

English Language Learners: Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners—Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth

Edited by Diane August
Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC

Timothy Shanahan
University of Illinois, Chicago

Review by Kathy Escamilla
University of Colorado, Boulder

Based on concerns about the increasing numbers of English Language Learners in U.S. schools and the documented academic underperformance of this group, particularly in the domain of literacy, the federal government provided funding for a panel of experts to synthesize the knowledge base in the field and provide recommendations for future research. In 2006, the long awaited and much heralded Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth was published in a book entitled *Developing Literacy in Second Language Learners* (August & Shanahan, 2006). The purpose of this essay review is to describe the contents of this volume, and to examine it through the dual lenses of theory and policy.

Correspondence should be addressed to Kathy Escamilla, School of Education, University of Colorado, Boulder, Campus Box 247, Boulder, CO 80309-0247, USA. E-mail: Kathy.escamilla@colorado.edu

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the long awaited and much heralded Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth was published in the form of a book entitled *Developing Literacy in Second Language Learners* (August & Shanahan, 2006). The book's stated purpose was to "synthesize research on the education of language-minority children and youth with respect to their attainment of literacy, and to produce a comprehensive report evaluating and synthesizing this literature" (p. xiv).

The contents of the book reflect four years of work (2002–2006) conducted by a panel of 13 experts in second language development, cognitive development, curriculum and instruction, assessment, and methodology selected by the Institute of Education Sciences staff and initially funded by several major agencies in the U.S. Department of Education, and by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHE) through funds transferred to the U.S. Department of Education, OELA—Office of English Language Acquisition, and the IES—Institute for Educational Sciences (August & Shanahan, 2006). The work of conducting the syntheses of research was also carried out by SRI International and the Center for Applied Linguistics and SRI International. Ultimately, the panel decided on five domains of investigation: 1) Development of Literacy in Second-Language Learners, 2) Cross-linguistic Relationships in Second Language Learners, 3) Socio-cultural Contexts and Literacy Development for Language Minority Students, 4) Educating Language Minority Students: Instructional Approaches and Professional Development, and 5) Language and Literacy Assessment of Language-Minority Students.

According to the authors, the intended audience for this report is "researchers interested in the development of literacy in language-minority students; sections are relevant to researchers studying literacy more generally, as well as to practitioners concerned about improving the education of language minority students" (p. xiv).

To the authors' credit, the methodology and search criteria are well reported throughout the book. It could be easily replicated. Each section begins with an overview chapter that captures and highlights the findings in the subsequent chapters. While the text overall is quite dense, these summary chapters are somewhat more digestible and could provide readers with an entrance to the topics without requiring wading through the more detailed chapters. The chapters themselves are written in a discourse style that is quite dense, making it difficult for the reader to understand the details while keeping the big picture in mind. This writing style permeates the book, and while the report may be useful to researchers, it is unlikely to be useful to practitioners and policy makers who are closest to the children and students most in need of more enlightened and appropriate instruction in first and second language literacy. Moreover, the major

findings in the Report had more to do with what we do not know about literacy for second language learners than what we do know. This is particularly the case for the development of writing in a second language.

The report focused on literacy development. While there was a major emphasis on pre-K–twelfth grade literacy research within the United States, the report also included literacy research globally that looked at students developing literacy in a societal language. Most of the research reported came from countries where English is the societal language (e.g., United States, Britain, Canada, Australia); however, also included were studies from the Netherlands, Israel, and Finland. Parameters for the research synthesis were that the research had to include language minority children ages 3–18, that the subjects had to be in the process of acquiring literacy in their first language and/or the societal language, and that the research be empirical and published in peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, and technical reports between 1980 and 2002.

This review will briefly discuss the report's findings vis-à-vis the five domains of investigation listed above. A summary of each section's content and findings is presented followed by a discussion and critique of each section. This review is organized around two interrelated themes. The first is that the report's findings and implications are largely discussed through a monolingual English lens, thereby limiting many of the report's findings. Second, the report is limited by policy constraints on both educational opportunities for students and research funding.

DEVELOPMENT OF LITERACY IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Section I of the report included 107 research studies and addressed five major research questions: 1) What are the differences and similarities in the development of literacy skills in the societal language between language minority students and native speakers? 2) What are the profiles of those language minority students identified as having literacy difficulties? 3) What factors have an impact on the literacy development of language minority students? 4) What is the relationship between English oral proficiency and English word-level skills? 5) What is the relationship between English oral proficiency and English text-level skills?

In reviewing the research, the authors found that research on language-minority students' literacy development has some parallels with the findings in research on monolingual literacy development. For instance, the report stated that word-level skills of language-minority students (e.g., decoding, spelling) are much more likely to be at levels equal to monolingual English speakers. However, this is not the case for text level skills (e.g., reading comprehension, writing). These skills rarely reach levels equal to monolingual English speakers.

Of interest is the finding that there are similar proportions of second-language learners and monolingual speakers classified as poor readers, which most likely means that speaking a non-societal language per se is not a cause of poor reading achievement.

