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ABSTRACT

The profile of native language literacy instruction for adults looks at a variety of trends and issues in the design and improvement of such programs. The first section discusses what has been learned in the last few years about the kinds of instruction offered, including basic program characteristics and models for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Six programs are described in this section. The second section focuses on the rationale for offering native language literacy instruction to adults, examining sociopolitical, linguistic, sociocultural, and sociocontextual reasons and the importance of literacy for content learning. The third section highlights key areas in which even limited investment of resources can bring program improvement. These areas include demonstration projects, development of a common data bank, and staff development activities. Finally a research agenda is outlined. Research areas of particular interest include transfer of native language literacy knowledge and skills to a second language, collaborative program-based research, language use in communities and classrooms, teacher inquiry and action research, longitudinal studies, and surveys. Contains 75 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

Issues in ESL LITERACY EDUCATION

1

Native Language Literacy Instruction for Adults

Patterns, Issues, & Promises

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Although it was not possible to collaborate directly with members of the Working Group to develop this issues paper, their insights and recommendations were invaluable to its development. It is hoped that the paper does, to some extent, represent their concerns and reflect their dedication to moving the field forward. The members were Klaudia Rivera and Deidre Freeman of El Barrio Popular in New York City; Celia Esparza and Carol Clymer-Spradling of El Paso Community College in El Paso; José Hunter of Casa Aztlán in Chicago; Lilia Salazar-Holst of Triton College in the Chicago area; Julio Midy and Marilyn St. Hilaire of the Haitian Multi-Service Center in Boston; and Douglas Doua Vue of the Lao Family Center in Milwaukee. Others participating were Elsa Auerbach of the University of Massachusetts, Boston; Aliza Becker of Traveler and Immigrant Aid, Chicago; Peggy Dean of the Adult Learning Resource Center, Des Plaines, Illinois; Richard Durán of the University of California, Santa Barbara; Fran Keenan of the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy in Washington, DC; Loren McGrail of World Education in Boston; Dan Rabideau of the Literacy Assistance Center in New York; Sharon Snyder of the Refugee Service Center, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC; and Heide Spruck Wrigley of Aguirre International in San Mateo, California.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States of the 1990s is a land of cultural and linguistic diversity. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, nearly 32 million people speak a language other than English at home. More than 17 million speak Spanish, a 56% increase over the number of Spanish speakers reported in the 1980 Census. Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese language populations have also more than doubled over the last decade. Many others speak French German, a Chinese language, or Italian at home (Macías, 1994). Between now and the year 2000, the U.S. Department of Education estimates that immigrants will constitute 29% of new U.S. entrants into the labor force, twice their current number (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Although precise figures do not exist, experts estimate that between 12 and 14 million adults may have difficulties speaking, understanding, reading, and writing English (Chisman, Wrigley, & Ewen, 1993). These numbers are reflected in enrollment in adult education programs. In 1992, nearly 40% of all adult education enrollees were ESL learners (Development Associates, 1994).

One of the greatest challenges facing ESL educators is that, in growing numbers, their adult learners are unable to read and write in their own languages. In New York City, one of the only places where such statistics are kept, an estimated 27% of the city's adult ESL learners are not literate in their native languages (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). Educators who work with this population have generally followed one of two basic instructional strategies. By far the most common is to focus only on English and to teach learners to read and write in English at the same time as they are taught to speak and understand spoken English. In many cases, however, teachers report that less-literate learners find it difficult to succeed in such classes. Many are unfamiliar with a school-like environment. Often teachers rely on printed texts, the use of the blackboard, and grammatical explanations to teach spoken English. Social stigmas associated with illiteracy may cause learners to be reluctant to admit their difficulties. Not surprisingly, ESL programs report high dropout rates among less-literate learners.

A second strategy is to offer instruction in learners' native languages. This may be very difficult to do. A variety of language groups may be represented in the same class, and teachers who speak the native language(s) are often unavailable. Funds to develop materials and train staff are limited. Learners may have a preference for English language instruction. Over the past fifteen years, however, a growing number of programs have begun offering literacy instruction in learners' native languages or some combination of native language literacy ESL instruction. Programs refer to these classes as mother-tongue

literacy, native language literacy, or basic education in the native language (BENL) classes. This paper uses the most common term in the United States, "native language literacy."

Practitioners offering initial literacy in the native language claim that, for some learners, the native language literacy classroom provides the most effective entry point into adult education. In these classrooms, learners can not only acquire basic strategies and processes for learning to read, but can also explore, with a teacher from their own culture, issues associated with adjusting to life in a new country. Learners with a positive first experience in adult education, practitioners assert, are less likely to drop out and more likely to continue their education in ESL classes and higher levels of instruction. Moreover, they contend, the reading and writing skills learned in the first language transfer to the acquisition of a second language, allowing learners to learn to read and write more quickly in English. Many teachers also stress their belief that the opportunity to learn to read and write in one's own language should be a basic human right. Bilingualism, they argue, should be celebrated and preserved as one of our country's most valuable resources.

Little information has been collected on programs that do offer native language instruction. Only a few research studies of limited scope have been undertaken in the United States. Little is known about where programs are located, how they are organized, or how well and under what conditions they operate. The purpose of this paper is to provide a summary of what staff at the Center for Applied Linguistics have learned about the nature of native language literacy instruction for adults and the rationales for offering it. It also suggests several directions for program improvement and further research. Although perspectives on policies, practices, and research in other countries would also be of great value, this paper is limited to the U.S. context. It is hoped that this information will promote a wider discussion of how and under what conditions the native language might be used productively in adult literacy education in the United States.

The data for this paper came from information collected during a two-year project undertaken by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) with funding from the National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL), established at the University of Pennsylvania by the U.S. Department of Education. The activities conducted by CAL included a review of the literature, a research colloquium on biliteracy (the ability to read and write in two languages), a national survey of programs offering native language literacy (Gillespie, 1991), and a two-day Working Group Meeting that brought together teachers, administrators, and researchers from key programs identified by the survey (Gillespie & Ballering, 1992). This paper synthesizes and analyzes information from all of these sources. CAL is, however, particularly indebted to the insights of members of the Working Group, whose names and programs can be found in the Acknowledgments.

A PROFILE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE LITERACY INSTRUCTION FOR ADULTS

Although researchers have documented the history of bilingual education in the public schools (Crawford, 1989; Hakuta & Pease-Alvarez, 1992; McGroarty, 1992), much less is known about how native language literacy instruction has evolved in the field of adult education. Prior to World War I, adult literacy instruction may have taken place in the many private and parochial schools that offered instruction in German, French, Spanish, and other languages. After World War I, however, the prevalence of these schools diminished as English became the predominant medium of instruction. Interest in bilingual education did not reemerge until the civil rights movement of the 1960s. After 1974, when the Supreme Court decided in *Lau vs. Nichols* that putting non-English-speaking children in classrooms where only English was spoken denied them equal access to education, bilingual programs again began to be offered in the public schools. Although funding remains limited, bilingual instruction, particularly as a transition to English, continues to be offered today in public schools throughout the country.

