**Q**: Can you advise teachers who want to build a strong reading program for English Language Learners? What are the steps they should take?

**A**: Designing a strong reading program for this diverse group of learners requires an understanding of the characteristics of ELL children. While there is no preeminent reading program for English Language Learners, the best programs are usually designed to serve the needs of a particular group of ELLs and recognize the strong relationship between language development and literacy skills.

It becomes of
It becomes of paramount importance, especially with older learners, to consider cultural orientation in literacy education when there is a dominant group of English Language Learners in the classroom. This is an area that has been subject to much debate, and many experts have advocated bilingual instruction that begins in the native language. Children learning to read in a language in which they are not yet proficient is an additional risk factor for reading difficulties also. However, it is the case today that many children enter school with little or no proficiency in English and still receive all of their instruction in English.

A recent large-scale, longitudinal study demonstrated that the simultaneous acquisition of English reading skills and language proficiency (e.g., African-American, Hispanic), and children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are at a greater risk than children from typical, middle-class suburbia.

However, it is difficult to separate the risk associated with poverty from the risk associated with limited English proficiency because many English Language Learners (ELL) come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and attend schools with disproportionately high numbers of children in poverty. Research in this area has accumulated over time and demonstrates the potential negative effects of a disadvantaged neighborhood and school community on child development, specifically literacy achievement.

There is a history of low literacy levels in the ELL population here in the U.S. due to a combination of lack of effective instruction and also the demographics of reading. Other considerations include cultural differences and conceptions of literacy.
can be an effective process. The caveat, however, is that a tremendous investment from the school district, resource staff, and teachers is also necessary to achieve early literacy and vocabulary. Educators must necessarily be committed to monitoring student progress and providing additional support for children identified as at-risk for reading difficulties, as early as kindergarten.

Accordingly, it is important to consider the potential gains in vocabulary development, which accompany effective literacy instruction in English Language Learners. There are many ways to embed vocabulary lessons in reading activities and vice versa. Because vocabulary knowledge is a significant determinate of reading comprehension ability, early lessons and activities that promote vocabulary knowledge and other reading skills are crucial. In our study of fourth-grade students, my colleagues and I did not find differences in reading comprehension between ELLs and their native speaking peers. It is however, also important to note that in this study, the children did not receive instruction in their native language and thus many of them are not bi-literate.

**Q**: What are the characteristics of strong reading programs for English Language Learners?

**A**: Designing a strong reading program for this diverse group of learners requires an understanding of the characteristics of ELL children. While there is no preeminent reading program for English Language Learners, the best programs are usually designed to serve the needs of a particular group of ELLs and recognize the strong relationship between language development and literacy skills.

**For More Information**

More information about Nonie Lesaux is available in the Faculty Profiles.

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