most support (Antunez).

August (2003) discusses several studies of promising practices that have shown to increase vocabulary knowledge for students learning English. One study by Neuman and Koskinen, (1992), examined how captioned television might affect bilingual students' acquisition of vocabulary and academic content knowledge.

Participants in the intervention were 129 bilingual seventh- and eighth-graders from 17 middle school classrooms. Intact classes were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: captioned television, conventional television viewing with no captions, reading along while listening to text, and textbook only. For the intervention, the researchers used a children's science program produced by public television. Each science unit was taught over a three-week period.

Results of the study indicate that students in the captioned-TV group outperformed students in other groups on word recognition, target word knowledge, and several other key indicators. Among other findings, the researchers note that higher levels of English proficiency correlated with more vocabulary learning; they emphasize the importance of visual and printed contexts that provide explicit information for increased vocabulary knowledge even without captioned words (Neuman & Koskinen, 1992, cited in August, 2003).

In another study, McLaughlin, August, Snow, Carlo, Dressler, White, Lively, and Lippman (2001) collaborated with teachers to develop and implement intervention strategies aimed at improving vocabulary knowledge and boosting reading comprehension for fourth- and fifth-grade ELLs. Approximately half the participants in the two-year, experimental study were Spanish-speaking ELLs; the other half were English-only speakers. Half the students participating in the study were in intervention classrooms, while the other half were in control classrooms with vocabulary development activities not related to the intervention.

The authors observe that research on vocabulary knowledge has traditionally been concerned with breadth rather than depth, that is, the number of words in a child's lexicon rather than his or her understanding of the multiple meanings of words, and how different aspects of meaning are emphasized in different contexts. The intervention was aimed at improving both aspects of vocabulary depth while also expanding breadth.

The first year of the intervention, implemented in fourth-grade classrooms at sites in California, Virginia, and Massachusetts, consisted of 95 lessons to build vocabulary breadth and depth and teach students strategies for acquiring word knowledge. The second year, the intervention was implemented in fifth-grade classrooms, and consisted of 75 lessons. Each lesson lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. Features of the intervention included direct instruction in vocabulary, instruction in strategies such as the use of cognates and root words, and activities outside the classroom to "extend and deepen students' understanding of word meanings" (McLaughlin et al., 2001, p.134).

A multivariate analysis found that students in the program outperformed students in the control group on breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge as well as reading comprehension. In addition, ELLs who received the intervention were able to close the gap between themselves and English-only speakers by 50 percent. The researchers conclude that, over time, an enriched program of vocabulary instruction can produce gains in vocabulary development and reading comprehension for students learning English.

## Fluency

Fluency refers to the ability to read text swiftly, accurately, and with appropriate expression. Research indicates that repeated oral reading practice or guided repeated oral reading practice are effective in building fluency for children reading in their first language (August, 2003). ELLs may have less opportunity to read aloud, may not have parents at home who are literate in English, and may struggle to comprehend English text due to limited English proficiency.

Both the NRC and the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) recommend that ELLs should learn to read initially in their first language. If this is not possible, research suggests that ELLs participate in read-alouds of big books, read along with proficient readers, and listen repeatedly to books read aloud in order to gain fluency in English (Antunez, 2002).

An intervention by Schoenbrodt, Kerins, and Gesell (2003) examined the effects of narrative language intervention on the communicative competence of 12 Spanish-speaking school-aged children. The term “communicative competence” describes the knowledge and usage of the grammatical structure of the language used in that culture or speech community. Related to fluency, communicative competence also refers to nonverbal interaction skills, and alters according to the setting. Narrative intervention is “maintaining one’s native language while building communicative competence in a second language” (p. 50). Narrative language intervention involves role-playing stories and engaging children in reading stories repeatedly. Intervention strategies focus on teaching the content of stories, as well as the internal structure or the story grammar.

Twelve Spanish-speaking children between 6 and 11 years old participated in an eight-week investigation targeting improvement of their communicative competence through a narrative intervention program. Participants attended an afterschool tutoring program at a public elementary school located in Baltimore, Maryland. The control group received the intervention in English, while the experimental group received the intervention in Spanish.

Narrative samples obtained from pre-/post testing examined communication unit (CU) clauses, number of words, story grammar, and narrative style. The study found that the use of a narrative intervention increased communicative competence in both groups. In addition, the experimental group showed a significant difference in performance indicating that intervention in the native language yields greater success compared with intervention presented in English.

## Comprehension

Comprehension, the ultimate goal of learning to read, is often the area where ELLs struggle the most. Vocabulary is an important factor in explaining poorer performance in reading comprehension of second language readers, as is limited background knowledge of text structures and content. As noted earlier, comprehension is aided in both young and adult readers when what they read has culturally familiar content (Rigg, 1986; Steffensen, Joag-Dev, & Anderson, 1979, cited in August, 2003).