Instruction for adults in the native language has received much less public support. The emergence of native language literacy instruction in the late 1970s and the current increase in interest appears primarily to be a grassroots phenomenon, initiated at the local program level. As will be discussed in more detail later, a general opposition to the use of languages other than English has been the norm. As a result, funding for native language literacy has been minimal, there has been little documentation of existing efforts, and only a few, limited research studies have been undertaken. Although innovative programs have sprung up in pockets around the country, most programs remain unaware of similar efforts in other regions of the United States and even, at times, in other parts of their own state. As one teacher in the Working Group Meeting exclaimed upon hearing of the scarcity of programs, "We really are the pioneers in this, aren't we!"

This section discusses what has been learned over the past three years about the kinds of native language literacy instruction for adults that have been offered. The first part identifies **basic characteristics of native language literacy programs.** It is based on the two existing surveys of native language literacy programs in the United States: a survey of Spanish literacy programs conducted in 1983 by staff of Solidaridad Humana, a community-based organization in New York City (Cook & Quiñones, 1983), and the CAL survey, completed in 1991. The second part describes **six different native language literacy programs.** These

descriptions are based on site reports prepared by teachers and administrators for the CAL Working Group Meeting held in August 1992 (Gillespie & Ballering, 1992). The third part describes **models for curriculum, instruction, and assessment.**

Program Characteristics

Where Programs are Located

In the early 1980s, staff at Solidaridad Humana, one of four programs in the New York City area then offering native language literacy, received a small grant to locate and study other programs offering similar services. Sending questionnaires to programs serving Hispanic adults around the country, they identified only 14 Spanish language literacy programs in the United States: four in New York City; two in Chicago; two in Hartford; and one each in New Jersey, upstate New York, California, Washington, DC, San Antonio, and Miami. None of the programs had existed more than four years at that time. Most were small and underfunded components of larger, community-based organizations offering a variety of services in addition to Spanish literacy. The advent of bilingual education in public schools was undoubtedly one reason for the programs' interest in native language literacy instruction for adults. Another impetus was an even more recent movement in adult education that took into account the needs and interests of learners (Knowles, 1980), elaborated in the work of the Brazilian literacy educator Paulo Freire (1970).

In 1991, nearly a decade after Solidaridad Humana's study, the staff at the Center for Applied Linguistics completed a new survey of programs[1] offering some type of initial native language literacy instruction or combination of native language and ESL instruction to adults or out-of-school youth. As a first step in developing the survey, project staff collaborated with the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE), an adjunct ERIC clearinghouse housed at CAL with, at the time, the only existing database of ESL programs around the country. From among 573 programs then in the NCLE database and through word of mouth, 68 programs that indicated they offered instruction in learners' native languages were identified.[2] A written survey was designed for practitioners to fill out or for CAL staff to fill out during a phone interview with the practitioners. The questions addressed three broad categories: 1) the general nature of programs offering native language and ESL literacy, 2) patterns of articulation and educational approaches of native language and ESL instructional programs, and 3) the purposes and outcomes of native language instruction. Quantitative information based on frequency distributions and rank ordering was obtained and qualitative data were coded by key themes with anecdotal information to illustrate the categories noted. Forty-nine of the 68 programs (72%) returned the survey in time to be included in

[1] The term "program" in the 1991 study referred to any site where native language literacy classes were conducted. What constituted a native language literacy program varied greatly. The term may refer to a separate site where native language literacy instruction was offered exclusively (although this was rare), or it may refer to many other kinds of instruction sites, such as large, community-based programs where native language literacy classes were one component of a large educational system.

[2] These were programs where reading and writing were taught in the native language, not those where the native language was occasionally used as a medium through which to teach concepts related to learning ESL. It is important to recognize, however, that language is complex and boundaries between these two categories may often not be so clear. See Auerbach (1993b) for a more detailed discussion of how the native language is used (and discouraged from use) in ESL classrooms.

an analysis of the data for the first report. Information found in this paper is based on those data (Gillespie, 1991).[3]

The CAL survey found programs from 20 states and the District of Columbia that offered some form of native language literacy instruction, often in combination with ESL instruction. Not surprisingly, the states with the most programs were New York, Illinois, Texas, and California, all states with high numbers of limited-English-proficient adults. Sixty-nine percent of the 49 programs were located in large, urban areas. Most classes (49%) were offered within community-based organizations. Twenty percent of the classes were under the auspices of community colleges, and another 18% described themselves as part of public school programs. Only a small number were found within workplace, library-based, family literacy, or correctional education programs. Over half of the programs had come into existence since 1988.

Fully 90% of the 49 surveyed programs offering native language literacy instruction did so in Spanish. This was true even though many programs had learners from many other language groups also enrolled in their school. Seventeen programs had between four and ten different language groups; one noted that 34 languages were represented. Only five programs offered native language literacy in more than one language, and only one offered it in three languages (Spanish, Arabic, and Chinese). Other languages offered included Haitian Kreyòl,[4] Hmong, Tagalog, and three American Indian languages. Seventy-six percent of the native language teachers in the programs surveyed were native speakers of the languages they taught.

Many programs indicated that they would like to offer instruction in languages other than Spanish. A lack of sufficient student enrollment, student preferences for English over native language instruction, the unavailability of qualified teachers, a lack of appropriate materials, and limited funding were all reasons given for *not* offering native language literacy instruction.

In two cities, New York and Chicago, teachers formed organizations to share information and materials and to promote native language literacy. The Comité de Educación Básica en Español (Committee for Basic Education in Spanish) in New York has 12 program members and works closely with three local Kreyòl programs (Rabideau, 1992). In Chicago, 11 programs participate in an Hispanic Literacy Council (Hunter, 1992), and teachers from other programs attend training offered through the Adult Learning Resource Center in Des Plaines, Illinois (Dean, 1990).

Program Contexts: Some Examples

Among the 49 programs surveyed, a wide variety of program designs exist, shaped by the individual program's philosophy of language and education, the community context, the nature of the program itself, funding opportunities, and other factors. This part, containing

[3] *Although the survey results provide valuable information, many additional programs were missed by the survey. Locating programs that are not part of the traditional adult education network, such as Chinese weekend schools run as part of civic organizations, American Indian programs that are part of cultural groups, and some programs associated with religious organizations, was particularly difficult.*

[4] *Kreyòl is the Haitian word for Haitian Creole. In Haiti, a French speaker would write Créole, but a Kreyòl speaker would write Kreyòl. This paper uses the Haitian term.*

brief descriptions of six of the programs participating in the CAL Working Group Meeting, gives a sense of that diversity.