With regard to oral language, the authors found that second language (L2) oral language correlates importantly with L2 literacy development. This is especially true in the area of comprehension. One caution here, however, is that correlation should not be equated with causation, and it is quite possible that increased oral language capacity does not actually increase reading comprehension, but rather, that it is necessary in order to be able to express comprehension.

Discussion

In discussing the findings presented in this section, I will raise several concerns. First, the findings presented here represent a synthesis of 107 research studies compared to the National Reading Panel (NRP) Report (2000), which included 450 studies around this same theme. Clearly the authors were limited by the number of studies that met their inclusion criteria, but the greater concern here is that the use of the NRP criteria as a way to organize and present the research findings resulted in the normalization of monolingualism by using it as the theoretical and conceptual frame from which to discuss literacy research for developing bilinguals.

A major concern in this section and throughout the book is that the theoretical lens is based on a monolingual English view of language and literacy development. Further, since monolingualism is presented as the norm, language-minority students are by default defined as not normal and as “behind” from the onset. For example, the authors assert that “language-minority students enter U.S. schools needing to learn oral language and literacy in a second language and they have to learn with enormous efficiency if they are to catch-up with their monolingual English classmates” (p. 53).

The authors further their argument of monolingualism as the norm by characterizing monolingual instruction also as the norm. Take, for example, the following:

“We know, for example, that characteristics of code instruction that work for beginning readers of English and that can be *presumed* (emphasis mine) to be effective with second as well as first-language learners. But *normal* (emphasis mine) classroom instruction does not tend to emphasize oral language proficiency for monolinguals because they already possess well-developed oral language skills.” (p. 54)

Aside from positing monolingualism as the norm, this section also uses language that depicts Language Minority students in deficit terms as evidenced by the

conclusions that language-minority students enter school needing to “catch-up,” that monolingual instruction is normal, but that oral language instruction need not be a focus of this instruction and that all monolingual English speaking children possess well-developed oral English skills. Each of these assertions is problematic.

First, bilingualism, not monolingualism, is now the global norm. Ricento (2005) has established that there are now more people in the world who speak English as a Second Language than there are people who are monolingual native speakers of English. That bilingualism is the new “normal” was not addressed anywhere in the report. Next, there is little, if any, evidence that monolingual English speakers already possess well-developed oral language skills when they enter school. Third, the authors presented only scant evidence to indicate that code instruction that works for native English speakers will work with second language learners.

This section concluded with a discussion of future research needs. Specifically, the authors call for investigation in how to build the English proficiency skills of second-language learners because “these skills impede students’ ability to achieve to high levels in text level skills” (August, 2007). This sweeping conclusion was based on the review of findings from seven studies on reading comprehension and zero studies on writing.

Overall, the tone and language in this section reflect a deficit orientation toward language minority students and their strengths and abilities and an attempt to privilege monolingualism as the norm from which to understand bilingual development.

CROSS-LANGUAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Section II of the report included 68 studies for review and addressed three research questions. These included: 1) What is the relationship between language-minority children’s first- and second-language oral development in domains related to literacy?, 2) What is the relationship between oral development in the first language and literacy development in the second language?, and 3) What is the relationship between literacy skills acquired in the first language and literacy skills acquired in the second language?

Studies reviewed in this section relied primarily on theories of transfer as their foundation, and study findings include the following: 1) There is clear evidence that tapping into first-language literacy can confer advantages to English Language Learners; 2) First-language oral proficiency also influences developmental patterns in second language speech discrimination and production; 3) First language literacy is related to literacy development in English, including word and pseudo word reading, reading comprehension, reading strategies,

spelling and writing; 4) Language minority students who are literate in their first language are likely to be advantaged in the acquisition of English literacy; 5) Instructional programs work when they provide opportunities for students to develop proficiency in their first language; and 6) Studies that compare bilingual instruction with English-only instruction demonstrate that language-minority students instructed in their native language as well as in English perform better, on average, on measures of English reading proficiency than language minority students instructed only in English. This is the case at both elementary and secondary levels.

Discussion

This particular section of the report speaks to the heart of the debate about development of literacy in second language children. This debate centers on the role that the first language can and should play in the development of literacy in a second language. With regard to the studies included in this synthesis, the section concludes that the first language is highly and positively correlated to the development of literacy in second language. Moreover, instructional programs that invest time and resources into the development of the first language literacy are more effective than those that are English medium or English only programs. These findings concur with those of virtually all of the other research syntheses in this area (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Greene, 1997; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005).

Unfortunately, these conclusions are deeply buried in the corresponding chapters of the book and are accompanied by statements that are dismissive of the report's own findings. Further, as with the previous section, this chapter is framed within a monolingual orientation, as evidenced by the absence of any discussion or acknowledgement of the benefits of bilingualism or biliteracy. I would argue that being bilingual and biliterate is a cognitive and linguistic advantage with or without cross-language transfer potential.

