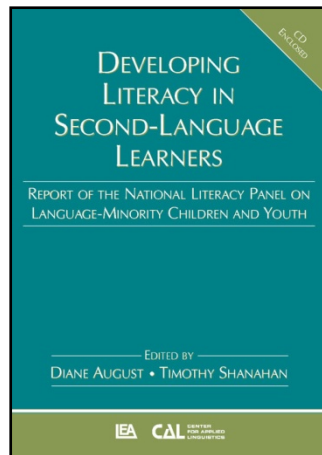# *Report of the National Literacy Panel for Language Minority Children and Youth*

Nonie K. Lesaux

Harvard Graduate School of Education

David J. Francis

University of Houston

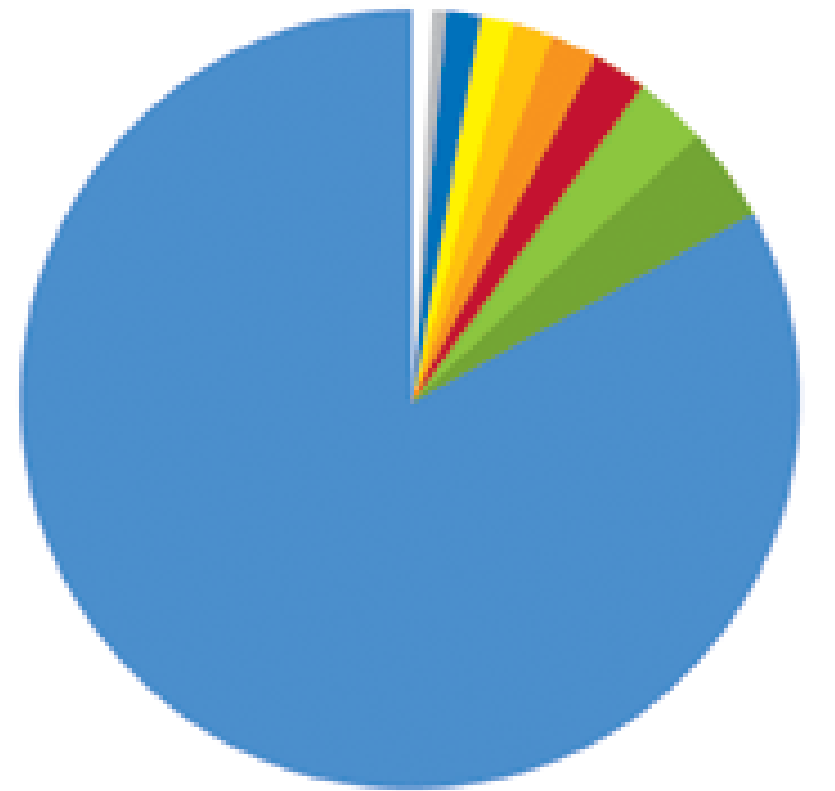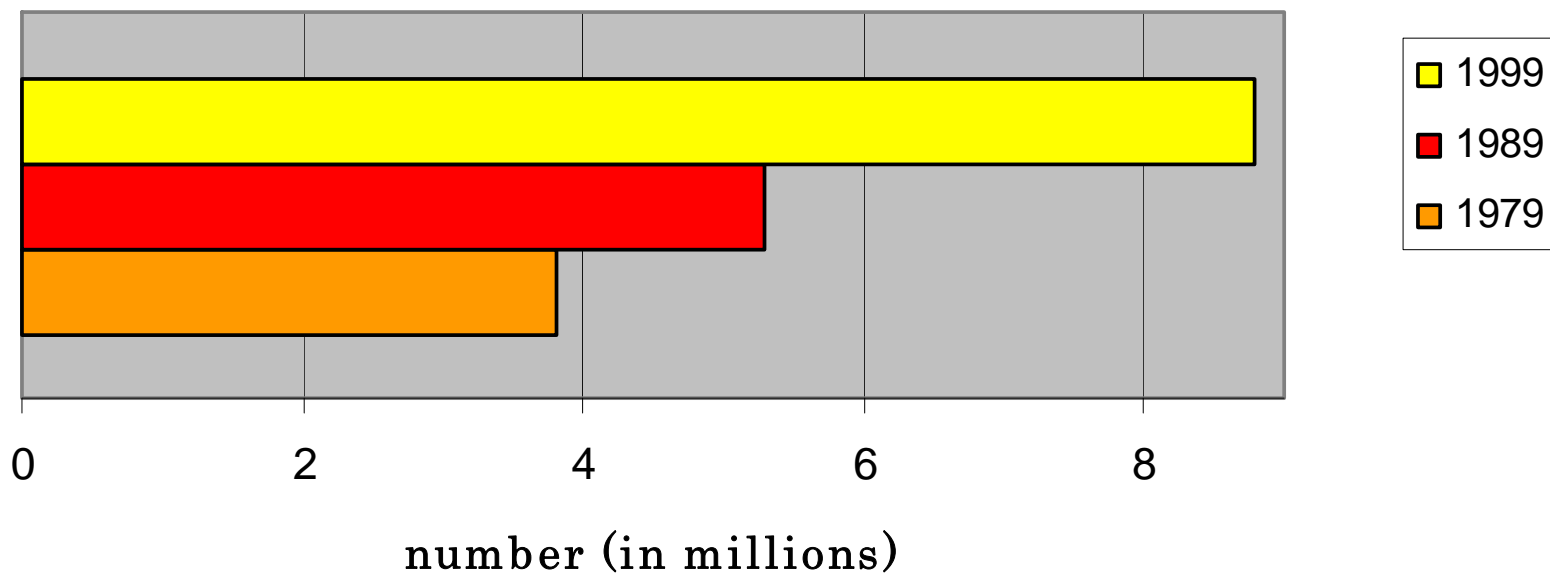Diane August