Casa Aztlán is an example of a large, well-established adult education program that offers native language literacy classes as one small component of a larger program. Located in the heart of Pilsen, one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods, this center has provided leadership and education for its Hispanic residents (primarily of Mexican origin) since 1972. The program offers a wide range of services, including a Spanish native language and oral ESL program; ESL and GED classes; and an innovative intergenerational, cross-cultural literacy program for Hispanic and African-American families. The native language literacy component was begun in 1985 after a needs assessment determined that the majority of the learners who dropped out of classes did not know how to read or write in their native languages. In fiscal year 1992, 198 men and women participated in the Spanish literacy classes, which became their first point of access for other educational programs and social services (Hunter, 1992).

Another example of a Spanish literacy component within a large program is the **Literacy Education Action (LEA)** program at El Paso Community College. Located just across the border from the city of Juarez, Mexico, El Paso has an Hispanic population of approximately 70%. Each year nearly 1,500 learners are served by the community college, which was established in 1985. Its Spanish Literacy Program was initiated in 1990 as a response to evidence that many learners were unable to succeed either in classes offered by the community college or in traditional ESL classrooms. About 40 learners are enrolled in the Spanish Literacy Program each session. In order to place learners in a Spanish literacy class, the staff inquire about their previous school background and review unedited writing samples. After these initial intake procedures, a learner completes a two-week orientation/assessment class called Exploración (exploration). Information gained from Exploración enables staff to place learners in a Spanish, bilingual, or English literacy instructional program. Upon completion of the instructional program, learners participate in advancement classes intended to help them make the transition from the literacy program to credit ESL and vocational college classes (Clymer-Spradling & Esparza, 1992).

El Barrio Popular Education Program in New York City is a small, community-based program located within one of the oldest and most vibrant Puerto Rican communities in the United States. This program began in 1985 as a research project for the Language Policy Task Force of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies of The City University of New York. Unlike the two programs described above, El Barrio Popular has offered native language literacy instruction since its inception. Because this organization was founded on the belief that "Puerto Ricans in particular, and Hispanics in general, have a right to be educated in the language they speak" (Rivera & Freeman, 1992, p. 46), most program activities are bilingual. In addition to native language literacy, El Barrio Popular also offers ESL, high school equivalency classes, leadership

development, and computer instruction. The learners, who are predominantly women from Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic, also run sewing and food cooperatives and participate directly in many aspects of program management (Rivera & Freeman, 1992).

Although the majority of native language literacy classes are offered in Spanish, a few programs offer instruction in other languages. Programs in Haitian Kreyòl exist in Boston, New York City, and south Florida. One such program, the **Haitian Multi-Service Center (HMSC)**, is a community-based organization located in Dorchester, in the heart of Boston, where 80% of Boston's large Haitian community lives. Most of the learners are low-income and 40% are unemployed. Learners typically have had four to eight years of education in Haiti, and some are not literate at all. About 50 of the 380 learners in the program have chosen the Kreyòl literacy class. In addition to Haitian Kreyòl and ESL instruction, the HMSC provides other services, including maternal and child health education, AIDS education, counseling and advocacy, document translation, bilingual childcare, and refugee resettlement (Midy & St. Hilaire, 1992).

There is evidence of some interest in native language literacy instruction for Southeast Asians. One of the most well-known programs involves a collaboration between The Lao Family Community, Inc. and the Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC). The **Lao Family/MATC Basic Skills, ESL and Hmong Bilingual Education Program** offers Hmong and Lao adult bilingual education in basic skills, ESL, and GED preparation. Established in 1989, 90% of the learners in this bilingual program are Hmong, and the remaining 10% are Lao or Vietnamese. Beginning level learners receive primarily bilingual instruction, and the proportion of bilingual instruction decreases as learners' English proficiency increases. The program was initiated because many Hmong adult learners had made little academic progress despite the years of ESL and basic skills instruction they had received from teachers who did not speak Hmong. Enrollment and attendance in ESL and basic skills classes were also very low. Since the advent of the bilingual program with native Hmong teachers, the program reports that enrollment has improved and interest in maintaining the Hmong language within the family has also increased (Doua Vue, 1992).

Not all programs have received even the limited levels of support of the five programs already described. Many programs, particularly in neighborhoods where the concentration of non-English speakers is smaller, are isolated and struggle to survive. The Spanish literacy program at Triton Community College, **Escribir y Leer es Poder** (writing and reading mean power), is one example. A part of the Adult and Continuing Education Area of Triton Community College in suburban Chicago, the program was begun after the Adult Basic Education (ABE) department saw nonnative English speakers with few or no educational skills repeating the first two levels of their program as many as four times. Although the college decided to offer native language literacy classes, funding is meager. The only paid staff member, the Spanish literacy

coordinator, works part time and is responsible for all aspects of the program, including recruitment, testing, curriculum development, and tutor training. The Illinois Secretary of State grant, which funds Triton's literacy programs, requires that individual tutors be utilized as teachers for each participant. Although 52 learners were tested during the 1991-1992 school year, only 25 were served due to the difficulty in locating and keeping tutors. Most of the tutors have been recruited among Hispanic adults currently studying ESL at the community college. Many tutors have difficulties finding the time needed for initial training and subsequent teaching while also attending classes themselves, working, and taking care of their own families. Because of the shortage of volunteer tutors, group sessions under the guidance of several volunteers have been implemented. With only one paid staff member, however, the program is developing very slowly.

Models for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Among the 49 programs identified by CAL, 76% offered native language literacy instruction exclusively to learners at beginning and low intermediate reading levels.[5] Several of the most common models of instruction at beginning levels have been identified by Wrigley and Guth (1992). Some programs, like the one at Triton Community College, choose a *sequential model,* in which learners attend native language literacy classes until acquiring a certain threshold level of literacy. Learners then make the transition into an ESL class. Another model, as seen at El Barrio Popular, is the *bilingual model,* in which the native language and ESL both are used within the same classroom. This model has the advantage of allowing learners to acquire native language and English literacy at the same time but requires the use of bilingual teachers or teacher aides with a background in both literacy instruction and ESL teaching. A third model, similar to that offered to some learners at Casa Aztlán, is the *coordinate model,* in which learners' time is split between a basic literacy class in the native language and an ESL class that focuses primarily on speaking and listening skills. Given the wide variety of contexts for native language instruction even within a single program, however, few programs adhere to a single model.