To illustrate how the authors dismiss their own findings, they state that "taking first-language influences into account does not necessarily mean teaching in the first language. Rather, it means . . . seeking to identify the sources of difficulty individual students may have in mastering ESL . . . even if their education is entirely through the medium of English" (p. 154). Section II concludes that use of a student's native language in literacy instruction is optional despite of the research evidence presented.

Further evidence of the authors dismissive treatment of the research results presented in this section is that the authors go on to argue that individual differences in overall cognitive ability underlie, and may even explain the significant correlation between first- and second language reading comprehension. There is no doubt that English literacy development is influenced by many factors

including cognitive ability, age, English oral proficiency, previous learning and the similarities and differences between the first and second languages. However, the authors spend an inordinate amount of time qualifying their own findings about the positive correlations between first and second language literacy and the nature and potential of cross-language transfer.

It would have added to the credibility of this report if the authors had noted that four other meta-analyses had reached the same conclusion: that learning to read in the native language promotes higher levels of achievement in English (Genesee et al., 2006; Greene, 1997; Rolstad et al., 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005). There was no need to be so tentative in light of the preponderance of evidence supporting their findings in this area.

As with Section I, the research findings in Section II are presented in a manner that once again privileges monolingualism. Research results presented and discussed in this section do not simply demonstrate that literacy in one language positively correlates to literacy in a second language. Rather, they provide evidence of the potential for language minority students to become biliterate and bilingual as outcomes of public schooling. Sadly, there is not a single reference to the potential benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy in this section. Conclusions once again imply that the sole benefit of learning to read in one's native language is that it provides a bridge to English.

To its credit, this section ends with a strong discussion about the need for further research, particularly in the potential relationships of first-language reading and writing to particular academic domains such as mathematics, science, and social studies. Further emphasized is the extremely sparse research base on cross-linguistic influences in the acquisition of writing.

SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Section III of the report included 87 studies and addressed five research questions: 1) What is the influence of immigration on literacy development, defined broadly? 2) What is the influence of differences in discourse and interaction characteristics between children's homes and classrooms? 3) What is the influence of other sociocultural characteristics of students and teachers? 4) What is the influence of policies at the district, state, and federal levels? 5) What is the influence of language status or prestige?

The surprising finding in this section was how little evidence the authors claim there is about the effect of sociocultural factors. The researchers reviewed studies in six areas: generational status, discourse patterns, sociocultural factors between teachers and learners, family and community factors, district/state/federal language policies, and language status. The researchers state that the knowledge

base in this area is thin. In fact, the authors state that they were hard pressed to find sociocultural interventions that had achievement outcomes, thereby making it difficult to connect sociocultural relationships to literacy development. There is no question that there is a critical need for new research in this area, particularly research that includes interventions. However, these findings contradict those of other researchers who have found patterns in student achievement that can be directly linked to the influence of sociocultural factors (Ogbu, 1992) and those of other researchers who can link higher education achievement in second-generation immigrant students to the maintenance of their native languages and cultures (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Nonetheless, the section made several noteworthy assertions regarding literacy development of language minority students and sociocultural contexts. The report states, "Available research designed to bridge home-school differences in interaction can enhance students' engagement and level of participation in classroom instruction. This outcome is certainly not trivial, but is not the same as enhancing student achievement or other types of learning outcomes" (p. 256). Further, the authors state that "being a member of a low-status language group may have negative effects on self-concept, motivation and/or learning opportunities, all of which can depress literacy attainment" (p. 258). They add, "Language minority parents are willing and able to help their children succeed academically, but schools do not always take full advantage of these home resources" (p. 294). Finally, they assert that there is a critical need for research that compares students who receive culturally accommodated instruction (that has been defined in detail) with students who do not. The authors cite the need for this research to be ethnographic and/or qualitative in nature such that it examines fine-grained data on the nature of the classroom interactions and students' and teachers' responses to instruction, all of which is ultimately tied to literacy outcomes.

In sum, the chapter provided an adequate discussion of the extant literature with regard to sociocultural influences and their potential impact on literacy development with one exception—that being the influence of policies at the district, state, and federal levels. The report would have been greatly strengthened had it acknowledged the potential impact that English-only policies in states such as California, Arizona, and Massachusetts have had on the ability of researchers to conduct research on sociocultural accommodations in schools with large numbers of English Language Learners (ELLs) and/or the inordinate pressure that federal policies have placed on schools to have "one size fits all" programs to match the "one size fits all" accountability and testing systems.

Discussion

In this section, the issue of topicality, that being the order in which certain topics are presented and the emphasis given to certain topics, is central to the

discussion. Few would argue that state and federal policies in the past decade have had an enormous impact on instructional programs for ELLs. Federal policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and state initiatives such as Proposition 203 in Arizona, Proposition 227 in California, and Question #2 in Massachusetts have radically altered programs of instruction for ELLs. These policies, more than attempt at sociocultural accommodation and/or parent initiatives, have affected students' opportunities to become literate in English and other languages. Further, state initiatives in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts limited any approach other than English only to teach ELLs to read and write. It would have made a great deal of sense for this section to begin with a discussion of state and federal policies and to note the enormity of their impact. Sociocultural accommodations and parent initiatives need to be interpreted within the larger policy context. Instead, the discussion of the most significant issues in this chapter were buried in the chapter and downplayed as if they held the same impact on schooling opportunities for ELLs.