Struggling readers are often given remedial instruction instead of being exposed to authentic texts and challenged to think critically or inferentially about stories. ELLs must be given exposure to quality literature and guided to use higher order thinking skills (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004; Jiménez, 2005). Teachers also need to engage ELLs in discussion about the difference between literal and figurative language, since figurative expressions—such as “sweet tooth”—may be confusing for those learning to read in a second language (Antunez, 2002).

An experimental study by Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) examined the effects of two instructional components—literature logs and instructional conversations—on the story comprehension and thematic understanding of upper elementary grade students. Five teachers and 116 fourth- and fifth-graders participated in the study. Slightly more than half of the participants were English learners. Students were randomly assigned to one of the four treatment conditions: literature logs only, instructional conversations only, literature logs plus instructional conversations, and control.

Within the 90-minute language arts block each day, teachers conducted two consecutive 45-minute small-group lessons. For the literature logs, teachers met with the group briefly and gave students a prompt asking them to write about personal experiences related to the story. Students wrote their logs independently, then read them aloud, and the teacher led a discussion about the similarities and differences between students’ experiences and those of the characters in the story. In the instructional conversation lessons, teachers used discussion to clarify the factual content of the story and develop students’ understandings of more complex concepts.

Posttests found that students in the instructional conversation and literature log plus instructional conversation groups scored significantly higher than the control group on story comprehension. Students in all three experimental groups were significantly more likely to demonstrate an understanding of the story themes than students in the control group. For students with limited English proficiency, the combined effects of literature logs and instructional conversations were greater than the effects of either treatment condition alone. For fluent English proficient students, the combined effects were not significantly greater than the effect of one treatment condition or the other.

One important limitation of the study is that students in the various experimental groups not only had qualitatively different instructional experiences, they also received different amounts of instructional time with the teacher.

Kucer and Silva (1999) examined the effects of using multiple strategies to develop comprehension for ELL students beginning their formal transition into English literacy in a third-grade whole-language classroom. The 26 students in the class were Mexican American, bilingual, and from working class homes.

The curriculum consisted of four components: theme-based literacy activities, teacher reading, free reading, and free writing. The thematic units included a number of specific literacy activities, including paired reading, reader response groups, compare/contrast exercises, learning logs, and strategy wall charts. Students were not given isolated instruction in written language conventions such as phonics, spelling, punctuation, or capitalization.

Analysis of the reading miscue data shows statistically significant improvements in the students' ability to produce more meaningful sentences, as well as significant gains in the overall number of retelling units and matches produced by the students. Capitalization and spelling also improved. However, holistic analysis of the students' written stories did not show improvement in overall writing abilities, nor did the analytic evaluation show an increase in the number of sentences or conventional use of punctuation.

The varied impact of the curriculum on literacy development led the authors to conclude that the complex nature of second language learning may require "differentiated mediation." Using the differentiated mediation approach, students would continue to be engaged in authentic and meaningful literacy activities, but when it is determined that a child is having repeated difficulty with a particular aspect of written language, "focused instructional events would be developed that explicitly teach over time the matter in which the child is experiencing difficulty" (Kucer & Silva, 1999, p. 21).

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Despite limited research on literacy for ELLs in afterschool programs, available evidence strongly suggests that the practices outlined in the NPQAL toolkit will support English literacy development for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Read-alouds offer students who are less proficient in English the chance to hear appropriate oral pronunciation and fluency modeled. Writing activities allow ELLs to practice written language skills and boost comprehension. Book discussion groups, literature circles, and story and literature dramatizations provide crucial opportunities for interaction between native and non-native English speakers, while engaging students in higher order thinking skills and helping them make connections to their own background experiences.

One-on-one tutoring can provide ELLs with much needed academic support as well as fostering positive adult-youth or peer relationships. And family literacy events have been proven to assist English-learning students and families with building proficiency in a second language while strengthening connections between home and school.

Before implementing these practices in the afterschool setting, practitioners should be aware of the complex factors influencing second language development, and make every effort to identify individual students' varying levels of background knowledge and English language proficiency. At a minimum, Antunez (2002) recommends that educators ask the following questions:

- What is the student's native language?
- Does this language have a Roman alphabet? Does it have a written form?
- Can the student fluently speak, read, and write the language?
- How well does the student speak English?
- How old is the student? (p. 10)

Afterschool providers must also attempt to incorporate culturally responsive practices into their programming. Successful programs hire staff members that reflect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students, and provide employees with training in cross-cultural awareness and techniques for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

This review of research demonstrates that afterschool programs can be designed and implemented in ways that guide students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to achieve academic success, in spite of the barriers they face both at home and at school. Afterschool programs have the potential to provide the informal, academically contextualized, and safe environments that turn at-risk students into academic success stories. In some cases, the afterschool program may go a long way in closing the achievement gap between mainstream and culturally and linguistically diverse students.



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