Regardless of the model or models employed, one of the greatest challenges facing native language literacy teachers has been the need to develop appropriate curriculum materials. In the beginning, some programs tried using materials prepared for national literacy campaigns in developing countries. Most soon found, however, that materials developed outside the country did not reflect the experiences of immigrants in urban settings in the United States (Rabideau, 1989). As a result, most programs have developed their own materials, often sharing them with others in their region. At the Adult Learning Resource Center in Des Plaines, Illinois, for example, Dean (1990) has developed a set of Spanish language workbooks based on the teaching of the alphabet, vowels, consonants, and basic math skills. In New York City,

[5] *Other programs offered GED instruction in the native language, primarily in Spanish. Currently, the GED test is available in English, Spanish, and French. Since the Spanish test was normed for adults living in Puerto Rico, controversy remains regarding its appropriateness for use in the United States. (J. Lowe, Director of the GED Testing Service, personal communication, July, 1993.)*

members of the Comité de Educación Básica en Español also share materials through meetings and through their newsletter *El Español en Marcha* (Spanish on the Move).

Many programs expressed a strong commitment to making sure their curriculum develops out of the immediate needs and experiences of learners. At the Haitian Multi-Service Center, for example, a problem-posing approach is used, through which learners identify, describe, analyze, and take action on a particular problem of importance in their lives (see Auerbach, 1992). Although teachers sometimes use literacy texts from Haiti, more often learners are encouraged to write their own stories using a language experience approach and dialogue journals. These writings, in turn, are used as content for class exercises and activities. Like several other programs, the Center publishes a magazine of student writing. At El Paso Community College, classes begin by involving the learners in the curriculum development process. Once learners decide on topics for discussion, tutors and the facilitator follow a five-step teaching approach of initial inquiry, a structured learning activity, a language experience activity, a reading-in-context exercise, and a home assignment. Teachers also develop some lessons that were not chosen by the learners, in areas such as self-esteem, goal setting, and career development.

Although innovative trends in curriculum development for native language literacy instruction do exist, only a few practitioners have written about their experiences for adult education newsletters, journals, or anthologies. Young and Padilla (1990) describe how they used popular education techniques to develop themes in the classroom. Rivera (1990b) describes the use of drama and video as a means to engage learners in critical analysis of issues they face in everyday life. McGrail (in Nash, Cason, Rhum, McGrail, & Gómez-Sanford, 1992) elaborates on how she used photographs to generate themes for writing first in Spanish and later in English. Spener (1991) reports on how dialogue journals can be used in a bilingual context. Ada (1989), Eno (1987), and Quintero (1990) describe how the native language can be used in family literacy contexts. The two newsletters devoted to native language literacy, *El Español en Marcha* (Rabideau, 1992), developed by El Comité Básica de Educación en Español in New York, and *El Boletín* (The Bulletin) (Hunter, 1992), developed by the Hispanic Literacy Council in Chicago, contain articles by and for teachers.

While providers have strong anecdotal evidence of the positive benefits of native language literacy instruction, most are only beginning to develop a set of assessment processes and practices to document how adult learners change as a result of participating in native language literacy instruction. With precarious funding, few programs have the resources to fully develop their instructional program, let alone a means to assess it. In addition, funders, administrators, teachers, and learners may have varying views concerning what needs to be assessed and what evidence of progress is of value. As Loren McGrail,

who organized a discussion on the topic of assessment at the CAL Working Group Meeting, pointed out:

> What do improved test scores on the Spanish ABLE test mean to a learner who wants to write a letter home? What do they mean to teachers who base their instruction on learner goals, needs, and interests? Does a timed, multiple-choice, standardized test tell program administrators anything about a learner's ability to succeed in an ESL classroom? Does it really tell funders anything about a learner's educational gains or the quality of instruction at a given program? These are just a few of the kinds of questions practitioners in native language literacy [programs] are beginning to ask. Each program must pose questions like these in order to develop some kind of framework for how they are going to assess learner progress (McGrail, 1992, p. 2).

McGrail (1992) found that the assessment framework developed by the programs participating in the Working Group Meeting varied depending on a number of factors, including the program's philosophy, theoretical approach to language learning, instructional model, and social context. Assessment at initial intake was perhaps the most developed form of assessment, and programs varied widely concerning the kinds of tools and processes used. All of the programs used some form of interviews for initial intake, some simply collecting basic background information on a registration form and others using learner goal checklists and charts to measure literacy use in and outside the classroom. In New York (New York State Department of Education, 1992) and in some programs in Chicago (Dean, 1990), special placement tests for native language literacy have been developed. Other programs used teacher-developed materials to assess reading and writing in the native language, and some assessed learners in both English and the native language. Some programs also used standardized tests. Among the most popular were the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) in Spanish and the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE). These norm-referenced tests provide a grade-level equivalent score. However, they were designed to be used with children rather than adults. Except for the Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE) in Spanish, programs did not identify any other standardized tests in the native language designed specifically for adults. Many programs used program-developed placement tests and standardized tests because they felt the standardized tests alone did not give them adequate information for placement.

Of the participating programs, the Literacy Education Action Program at El Paso Community College had the most developed initial assessment process (and, interestingly, one of the most stable funding bases). Before starting the program, learners enroll in a one-month assessment process that helps them identify their educational goals. Based on this process they either continue in the program or are referred to other programs throughout the county. Once they are

enrolled, a team works with them to identify four dimensions of literacy learning: practices, strategies and interests, perceptions, and goals (Clymer-Spradling & Esparza, 1992).

In most programs, ongoing and end-of-cycle assessment was less developed than initial assessment. The majority of the programs kept portfolios of learners' work and relied heavily on teacher observations of what had been learned in class. In programs where the content of the classes was based on themes chosen by learners, class discussions provided important feedback to teachers. For many programs, the most compelling evidence of learner progress was anecdotal teacher observations and learner reports of their taking initiative in their lives, pursuing further education, participating in civic affairs, or becoming more involved with their children's education. These gains are impossible to capture with standardized testing tools.

Why Programs Offer Native Language Literacy Instruction

Why do programs make the decision to offer native language literacy instruction? The reasons are varied and complex. This section elaborates on five key types of reasons mentioned at the CAL Working Group Meeting. The first are *sociopolitical* in nature, related to the role individuals and communities believe minority languages can and should play in our society. The second are *linguistic* and refer to research on the transfer of knowledge and skills learned in the first language to a second language. The third are *sociocultural*, concerning the role of the native language in fostering a culturally appropriate learning environment. Closely related are the fourth, *sociocontextual* reasons, centering around issues related to the social context of adult literacy learning, particularly to the role the native language can play in fostering metalinguistic aspects of learning. Finally, the role of the native language for *acquiring knowledge and skills in content areas* is considered.