While the report decried the absence of relevant research on sociocultural influences on literacy outcomes, it did not connect this lack of research to current federal/state/local policies that privilege quantitative research designs over all other research designs and value research designs in which academic achievement is measured in English only rather than literacy in two languages, or biliteracy. It would have strengthened the overall report to emphasize the role that these federal/state/local policies play in both educational opportunities for children and youth and in opportunities for financial and other support to do needed qualitative research.

The NCLB Act, for example, mandates testing on state achievement tests, in English, after children have been in U.S. schools for three years. The mandated testing is in English and outcomes are compared to outcomes of monolingual English children and are used to determine which schools are failing or meeting federal/state standards. Under NCLB, native language assessment is not prohibited; however, it is not encouraged, and achievement outcomes in languages other than English are given little or no weight in deciding which schools succeed or fail. This federal policy, which has been subsequently adopted and implemented in the majority of states, has had a significant impact on student opportunities to learn to read in languages other than English. Further, federal initiatives under NCLB, such as Reading First (2006), awarded funds to states that adopted very narrow, skills-focused, and script-based approaches to teaching children to read (GAO, 2007). These programs have been and are being utilized with ELLs as well as native English speakers.

While the full impact of these initiatives is just beginning to emerge in the research, it is important to note that if students are not given opportunities to learn to read and write in multiple languages, and if schools are restricted

in the approaches and methods they can use in literacy instruction, then the opportunities to conduct research in this area will likewise be limited.

NCLB at the federal level combined with anti-bilingual education initiatives in several states (California—Proposition 227, 1998; Arizona—Proposition 203, 2000; and Massachusetts—Question 2, 2002) have no doubt exacerbated the issues raised above. These state policy issues merit a standalone chapter in reports such as this one, for there is no doubt that prohibiting the teaching of literacy in any language other than English not only limits the type of literacy instruction language minority children are receiving but also limits what instructional materials are published and in what languages. Moreover, there is an impact on what teacher-training programs teach with regard to pedagogy in literacy instruction, language status, and the rights of parents to advocate for their children to learn to read and write in multiple languages. These policies will impact significantly what research can be feasibly conducted over the next decade and should have been featured more prominently in this report.

Further, federal/state/local policy dictates what is deemed worthy of being studied. Therefore, the research agenda, as well as the types of research being funded, are very much influenced by federal/state/local policies. This, in turn, affects the knowledge production in the field. The collective impact of these policies on future research opportunities is obvious. One cannot research the efficacy of programs and practices that do not exist, and it is difficult to conduct the type of research called for in the chapter when current policies do not provide funding or other support for qualitative research designs that examine sociocultural contexts and literacy development.

The critique offered here is not about the research reported. The authors could not report on research that does not exist. However, the issue is that scant attention was paid to the fact that perhaps the dearth of research in many of the areas included in this section is a direct result of local, state, and federal policies regarding the overall education of Language Minority Children. Current federal policy has been seen by many as a declaration of a particular doctrine of research design by largely limiting itself to the examination and funding of experimental and quasi-experimental studies (Cunningham, 2001). In this climate and with these policies, it is reasonable to wonder whether any of the important research issues identified in Section III will be addressed over the next few years.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Section IV of the Report included 49 studies and addressed five research questions: 1) What impact does language of instruction have on the literacy learning of language-minority students? 2) What can be done to improve achievement

in reading, writing and spelling for language-minority children? 3) What do we know about classroom and school practice designed to build literacy in language minority students? 4) What do we know about literacy instruction for language-minority students in special education settings? 5) What does the research tell us about teachers' beliefs and attitudes related to literacy development in language minority students?

This section addressed perhaps the most contentious debate in the field over the past 35 years, which is the issue of language of instruction and, specifically, what role, if any, the native language of a student should play in instruction. Given this contentious history, it is reasonable to assume that practitioners and policy makers might start this book by reading chapter 14, once again raising the issue of topicality and why such a critical research topic would be buried in the report rather than being prominently featured in the first part of the report. Among the findings reported in this chapter, the following are perhaps the most relevant to the field: 1) "Where program differences were observed, they favored students in a bilingual program. The meta-analytic results suggest a positive effect for bilingual instruction that is moderate in size" (p. 397); 2) Findings from the synthesis suggest that there are no negative effects of bilingual instruction on acquisition of literacy in English (p. 398); 3) The authors report major problems relating to effect in many studies in that they do not adequately describe their program characteristics and cannot account for fidelity of implementation; and 4) That many bilingual programs are short term in nature, thereby making it difficult to examine cumulative effects.