Center for Applied Linguistics

English Language Learners in Head Start Programs

•28% of Head Start families speak a primary language other than English at home.

•Approximately 140 different home languages represented nationwide in the EHS/HS population

•About 80 percent are from Spanish-speaking homes

- Spanish (245,954)
- East Asian languages (11,876)
- Central/South American languages (8,710)
- Middle Eastern/South Asian languages (7,281)
- Pacific Island languages (5,173)
- European and Slavic languages (5,033)
- Caribbean languages (4,196)
- African languages (4,065)
- Native North American languages (2,090)
- Other languages (2,679)

Children who Speak a Language Other Than English at Home
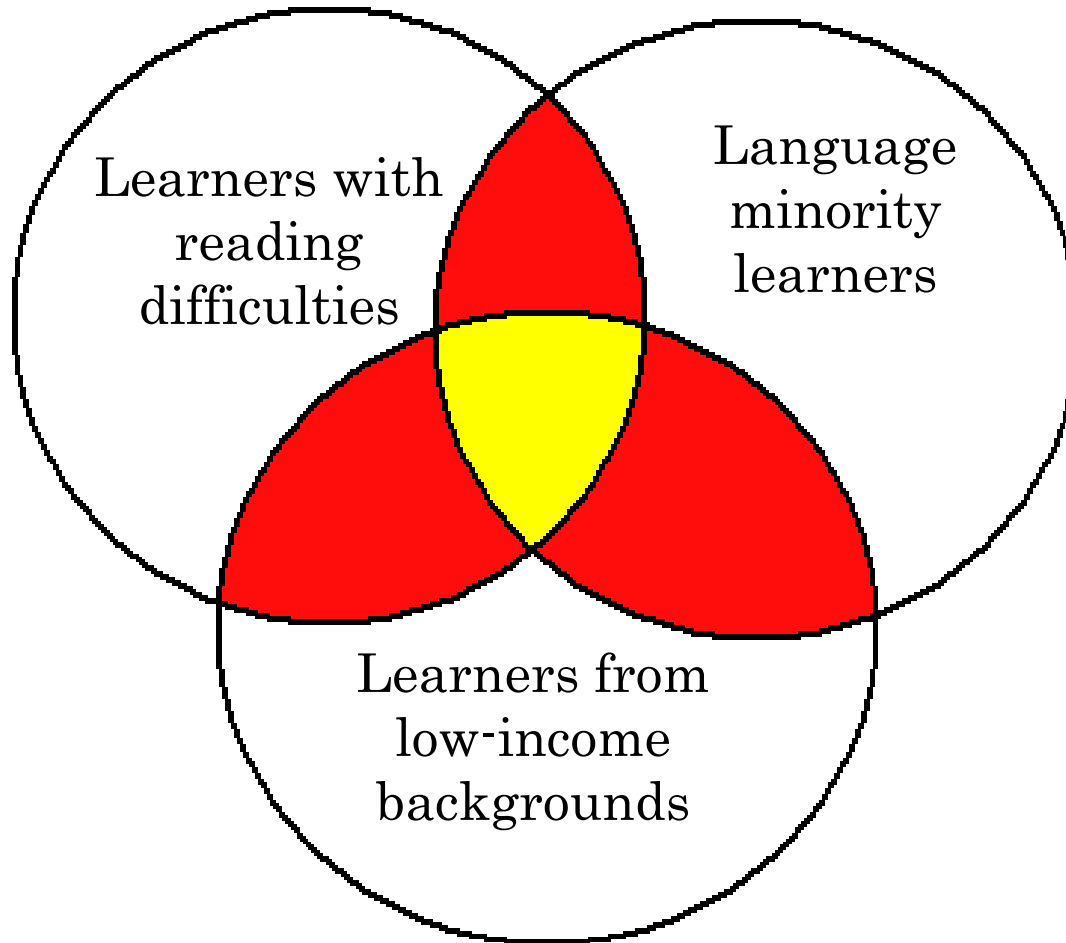
number (in millions)

Legend: 1999, 1989, 1979

Demographics

- Proportion of Latinos in the U.S. child population is expected to reach 28% by 2050

    (Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, & Miller, 2002).

    Latino families continue to be over-represented among America's poor (Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2002)

    - The number of Latino children served by EHS/HS can be expected to further increase over the coming decades.