Sociopolitical Reasons

Native language literacy instruction for adults cannot exist outside the political and ideological contexts for language usage and language rights in the United States. The degree to which native language literacy instruction is supported or opposed varies widely throughout the United States. Residents of this country have opposing views on the value of language diversity. While some laud it as a resource, others see it as a serious problem.

> The resource orientation sees both economic and personal benefit in multilingualism, regarding the language skills of immigrants as a resource that should be conserved, developed, and invested in,

> particularly in schools and the workplace. . . . The language-diversity-as-problem orientation, however, views cultural diversity as a weakness to be overcome rather than as one of the country's greatest strengths (Ruíz, 1988; cited in Wrigley & Guth, 1992, p. 109).

Proponents of the "language-diversity-as-problem" orientation consider English literacy the only literacy that counts. Advocates of language rights point out the danger in that viewpoint.

> When this orientation shapes policy, several negative outcomes may result: 1) important knowledge and skills are ignored, 2) literacy surveys present a skewed picture of the true levels of reading and writing of the population, 3) program decisions are made on false premises, and 4) learners are defined by what they don't know [English], rather than what they do know [the native language] (Wrigley & Guth, 1992, p. 110).

Many native language literacy providers point to their struggle to promote acceptance for multilingual adult programs among policy makers and program funders. Although they advocate for the importance of learning English, acknowledging English as the language of power associated with jobs and prestige, they point out that many immigrant adults have language needs other than English. In large urban areas and in the Southwest, much of the daily activity and commerce of nonnative English speakers can and does take place in other languages.

Native language literacy providers vary in the extent to which they promote literacy instruction in the native language as an end in itself or as part of a more efficient transition to English language acquisition. Those who support a maintenance model of bilingual education believe learners have a right to be educated in their own language. They point to the ways in which language has been a tool for dominant groups to exclude language minorities from access to jobs and services and from taking part in decisions about which language should be officially used in the country. Klaudia Rivera, director of El Barrio Popular in New York City, asserts with pride that, regardless of oppression, the Puerto Rican community there has managed to retain use of its language (Rivera & Freeman, 1992). In her program, a key aspect of the curriculum is analyzing the status of the Spanish language in the community (Rivera & Freeman, 1992). At the Haitian Multi-Service Center in Boston, providers report that older learners share with newer learners the importance of learning and maintaining the native language. The learners also discuss the politics of Kreyòl as it relates to French, Haiti's official but second language. For many in the program, learning to read and write in Kreyòl makes a political statement about who should have power. Providers argue that for their learners, reading, writing, and seeing their native language in print is a key step toward helping them to recover their own political and social voice.

Programs advocating language maintenance and the incorporation of sociopolitical themes related to language within the curriculum

often struggle against public opposition. The current political backlash against immigrants, perhaps brought on by the combination of high rates of immigration and a time of economic downturn, has created a bias against investing in services for immigrants (Chisman, et al., 1993). Xenophobic fears have fueled a sense that languages other than English have no place in the United States. "English-only" legislation that seeks to limit the use of other languages has passed in 16 states (Lewelling, 1992). So negative is the current climate toward immigration and multiculturalism that, although many program staff and learners themselves may have sociopolitical reasons for supporting native language development, they may instead stress linguistic reasons (related to the role of the native language in facilitating English acquisition) in public discussion. Even within programs themselves there may be varying views among teachers and learners concerning the appropriateness and strategic value of using English or the native language. As linguistic minorities comprise greater and greater portions of the U.S. population, this debate will continue.

Linguistic Reasons

Among adult literacy educators, the most commonly cited reason for offering native language literacy instruction (and for convincing funders and the general public of its value) is what Snow (1990) and Rivera (1990a) refer to as the *linguistic* rationale. Associated with this rationale are various areas of research related to how instruction in the native tongue (L1) facilitates the acquisition of a second language (L2). Since little research in this area has been conducted with adult learners, adult educators (Rabideau, 1989; Rivera, 1990a; Wrigley & Guth, 1991) turn to research conducted with children learning English as a second language to elaborate this argument. They have found support in the work of Cummins (1983). According to Cummins' common underlying proficiency hypothesis, the development of L1 competence provides a foundation of proficiency that does not need to be relearned for another language. Thus, if children reach a threshold level of linguistic competence in the L1, they will have a stronger base for learning in a second language than will students taught entirely in the L2.

Although opponents of bilingual education have initiated much debate regarding the quality of bilingual education research (see Baker & de Kanter, 1981; Baker & Rossell, 1993; Ramírez, 1992; Willig, 1985), Hakuta (1990) points out that after three decades, consensus is emerging in several areas. First, a body of research confirms that "the native language and the second language are complementary rather than mutually exclusive" (Hakuta, 1990, p. 4). Cross sectional and longitudinal studies by Hakuta (1987) as well as Cummins (1984, cited in Hakuta, 1990), Ramírez (1992), Snow (1987), and others report consistently high cross-language correlations among proficiency levels in the two languages.

Second, although during the 1960s it was thought that a key difficulty associated with learning a second language was related to overcoming previously learned habits in the first language, "this view is not held by current researchers" (Hakuta, 1990, p. 4). Errors related to the interference between languages, although noticeable and measurable, do not have as a negative an impact on second language acquisition as was once supposed.

Another common notion disproved by research has to do with the role of age in language acquisition. According to Hakuta (1990), declines in acquisition of phonological and grammatical skills associated with age are much slower than previously thought and not an overriding limiting factor in second language acquisition.

Researchers have also found that determining the length of time necessary to develop language proficiency is much more complex than was once thought. As Hakuta observes (1990, p. 5), "skills used in interpreting contextualized face-to-face conversational settings develop more rapidly than skills needed to interpret decontextualized language (oral or written)." Thus, for example, earlier assumptions that children could acquire English in a short time do not reflect the development of "all aspects of language use" (1990, p. 6). Recent longitudinal studies (Collier, 1992; Ramírez, 1992) have revealed that second language skills for more decontextualized academic learning require an average of five years or more to develop. These findings create a stronger rationale for providing children and adults learning English with access to core curricula or content area knowledge in their primary language. Such instruction may be necessary for a longer period of time than previously thought. Without bilingual instruction, students too often can fall below the norms on nationally standardized tests as well as on state performance assessment measures. However, students who have received bilingual instruction for a period of five to six years or more not only catch up but perform better than their monolingual peers on these same tests (Collier, 1992; Ramírez, 1992). Children in two-way bilingual programs (where English speakers and speakers of other languages receive academic subject matter instruction in two languages) perform even better. According to Hakuta, bilingual children also show greater "cognitive flexibility and awareness of language" (1990, p. 7). For example, they have been shown to perform better on tests of analysis of abstract visual patterns and measures of metalinguistic awareness. While, as Hakuta points out, there remains controversy over the conditions under which these positive advantages appear, "there is widespread agreement among researchers that these effects are real" (1990, p. 7).