It is somewhat surprising that the chapter did not include any studies conducted after 1994. No case studies or qualitative studies were included in this chapter. As mentioned earlier in this review, the findings that these authors report regarding the positive effects on literacy development in English of using children's native languages in literacy instruction have already been reported by other research reviews (Genesee et al., 2006; Greene, 1997; Rolstad et al., 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005). More important, no mention was made of the critical implication in this and other syntheses of research in this area that conclude that spending time teaching in a minority language does not delay or slow down students' literacy development in English (Cummins, 2000).

While chapter 14 dealt with research findings regarding language of instruction, chapter 15 dealt with issues around quality of literacy instruction for ELLs when learning to read in English. Findings in this area were separated by explicit instruction in literacy and other approaches. Using the same format as the National Reading Panel (2000), the report reviewed strategies for improving literacy in phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, and writing. Before reporting results, it is useful to note the number of research studies included in the National Literacy Report for Language Minority Children and Youth as compared to the NRP: There is

TABLE 1
A Comparison of Studies Reviewed for National Reading Panel Report and
National Literacy Report for Language Minority Children and Youth

<i>Skill Area</i>	<i>National Reading Panel (2000)</i>	<i>National Literacy Report for Language Minority Children and Youth (2006)</i>
Phonemic awareness	51	0
Phonics	38	5
Oral reading fluency	16	2
Vocabulary	45	3
Comprehension strategies	205	3
Writing	0	4

simply less research to review and therefore assumptions about comparability of findings should be viewed with caution.

Findings reported with regard to the above concluded that studies of elements of literacy suggest that the types of instruction that help native English speaking children learn to read in English are advantageous for second language learners as well; however, the *effect sizes are lower and adjustments are needed* (emphasis mine). It is not trivial to note that strategies utilized in research for second language learners reviewed for this report were *not* implemented for second language learners in exactly the same way as they were for monolingual English students, thereby raising serious doubts about the purported sameness of instructional strategies. In addition to the findings related to explicit instruction in literacy, the report concluded that other strategies for improving literacy (e.g., specific interventions such as Success for All, free reading, reading to children) helped, but there was too little evidence to draw definitive conclusions.

The next chapter in this section addressed qualitative studies of classroom and school practices that were designed to study effective classroom and school practices and contexts designed to build literacy in language minority students. This chapter did not address language of instruction issues. Similar to the findings reported for explicit teaching of literacy strategies, the authors suggest that “attributes of effective schools for native English speakers, such as implicit and explicit challenging of students, active involvement of all students, providing activities that students can complete, cooperative learning, etc., can also be effective for English language learners” (p. 356). However, again the authors caution that there are techniques related to second-language acquisition such as sheltered English and respect for cultural diversity that need to be utilized in addition to the effective school and classroom strategies discussed in the chapter. Again, it is significant to note that if effective schools and classrooms need to be modified for second language children, they are no longer the “same” practices as those implemented with native English speaking children. This difference is

critical to note given that many schools and teachers have come to believe that best practice for native English speakers is the *same* for ELLs.

With regard to ELLs and special education, only a small number of studies (12) were reviewed, and these studies involved only a few subjects (8 studies had fewer than 5 students). For the field, the most salient, albeit depressing finding is that, in the authors' words, "In some cases the children may not have been learning disabled, but poor readers as a consequence of their limited English proficiency or lack of exposure to reading instruction in their second language" (p. 537).

This section ends with a chapter on professional development. Findings point to the dire need for professional development opportunities for teachers of ELLs that are targeted at first changing teachers' beliefs and attitudes about language minority children and their strengths, and at the same time providing teachers with solid preparation in effective teaching strategies and approaches for ELLs. The authors state that in one study, "teachers blamed the English language learners' difficulty with reading skills on their cultural and language backgrounds, rather than on teaching methods, materials and teacher assumptions" (p. 356). While only five studies were included in this review, it is clear that there is a trend that teachers and others have deficit views of language minority children than need to change.

Discussion

As in previous sections, this section once again places its focus on literacy outcomes in English and again uses a monolingual English lens to examine literacy in emerging bilinguals. Chapter 14, which dealt with language of instruction, would have been an opportune place to present findings (where appropriate) about literacy development in several languages. Further, it would have been an opportune time to present research results about bilingualism and biliteracy as outcomes of literacy programs for language minority children. Instead, the authors chose "to compare English only and bilingual reading programs used with language-minority students with measures of English reading as the outcomes" (p. 372), thereby once again privileging English outcomes as the primary reason to teach children in bilingual settings.

To their credit, the authors acknowledged that the corpus of research on explicit literacy instruction for ELLs was much smaller than for native English speakers, and that much more research in this area is needed (chapter 15). However, this small body of evidence did preclude their making inferential leaps and stronger conclusions about the relationship between literacy development and instruction in a second language than can be firmly grounded in the data when compared to the same development for monolingual English students. For example, the authors state that "fluency instruction benefits native speakers and

appears to similarly benefit English language learners” (p. 429). This conclusion is based on results of two studies involving 120 children, the longest of which was only 12 weeks in duration.

