



# Review of Evidence-Based Practices to Promote Language and Literacy in Young Language Minority Children

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# Current Context for Language Minority Children

- The proportion of the population that enters early education programs speaking a language other than English is increasing and is projected to grow at even greater rates.
- Increased risk factors associated with poorer school performance have been identified among language minority children from low SES homes.
- The educational success of these children is critical to the overall progress of our educational system and the economic future of the nation.
- Specific instructional practices that are well implemented during the early years of schooling have the potential to improve the academic achievement of a large and growing group of diverse learners.

# Strengths and Limitations of Current Research Base

Research for Monolingual English Speakers	Research for Language Minority Children
Decades of studies	Recent area of concern: Demographic shift, accountability, impact of preschool.
National Early Literacy Panel: 7300 studies, > 300 met inclusion criteria.	Few studies with LM children < 5 years of age (most of LM research on K-12 students)
Consensus on goals and variables: sizable, reliable, & stable.	Measurement issues
Informs content, intensity, sequence of ECE interventions (PA, shared book-reading, parent programs, language rich interventions)	Debate on goals and terms

# Research Reviewed

- Review of literature on instructional practices for preschool LM children (only peer-reviewed, includes experimental and quasi-experimental studies).
- National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (few studies on Pre-K and K) (August & Shanahan, 2006).
- What Works Clearinghouse Report: Effective Literacy and Effective English Language Instruction for English Learners (elementary grades) (Gersten et al, 2007).





# **Instructional Practices for Preschool Language Minority Children:**

**What We Know and What We Need to Learn**

## Instruction in the primary language

- Separate meta-analyses have found that teaching reading skills in the first language is more effective in terms of English reading achievement than immersing children in English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2006).
- The use of the primary language (Spanish) in the Pre-K classroom also has been found to be related to teachers' perceptions of children's behavior and social competence (Chang et al., 2007).
- Implication for ECE: Using only English in Pre-K classrooms with LM children will affect their opportunities to have rich language and literacy related interactions and close relationships with their teachers.

# What do we need to learn about using the primary language?

- Is more instruction in the primary language, and for more years, more beneficial than less?
- Is primary-language instruction more beneficial for some LM children than for others?
- In an English-only situation, what is the most effective way to use the primary language to support children's learning in the second language?
- (Goldernberg, 2006)



# What do we need to learn about using the primary language?

- For very young LM children, at what age/ developmental level should English be introduced?
- There is evidence that when infants have sufficient opportunities to learn both languages, they are fully capable of “different but parallel acquisition of two languages from the very onset of language production” (Petito, Katerelos, Levy, Guana, Tetreault, & Ferraro, 2001, p.493).
- However, other research has examined the negative consequences of introducing English too early on parenting and family functioning (Wong Fillmore, 1991; 1996; Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000)



# High quality instruction as the foundation of learning for LM students

- What constitutes the benefit of high quality instruction for non-LM children is equally beneficial for LM children (Goldenberg, 2006; Shanahan & Beck, 2006).
- *What is considered high quality instruction in early childhood education?*
  - Using a curriculum that is “thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.”(p.2, NAEYC, 2003).

However...

“High quality instruction ...alone would be insufficient to support equal academic success for language minority students.”

(August & Shanahan, 2006, p. 448).



# Instructional accommodations to support LM children

Instructional accommodations are important specially when instruction is only in English:

- Conduct **ongoing and frequent assessments** that allow teachers to monitor children's English language acquisition and development in the different domains (Lesaux & Siegel, 2003).
- Provide **focused small-group interventions** for LM children, especially with those who are at risk for reading and math difficulties (e.g. Vaughn et.al., 2006; McMaster et. al., 2008) .



# Instructional accommodations to support LM children (cont'd)

- Provide **explicit vocabulary instruction** (Carlo et. al., 2004) that can be done through read-alouds, and direct teaching of core vocabulary, using the primary language strategically (Castro, et al, 2006):
  - Engage the children in pre-reading activities that identify key words and phrases that are needed to understand the text. Help the LM children learn the core vocabulary by presenting the words in primary language and English, and using multi-sensory materials to illustrate the book meaning.
  - Use good book-reading strategies including dialogic reading practices that prompt the children to interact and respond to the story. While interacting with the children during reading, the teacher will also need to consider which stage of English acquisition the child is in and adapt expectations accordingly.
  - After reading books to children, provide opportunities for using the core vocabulary in related extension activities. (Castro et al., p.79).

## Instructional accommodations to support LM children (cont'd)

- Ensure the **development of formal or academic English** (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer and Rivera, 2006) .
- **Promote socio-emotional development** through positive teacher-child relationships and facilitating children's participation as members of the sociocultural group of the classroom (Gillanders, 2007; Howes & Ritchie, 2002).
- **Promote family-school partnerships** (e.g Goldenberg, Reese & Gallimore, 1992; Hancock, 2002).
- Implement a **culturally responsive curriculum** (Espinosa & Burns, 2003).

# Instructional accommodations to support LM children (cont'd)

- Consistent expectations, instruction and routines.
- Extended explanations & opportunities for practice.
- Physical gestures and visual cues.
- Build on primary language skills.



# Instructional accommodations to support LM children (cont'd)

- Extra practice reading words, sentences, and stories.
- Paraphrase students' language and encourage them to expand
- Focusing on the similarities (cognates) between English and primary language.



**Factors affecting the impact of  
instructional practices**

# There is variability among LM children in:

- The amount of exposure to rich primary language.
- The amount of exposure to English.
- The extent of LM children's early literacy learning opportunities.
- Socio-economic status, and thus, family resources available to support the child.
- Timing and circumstances of immigration to the U.S.

(Espinosa, et al., 2006)



# Closing remarks

- Research on instructional practices to support language and literacy development in preschool LM children is emerging.
- Many of the suggested instructional practices are adaptations from research conducted with older children.
- Nonetheless, we can lay claim to some things that matter:
  - (1) The use of the primary language in the classroom enhances LM children's language and literacy outcomes. Although, there are still questions about how much, when and how to use it with the very young children.
  - (2) High quality instruction is beneficial for non-LM children and LM children, BUT accommodations are required for instruction to have the same level of impact on LM children's language and literacy.



This presentation is based on the paper by:  
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