While research findings are of great interest to adult educators, research specifically focused on adults is limited. Moreover, research with adult education populations brings with it unique problems. Two studies that have found positive effects of first language literacy on second language acquisition (Burtoff, 1985; Robson, 1982) are examples. Robson (1982) examined the effects of Hmong literacy in a Roman

alphabet on the performance of 62 Hmong refugees in a three-month ESL program at a refugee processing center in Thailand. Participants were grouped according to presence or absence of formal education and reading ability in Hmong. Their ability to read Hmong was measured at the beginning and end of the program, using a test developed by Robson and her colleagues. In addition, a test developed by the Oregon Indochinese Refugee Center to be particularly sensitive to the needs of low-literate learners was used to measure oral production, comprehension, and reading in English. Robson found that previous experience with schooling, and literacy in any language (i.e., Hmong, Lao, or Thai), had a positive effect on learners' performance on the ESL tests. Frequently cited by adult educators, this study has important implications for further research. Its findings, however, are limited by the small sample size, the short period of instruction, and the fact that the learners were studying outside the United States.

A second study of adult learners was conducted by Burtoff (1985) with a group of Haitian Kreyòl-speaking adult learners in New York City. The study was performed to determine whether, when total instructional hours are equal, learners who receive native language literacy instruction in addition to ESL instruction develop greater proficiency in English than those who receive only ESL instruction. Burtoff found, among the 29 subjects studied, those who received native language literacy instruction in addition to ESL instruction during the 24-week course developed English-language proficiency comparable to those who were enrolled in the ESL instruction-only group (even though the ESL-only group received more total hours of English instruction). Additionally, those receiving instruction in the native language made greater gains in both literacy and (anecdotal) self-confidence.

Burtoff's frank discussion of the logistical and methodological difficulties she encountered highlights the problems of conducting research with adult learners who do not generally receive the long-term, systematic, daily instruction that children in public schools generally receive. She initially tested 130 subjects; of these, 90 were found eligible for the study. Due to high dropout rates, only 29 subjects were included in the final study. Accurate attendance records were not kept for the 29 remaining subjects. Classes were of different sizes at varying sites, and there was no control for teacher differences or course content, especially in the ESL components. Moreover, the enrollment period may have been too short for the program to have made a lasting impact on learning gains. However, the data suggest that literacy skills do transfer between languages, especially when both languages employ the Roman alphabet (p. 16).

More research on how native language literacy instruction might facilitate English language acquisition among adult learners is clearly needed. Potential areas for research are discussed later in this paper. However, as has been seen with respect to studies of school-aged children, adult educators may do well to keep in mind that the availability of research to demonstrate the positive outcomes of bilingual

instruction alone is often not enough to counterbalance pervasive sociopolitical arguments against bilingualism.

Sociocultural Reasons

In her study of bilingual education among school-aged children, Snow (1990) identifies what she calls a sociocultural identity argument for bilingual education. For many members of minority groups, she reflects, schools are alien institutions.

> In schools, the rules that govern behavior, the goals of the actors, and the messages that are conveyed are often mysterious. . . . It is very difficult to present hard data to document the degree to which the strangeness of the school environment affects the achievement of language minority children, but there is ample data from ethnographic studies of classrooms and from classroom discourse analyses to conclude that children from different cultural groups have very different expectations about how classrooms should be organized. (p. 63)

A similar sense of alienation from school has been reported among adult learners (Auerbach, 1993b). For example, when Klassen (1991) looked closely at nine Hispanic immigrants living in Toronto, most of whom had little formal schooling and whose levels of Spanish literacy varied, he found that there were many language domains—home, the streets, shops, offices, some work settings—where they managed to get along very effectively using whatever linguistics tools they had in either language. ESL classes were among the settings in which these adults felt most powerless. This ethnographic study seems to indicate that the English-only instructional model was not breaking down a sense of alienation from school.

In adult education programs where attendance is not compulsory, learners often respond by voting with their feet. Many providers interviewed cited high dropout rates in ESL classes as a key impetus for initiating native language literacy. Strei (1992), for example, reported that the dropout rate for literacy learners in his Palm Beach County, Florida, program decreased from 85% to 10% after native language literacy classes were started. The Lao Family Community, Inc., in Milwaukee, started their Hmong bilingual classes after ESL enrollment began to fall. Results of a questionnaire survey conducted by the refugee leadership indicated that, of the 79 refugee adults attending ESL and vocational classes, two thirds said they experienced "great difficulty" understanding their teachers. Half "did not understand what they were studying in class," and most felt that "help must come from someone who could speak their language" (Podeschi, 1990, p. 59).

Many native language literacy providers believe that, just as with school-aged children (Snow, 1990), the achievement of adults improves when they are provided with teachers from their own language and cultural groups (Auerbach, 1993b). The importance of teachers having

a deep understanding of the cultures of their learners emerged as a major theme of the CAL Working Group Meeting. Working Group members were quick to point out that teachers who do not share the language and culture of learners can be effective. And, they acknowledged that all teachers must have appropriate training in areas such as second language acquisition and theories of reading. However, too often, the unique qualifications of bilingual teachers have been underestimated, and not enough effort has been made to hire nonnative speakers of English as native language literacy teachers. Many at the Working Group Meeting joined this teacher in the belief that

> the linguistic justification for native language literacy is that it makes sense to teach literacy in a language that learners understand. But then it stops there. What really makes the difference are all the things around language: the kind of teaching, the kind of involvement the teacher has, the fact that you share the culture.

Cultural nuances within the classroom may be subtle but powerful. Hvitfeldt (1986), for example, found that Hmong adults felt they could learn best in an environment quite different from the typical classroom. They preferred that their teacher stress "cooperative achievement, the denial of individual ability, and the belief that everyone's classroom work belongs to everyone else, all cultural norms highly valued within Hmong culture," rather than fostering the competition and individual achievement associated with American culture (p. 72).