More problematic are the overall conclusions in this chapter such as, “It is possible that second-language literacy development is similar for native speakers and English-language learners” (p. 419), and “It appears fair to say that the 17 studies discussed in this section yielded results that are largely consistent with the findings for native-speaking populations” (p. 435) (for which more than 400 studies were reviewed). Although these results are insufficient to prove that the same instructional routines found to benefit native speakers are equally effective with second language learners, they in no way contradict this idea” (p. 435). This conclusion is especially problematic given the author’s own admission that “we could not perform a true meta-analysis for any of the literacy components; we never had more than three conceptually comparable studies on any of the elements” (p. 419). Given the paucity of research in this area, these findings should have been stated tentatively; instead, the reader is led to believe that the research base is much more robust and the results are much more conclusive than they really are.

Sadly, this section was most lacking in its regard for theoretical frameworks relating to emerging bilingualism and biliteracy. Had the authors used an analytic lens that was based on bilingual development rather than monolingual development, they would indeed have found that there is ample evidence to contradict or at least question their conclusions that bilinguals develop language and literacy in the same way as monolinguals. The very ontology of being bilingual is different than being monolingual (Baker, 2003; Grosjean, 1992), and examining second language literacy development vis-à-vis native language literacy development will never permit exploration of the most salient aspects of this phenomena—that a human mind is processing information using two languages not just one (Berhnhardt, 2003). Unfortunately, bilingual frameworks were virtually nonexistent in this section and throughout the book.

In light of the sameness argument for explicit literacy instruction, it is even more disconcerting that the authors conclude “comprehension studies found no significant improvement in that outcome due to instruction” (p. 435). If in fact, explicit teaching of the components of literacy instruction has a “benefit on English Language Learners” and if, in fact, “that benefit is similar for native speakers and English language learners” (p. 419), then the comprehension studies should have yielded similar results. That the benefits of explicit instruction for ELLs with regard to comprehension could not be demonstrated in the review should raise red flags about the assertions of the other findings.

The research studies reviewed in chapter 16 on effective schools are rife with contradictions. First, the authors state that their review in this area did not include language of instruction as a factor, so no attention was paid to whether strategies

such as cooperative learning were implemented in English or other languages. Then they state that findings from their review indicate that the attributes of effective classrooms and schools for ELLs are most likely the same as for native English speakers; however, they then caution that in all likelihood these strategies, routines and approaches utilized for monolingual English speakers will need to be modified for ELLs with regard to using sheltered English techniques and techniques that are culturally responsive. As stated above, this finding sends a mixed message to the field. In one part of the chapter, the reader is lead to believe that effective schools and classrooms do engage in the same practices for native English speakers as well as ELLs. As the saying goes, “good teaching is good teaching.” The chapter goes on to call for modification of these strategies for ELLs. In fairness to the authors, other syntheses of research in this area acknowledge that there is some support for the argument that what we know about good instruction and curriculum in general holds true for ELLs. However there is also widespread agreement that teachers must modify instruction to take into account students’ levels of proficiency in English (Goldenberg, 2008). I would submit that when strategies are modified for cultural and linguistic differences, then they are no longer the same strategy. Once modified, strategies and approaches take on new dimensions and attributes, thereby possibly making them “new.”

With regard to professional development, there is little doubt from the research presented in the review and the field at large about the need to change teacher attitudes and beliefs about language minority students, their strengths, and attributes. Too often, these students are perceived to be liabilities rather than assets to their schools and communities. As the authors so appropriately point out, the question of how to change attitudes and beliefs is large and looming and in need of future research. What is clear in the research is that efforts to change beliefs must go beyond teaching teachers’ new pedagogy and methods.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Section V, the final section of this report included 37 studies and six research questions: 1) What assessments do state and local school districts use for identification, program placement and reclassification purposes? Are these assessments adequate? 2) What do we know about alternative assessments of oral English proficiency and literacy? 3) What first- and second-language vocabulary and widescale literacy assessments for language minority students have been investigated? What does the research tell us about accommodations for language-minority students taking these assessments? 4) Are first- and second-language vocabulary and widescale literacy assessments for language minority students (including those with reading disabilities) useful and appropriate? 5) What re-

search has focused on non language and literacy measures or methods developed for the identification of language minority students eligible for special education services (including speech and hearing)? 6) What standardized (commercial) and researcher-developed oral proficiency, literacy, and literacy-related assessments have been used by researchers whose work is reviewed throughout this volume?

Given the current educational environment with its emphasis on testing and assessment, the findings in this chapter are particularly disappointing. The authors are quick to note the dearth of research on any of the research questions posed above. Of the 37 studies reviewed, many were essentially pilot efforts, or the number of subjects and items were so small that generalizability could not be inferred. As with other sections, findings reported herein focus more on what we do not know than what we know and can rely on. They conclude overall that “most assessments cited in the research to gauge language minority students’ language proficiency and content knowledge in English were inadequate” (August, 2007, p. 8). Again the authors note the need for a systematic, progressive accumulation of empirical findings. The authors particularly cite the need for language proficiency assessment that defines the difference between language proficiency standards and English language arts standards. Appropriately the authors call for new assessments that are practical.