Learners with reading difficulties

Language minority learners

Learners from low-income backgrounds

Purpose of a National Panel

- Develop an objective research review methodology

- Analyze and synthesize the existing evidence about the development of literacy for language minority learners

- Develop a final report with recommendations for research

Support for the Panel

- Institute of Education Sciences
- Additional support
  - National Institute for Child Health and Development
  - Office of English Language Acquisition

Panel Process

- US Department of Education constitutes the panel
- Five panel meetings, several subgroup meetings, and numerous, ongoing conference calls
- Five working groups each focused on a different domain
- Seven electronic searches and hand searches of key journals
- Criteria established for inclusion
- Coding of all studies in a file-maker database
- Manuscript development
- One internal round of review and 2 external rounds of review
- Extensive editing and revisions

Panel Members

- Diane August, Principal Investigator
- Timothy Shanahan, Chair
- Fred Genesee
- Esther Geva
- Michael Kamil
- Isabelle Beck
- Linda Siegel
- Keiko Koda
- David Francis

- Claude Goldenberg
- Robert Rueda
- Margarita Calderon
- Gail McKoon
- Georgia Garcia

Senior Research Associates
- Cheryl Dressler
- Nonie Lesaux

Senior Advisors
- Donna Christian
- Catherine Snow
- Frederick Erickson

Parameters for Research Synthesis

- Language minority children
- Ages 3-18
- Acquisition of literacy in their first language and the societal language
- Empirical research
- Peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, technical reports
- Research published between 1980-2002

Topics

- Development of literacy
- Relationship between second language oral proficiency and second language literacy
- Cross-linguistic relationships
- Socio-cultural factors that influence literacy
- Schooling: Effective instructional practices and professional development
- Assessment

Development: Research Questions

- What are the differences and similarities between LM and native speakers in the development of various literacy skills in the societal language?

    - What factors have an influence on the literacy development of LM students?

- What are the profiles of those LM students identified as having literacy difficulties?

    - Prevalence of difficulty

Development of Literacy Skills

- Precursor literacy skills
  - Understanding of print, phonological processing
- Word-level skills
  - Word Reading
  - Spelling
- Text-level skills
  - Reading comprehension
  - Writing

Methodology Specific to Development Review

- Studies conducted with LM learners acquiring the societal language
  - English, Dutch
- Relevant literacy outcome measures
- Quantitative measurement and analysis

Precursor Literacy Skills

- Phonological processing skills (L1 or L2)
  - Phonemic awareness
  - Rapid naming
  - Phonological memory
- Concepts of print
- Print awareness

  - e.g., Bialystok, 1997;Chiappe & Siegel, 1999; Cisero & Royer, 1995; Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2002; Jackson, Holm, & Dodd, 1998

Main Findings: ELLs vs. Monolinguals

- Converging evidence that LM learners and monolinguals have *equivalent* word recognition and decoding skills

  - Diverse linguistic backgrounds (Asian languages, Arabic, Italian, Portuguese, Punjabi, Turkish, Urdu)
  - Diverse demographic contexts (Canada, the Netherlands, UK, US)
  - Combination of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies
  - Varying ages (K through 8th grade)

Reading Comprehension: ELLs vs. Monolinguals

- Limited amount of research that investigated the development of reading comprehension skills for LM learners

- 5 studies that compared LM learners and native speakers
  - LM learners' generally performed at lower levels than native speakers
    - Aarts & Verhoeven, 1999; Droop & Verhoeven, 1998; Hacquebord, 1994; Verhoeven, 1990, 2000

- Multiples studies used a within-group design to examine factors that influence reading comprehension of LM learners

Predictors of Reading Comprehension

- Individual-level factors
  - e.g., vocabulary, background knowledge, motivation, strategy use

- Contextual factors
  - e.g., home literacy practices

- Text factors
  - Story structure

Reading Difficulties

- The reading difficulties of LM learners reading in their second language resemble reading disabilities as identified in research with native speakers

- Similar presentation and prevalence of difficulties related to foundational skills
  - Phonological awareness, word reading, spelling
  - Abu-Rabia & Siegel, 2002; Chiappe & Siegel, 1999; Da Fontoura & Siegel, 1995; Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2002; Everatt, Smythe, Adams, & Ocampo, 2000; Limbos & Geva, 1999; Miramontes, 1987; Wade-Woolley & Siegel, 1997

Implications to consider…

- Sources of low achievement not limited to disability
- Early screening for intervention services must include measures of vocabulary and oral language
- Typical classroom curriculum not enough to promote low-income ELLs' vocabulary
- Candidates for early intervention programs that focus on oral language;
  - retention without intervention not likely to be effective

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Future Directions for Research

- Readiness
  - Preschool and kindergarten predictors of later outcomes
  - Effects of preschool attendance
- Rates and predictors of growth in oral language and reading abilities
- Component skills of reading comprehension
  - preschool to 12

Future Directions for Research

- Replication and extension of previous research
  - Design, assessments, samples
- Longitudinal studies
- The influence of contextual and demographic factors on development
  - Neighbourhood characteristics, socioeconomic status
  - Instruction
  - Age of arrival
- Two-group design: Comparative lens is crucial