Similar findings have been uncovered recently by Kang, Kuehn, and Herrell (1994). Teachers who share similar backgrounds with learners, Working Group members pointed out, are often especially able to establish a vital level of trust with learners. A Hmong teacher recounted how he found ways to encourage all learners to participate in classroom activities while still respecting traditional values concerning the gender and age of his learners. A Haitian teacher described his need to reassure new learners accustomed to the kinds of political reprisals they suffered in Haiti that he would not harm or inform on them. This reassurance was necessary before the learners could begin to learn to read and write.

Native language literacy teachers often also share with learners the experience of being an immigrant to the United States. These teachers have a keen awareness that the literacy classroom is often the learners' first point of access not only to the American classroom, but also to social and public services. As a result, they are often willing to allow learners to bring up issues of immediate concern in their lives. "I think the biggest difference is with us they feel they can ask all kinds of questions. They don't feel like they have to know everything or hide their problems, either personal or survival," observed one Working Group teacher. In her experience training native language literacy teachers, Auerbach (1993b) found that

> where English is being taught to immigrants and refugees transplanted to a new country, it is not just the experience as a language

> learner, but the experience of sharing the struggles as a newcomer that is critical. . . . There is something about having actually lived these realities which enables immigrant teachers to make connections that are otherwise not possible. (p. 26)

Many Working Group members also emphasized the importance of teachers and program staff as role models. At El Barrio Popular, one of the long-term goals of the program is that it be managed and run by learners and former learners. At the time of the meeting in August 1992, 50% of the paid staff were also learners in the program. Casa Aztlán also employs staff members who were former learners and encourages learners to serve on its board and to run for the local school council. Everyone in the program takes pride in the educational achievements of learners who were once enrolled in the program. "What effort I make is not only for myself but also for my people," said one teacher at the Working Group Meeting.

Sociocontextual Reasons

In recent years, educators working with adult beginning readers have recognized that literacy acquisition involves much more than simply learning a set of isolated skills. Many factors in the social context of learners' lives play a powerful role in literacy acquisition in adulthood. Lytle (1990), for example, has developed a model for understanding the dimensions of literacy that takes into account adults' beliefs about literacy and learning, their everyday literacy practices, the metacognitive processes by which they learn to read and write, and their changing plans for the use of literacy in their lives. Most of the research in this area has been conducted with native speakers of English; however, in the Working Group, it was found that many of the native language literacy practitioners shared the view that the ability to use the native language facilitates learners' exploration of these sociocontextual dimensions of literacy.

Within the dominant culture of the United States, Fingeret and Danin (1991) have observed, the inability to read and write well is "highly stigmatizing, giving rise to a profound sense of shame" (p. 223). Although adults may be very competent and confident in other aspects of their lives, when it comes to literacy, many have internalized those stigmas, with significant consequences in self-esteem and self-concept. A key part of the process of becoming literate, these researchers have found, is when learners begin to "transform the underlying basis on which judgments of self-esteem are calculated" (p. 223) by moving from self-blame to an analysis of the social conditions that contributed to their limited reading and writing abilities.

Many providers interviewed for the CAL survey recognize these same processes in their work with non-English-speaking adults, who are stigmatized not only within their own communities for their inability to read and write, but also within the dominant culture for their

inability to speak English. Learners often feel overwhelmed by the unfamiliar classroom environment, experience a sense of inadequacy with respect to their ability to help their children with their schooling, and wonder if they themselves are too old to begin the process of learning to read and write. Women may see becoming literate and learning English both as something to desire and also to fear, as it may become a threat to the stability of the family when husbands oppose their attending classes (Rockhill, 1987).

Too often, teachers say, important discussions examining beliefs about learning cannot take place in the beginning ESL classroom, where the language barrier requires that complex discussions be oversimplified, or, in the words of one teacher, "deadened." "You've got so much more power in your own language," reflected another teacher in the Working Group. "You can be more confident, and that's what it takes to realize you can learn another language."

To be willing to make the commitment to continue their education, adult learners in beginning-level literacy classes must first develop a belief in their ability to learn. At the Working Group Meeting, Heide Spruck Wrigley remarked on the changes she saw as she interviewed learners around the country for a study of promising practices in ESL and native language literacy (Wrigley & Guth, 1992).

> What we saw was a change in the way people looked at themselves, at each other, and at their possibilities for the future. They began to see that, "Now I can do it." Learners kept saying to us, "We know we're not really literate yet, we cannot do all the things that we want to do, but now we feel that we can."

Another dimension of literacy acquisition that practitioners believe can be facilitated by the use of the native language is the development of a metacognitive awareness of language and learning. Often learners come to the classroom with a limited view of what reading and writing are all about. Seeing reading as a process of constructing meaning from text and of learning to use semantic, syntactic, and graphophonemic cues is more efficient, they claim, when the native language can be used. This also applies to metalinguistic discussions of the rules and patterns of the English language, which teachers in the Working Group cited as instrumental in helping learners to develop listening and speaking skills in English. These processes, teachers have observed, allow learners to develop an awareness of language that later transfers to the learning of English.

The Importance of Learning Content

A final argument in support of native language instruction has to do with its role in fostering the learning of content. Within public school settings, a key argument to support bilingual education has been that, according to second language acquisition researchers, learners require up to six or seven years to master the academic uses of

English (Collier, 1992; Ramírez, 1992). To keep children from falling behind in content area subjects, native language instruction is necessary.

Many adult native language literacy instructors point out that adults also have, in the words of one teacher in the CAL Working Group Meeting, "a right not just to learning a language, but to a basic education as well." Acquiring a deeper control of one's own language, they claim, leads to greater control over other kinds of understanding. Learners are then able to build on their general education rather than focus on second language acquisition to the exclusion of other adult developmental processes. Instructional needs vary. In some programs, recent immigrants require cultural orientation and life skills education in areas such as health, parenting, or legal rights. In other programs, they need math instruction, pre-vocational skills, specific vocational training, or citizenship education. As one Working Group teacher observed about her ESL class, "too often we find ourselves dancing around trying to communicate a topic when we could just say it straight out if we could use the native language." Others commented that, in ESL classes, not only must they dilute the content in order to explain topics in English, but they must use up valuable time trying to communicate directions for reading and writing activities in English.

MOVING FORWARD IN A MARGINALIZED FIELD

Although many teachers and administrators in the Working Group presented a compelling case for the value of native language literacy instruction both as a bridge to English and as an end in itself, the struggle for program survival has been an uphill battle. Most programs operate with scarce resources, leveraging token amounts from other projects to devote to native language literacy. Even though many programs report long waiting lists for the native language literacy classes, short funding cycles and frequent budget cuts often make institutionalization of these classes uncertain.[6] Most teachers, if they are paid at all, are offered only part-time positions and often teach in more than one kind of program (Crandall, 1993). Under these conditions, many teachers have made what can only be considered heroic efforts to develop and implement effective native language literacy instructional programs. However, the constraints have been considerable. Too often adult native language literacy instructors envision a quality of instruction they are unable to deliver.