Given the current high-stakes testing environment and the need for all schools to meet the mandates of NCLB, the report’s findings with regard to the research on accommodations and how English language achievement tests should be accommodated for ELLs will be of great interest to the field. In general, accommodations that gave ELLs extra time were minimally beneficial, and those that simplified English (e.g., tests that made linguistic changes in the vocabulary and grammar of test items to eliminate irrelevant complexity while keeping the content the same) did not help. An accommodation that seemed to help was the creation of customized English language glossaries and dictionaries to provide definitions or simple paraphrases for potentially unfamiliar or difficult words to the test booklet. This helped in content areas of math and science.

Of great interest to the field is the finding on accommodations that included using the students’ native language. In this review such studies were limited to examining accommodations in Spanish. Findings indicated that assessment in Spanish had a large and positive effect *if students had been instructed in Spanish, but a negative effect if they had not* (emphasis mine). The same was true for dual language test booklets in which a test booklet contained English items on one side and the corresponding native language items on the other side and the use of bilingual dictionaries and glossaries. In short, the native language is only a useful accommodation if students have had the opportunity for native language instruction.

This section concludes with a caveat that this review was completed before the widespread implementation of NCLB and there are many current initiatives

to improve the validity, reliability, and feasibility of assessment systems and tools for ELLs.

Discussion

It is ironic that the current emphasis on evidence-based practice provides so little evidence to support most of the assessment and testing practices for language minority children and youth. How can so much time and energy be expended on testing that punishes and rewards schools when the outcomes of this testing does not produce required results? Further, if, as the authors report, there is such a dearth of research to support current assessments used to measure language proficiency or literacy, is the body of research reviewed in this entire report as the report questionable in nature because it is so heavily grounded in the quantitative measurement paradigm that uses tests as indicators of student outcomes and to report research findings?

That the findings reported in the chapter so heavily emphasized language proficiency tests and accommodations for English language assessment for ELLs once again points to the monolingual lens that provided the theoretical framework for this entire report. The assessment tests reported in this text as well as the assessments being utilized in the implementation of NCLB were created for monolingual English speaking children. Their use, even with accommodations, for ELLs illustrates once again that monolingualism in English is considered the norm, and accommodations are created from monolingual tests to be used with students who are not part of the norm.

It is very important to note the potential of native language assessments for improving the overall assessment practices for ELLs. The creation of bilingual assessments systems that are valid and reliable would require two rather significant changes in current practice. First, as stated in the report, native language assessment is only effective if it is coupled with instruction in the native language. Second, native language assessments would need to be created from theoretical frameworks that value bilingualism and see bilingualism as a new and different norm from monolingualism. This change in paradigm would require much more than time and money—it would require a fundamental shift in the value systems present in U.S. schools. It also would require development of bilingual approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment that are comprehensive and long term. It would require the development of bilingual tests that are developed first in non-English languages rather than simply being reconstructed from English. Given the current federal/state/local policies that are so driven by English-only policies and mandates, and the pressure to perform only in English, it is doubtful that the political will exists to implement this kind of instructional or assessment program. Again, the potential of bilingualism and biliteracy is dismissed and devalued.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this review has been to draw attention to types and amounts of evidence, the reasoning from that evidence, and the conclusions drawn from that evidence. Having now read and analyzed the report multiple times, I have reached the conclusion that the authors were given a Herculean task when they were commissioned to do this report and that the information presented in this volume was too much for one book. It might have been helpful if the report had been written in two volumes, one on elementary and one on secondary. Further, it might have been helpful to more clearly separate language minority students who are Spanish speakers from other language groups or to separate what is known about second language literacy for students who have or are becoming literate in their native language at the same time they are learning to read and write in English.

On a more basic level, it might have been helpful to distinguish the terms “language minority” from ELL. Further, the entire conundrum with regard to assessment of ELLs and who exactly is an ELL and how do we measure English proficiency, etc., merits a separate book. The point is that the authors attempted to cover a great deal of information in a few chapters and the end result was a report that contained far too much information crammed into too few pages to be useful to the field.

It bears repeating that in its totality the report was more about what we do not know about effective schools, theories, and educational practices for literacy for second language learners than what we do know. To the credit of the authors, they began and ended every section and chapter with this very refrain and with this caveat. Readers of the report may be disappointed in its presentation and in its redundancy in stating that there is so much that we do not know. The authors are to be commended for their candor in revealing that our knowledge in the area of ELL literacy development is narrow and thin. Nevertheless, there are serious issues with the report with regard to its theoretical orientation, the conclusions reached in some of its syntheses, and its overall deficit view of language minority children and youth. These issues bear repeating in this summary.

The National Reading Panel Report (2000) was criticized on epistemological grounds for its narrow definition of scientifically based research as solely positivistic in nature and overly dependent on the research traditions of experimental and quasi-experimental research design (see Cunningham, 2001). While the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth had a broader framework with regard to epistemological issues, its theoretical orientation with regard to language and literacy was as narrow as the NRP’s research orientation.

Given the monolingual English lens through upon which the report was based and the policy constraints on both educational opportunities for students and

research funding, it is important that the report be read and interpreted with caution. Major limitations are summarized below.

The report normalized monolingualism thereby placing language minority students (who are developing bilinguals) in the margins of educational theory and practice. The report utilized standards and assumptions about monolingualism as the basis for studying bilingualism, literacy development in a second language, and bilingual literacy development. The orientation cast monolinguals as “normal” and language minority students as “other than normal.” This monolingual norm was particularly problematic in the report when the authors synthesized research results where students were in literacy programs that used two languages as mediums of instruction. Rather than discussing the potential benefits of biliteracy, the sole criteria that were used to examine the potential benefits of cross-language transfer in literacy or bilingual instructional approaches were in the examination of English literacy outcomes using assessment measures that were developed for monolingual English students.

The normalization of monolingualism subsequently normalized monolingual English methods as the basis for examining the efficacy of instructional programs. Many chapters emphasized the potential efficacy of sameness (e.g., using the same methods for teaching ELLs as monolingual English students). This was particularly the case in the teaching of reading skills related to decoding. At times, the benefits of sameness were argued despite little evidence to support these conclusions and evidence that this sameness did not result in improved reading comprehension for ELLs.

When teaching methods are modified, they are no longer the same. Ironically, while many sections of the report argue for sameness in methodology or approach, they simultaneously note that monolingual methods need modification and adaptation for ELLs. As with bilingualism, however, these caveats and calls for modification were frequently mentioned as footnotes to chapters and sections of the book. A fear is that the proponents of one size fits all reading instruction and platitudes about good teaching being universal will find great comfort in this book and will likely not read through all of the caveats and limitations. It bears repeating that methods and approaches that have been significantly modified along linguistic and cultural criteria are no longer the same methods.

The report’s orientation toward monolingualism weighed heavily in its topicality. In the few pages and sections where biliteracy or second language literacy issues were addressed, they were often the final bullets. There was virtually no attention to the potential benefits to individuals, communities, or societies of being bilingual and biliterate. It was as if only acquisition of and achievement in English literacy matters. Any reference to the benefits of bilingualism are buried so deeply in the report that it is quite possible that the reader who comes to this text already believing that monolingual literacy practices are superior will not read long enough to understand the benefits of bilingualism or the nuanced and tentative ways in which many of the findings are discussed.

Policy constraints on educational opportunities prevent students from the opportunity to become biliterate in public schools. These constraints prevent students from demonstrating their knowledge or their potential in languages other than English, they view students' cultures as "barriers to learning," thereby reducing the discourse about their educational needs to that of "learning English." Policy constraints that limit assessment and instruction for ELLs to English medium programs with English-only assessments similarly limit the potential for researchers to explore a wide range of issues regarding instruction and assessment for language minority students.

Paradoxically, I believe that those of us in the field should study and view this report with skeptical optimism. For example, the report sets out a clear and resounding need for future research in many areas related to literacy acquisition for second language learners. Next, the report presents a comprehensive view on what we do know that could be the blue print for future work. I am optimistic that the research community can undertake this research. However, I am skeptical that federal/state policies with regard to research will support the robust and diverse approaches to research called for in this report.

The report clearly states that native language literacy correlates to literacy in English as a second language, and that in the extant literature bilingual approaches are more effective than English only approaches. Given this knowledge, will federal/state/local policies encourage the implementation and study of multiple approaches to the education of language minority students? Or will we continue to see the current trend toward policy initiatives that privilege and mandate monolingual approaches? What about sameness? Will we ignore or embrace the admonitions in the report that assert that methods that are effective for monolingual English learners are only effective with ELLs if they are modified and made linguistically and culturally appropriate? Will we study and attempt to understand the report in its totality, or will we simply utilize the sections that agree with our ideological orientations? We have the report, we know the state of the art, where do we go from here?

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Kathy Escamilla is a Professor in the Division of Educational Equity and Cultural Diversity at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She has been in the field of Bilingual/ESL Education for over 38 years and has been a classroom teacher, a school administrator and professor. She does research on Spanish language and literacy development and assessment of Spanish-speaking Latino children in U.S. schools. She is particularly interested in issues related to the development of bilingualism and biliteracy in this population. She has served on the National Early Literacy Panel, and on the National Hispanic Advisory Council for the National Center for Family Literacy. She is currently working on Phase II of Literacy Squared, a longitudinal biliteracy research intervention designed for Spanish speaking simultaneous bilingual children. She can be contacted at the School of Education, University of Colorado, Boulder, Campus Box 247, Boulder, CO 80309-0247. E-mail: Kathy.escamilla@colorado.edu.