The following section highlights a few key areas where even limited investments of funds might yield significant results, both in improving programs themselves and in helping the field to ascertain when and in what circumstances native language literacy instruction is effective and appropriate.

Program Improvement Activities

Demonstration Projects

Given existing financial constraints, one way to move the field forward might be to provide at least a few programs with dependable, sufficiently long-term funding to allow them to develop model native language literacy instructional programs. The establishment of these few research and development projects would do much to build capacity in the field. Several program models in various contexts could be implemented, evaluated, and pilot-tested. The pilots could then also be evaluated. The projects would need to extend over a period of time, perhaps three to five years, so that the impact of native language instruction could be assessed over time and so that research could be conducted concurrently with program development. Wide dissemination of the experiences of the projects would also be important. Collaborations between program staff and researchers could lead to the development of effective curriculum materials, the creation of more

[6] *Native language literacy instruction, for example, represented only 3.3% of the total number of hours funded by the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative, one of the groups that has invested most in the area of native language literacy instruction for adults.*

appropriate means to assess learner progress, and other activities aimed at improving instruction. These demonstration projects would be important not only for improving practice, but also for developing a research base, since most existing projects lead too precarious an existence to be appropriate sites for systematic research studies.

This model would have the added benefit of building capacity within the field by bringing together teachers, learners, and researchers at various stages of development to learn from each other and improve their knowledge and skills. Among the processes for staff development might be a mentoring system with experienced teachers working with those who are less experienced (Crandall, 1993) and various kinds of teacher inquiry projects.

Development of a Common Data Bank

Except in a few cases, native language literacy practitioners have been isolated from one another. Practitioners often do not know even the existence and location of other programs within their own region or state. Teachers have difficulty finding out about curriculum materials and about what other teachers are doing. Another practical avenue of program improvement might be the development of a common data bank through which programs could collect and share information (Beder, 1992). Such a data bank could expand upon the database of native language literacy programs initiated by the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE). Curriculum materials, information about training opportunities and trainers, examples of assessment tools, and other information could also be shared. The increasing availability of computer networking could facilitate this process, because programs could exchange information electronically.

Staff Development Activities

Another significant requirement, not only for native language literacy but for the field of ESL as well, is for a more comprehensive system for professionalizing the workforce (Crandall, 1993). Although the CAL Working Group found that many native language teachers had received college degrees, most did not have formal training in areas such as adult education, reading instruction, or applied linguistics. Staff development activities, for the most part, included participation in occasional workshops and seminars. In particular, the Working Group reported a strong interest within the field in providing training opportunities for members of linguistic minority communities to become teachers. The benefits of having program staff who share the languages and cultures of learners are discussed above. However, potential teachers may lack the formal qualifications and knowledge necessary to enter the workforce.

Currently, training programs for native language literacy teachers exist in only a few areas. One of the most comprehensive is organized

through the University of Massachusetts Family Literacy Project in Boston in collaboration with community-based adult literacy programs (Auerbach, 1993a). Periodic training has also taken place through El Comité de Educación Básica en Español and the Literacy Assistance Center in New York City. In Chicago, the Hispanic Literacy Council has promoted leadership in the area of native language literacy, and a training module is offered at the Adult Learning Resource Center of the Northwest Educational Cooperative, also in the Chicago area. Unfortunately, however, no large regional or national organization brings together native language literacy practitioners to share ideas and acquire further professional development. Even the regional efforts, such as those in Chicago and New York, frequently rely on the volunteer efforts of their members. Funding to bring native language literacy practitioners together at national and regional levels is another area where a limited amount of seed funding could do much to advance the field.

Agendas for Research

Many educators are aware of the close relationship between research and program improvement. Without additional research, educators acknowledge, overall support for adult native language literacy instruction will continue to be meager. Systematic inquiries to examine the degree to which literacy knowledge and skills in the first language aid or impede learning English is an important priority from the perspective of leveraging funds for programs. Other kinds of studies would also be useful to the field. This section suggests a few potential directions for research.

The Transfer of L1 Literacy Knowledge and Skills to L2

One such study would involve measuring the effects of adult native language literacy instruction on the acquisition of oral communication and literacy in English. At a minimum, such a study would compare the gains of learners who receive ESL-only instruction with those of learners who receive initial literacy in the native language and then later make the transition into ESL instruction (described earlier as the sequential model). If funds were available, a larger study could also compare the differential impacts of the sequential model with the bilingual model (use of the native language and ESL in the same classroom) and coordinate model (simultaneous enrollment in native language literacy and oral/aural instruction in English). Within each participating organization in such a study, it would be necessary to identify a population of age-peer learners with similar socioeconomic characteristics, the same native language, comparable levels of educational attainment in their countries of origin, and levels of native language literacy and English proficiency that fall within the same range at

the outset of the study. In addition, special controls would need to be created in order to ensure that the size of the programs, the scope of the curriculum, and the quality of personnel within and between programs were comparable.

Depending on the exact features of the programs under study, additional research questions could also be investigated. It would be useful to explore whether or not there is a positive transfer of literacy ability from English to an adult's native tongue when literacy instruction is offered only in English. It would be equally important to ascertain whether learners receiving literacy instruction only in the native language (and who are not enrolled in ESL classes) show gains in English reading and writing ability. In addition, the differential effect of these variables for learners representing different language groups should also be examined.

As was discussed earlier (see Burtoff, 1985, and Robson, 1982), the development of rigorous and well-designed studies of adult education presents many conceptual and logistical challenges. Several design issues in the proposed study would require particular attention. Given the small size and limited resources of many programs, organizing groups of learners to participate in the study would require careful planning. Programs would need additional support, both financial and logistical, in order to recruit and retain learners and to ensure that accurate baseline and post-enrollment data could be kept. A precise account of the amount of instruction offered must also be maintained, and decisions regarding when to post-test must be carefully considered by researchers in close collaboration with practitioners.

Another very different but equally important set of considerations concerns finding appropriate assessment tools for use in such a study. Although suitable tests of oral proficiency in English may be available, many questions remain concerning the reliability, validity, and appropriateness of existing standardized tests of reading and writing, both in English and in the native language. Only a few ESL tests for nonnative speakers of English include reading and writing components. Moreover, questions exist about the usefulness of pencil-and-paper tests for the most beginning level learners. In addition, most of the standardized tests available for beginning readers in languages other than English (such as Spanish or French) were developed for children and may not be acceptable for adult learners. In undertaking the proposed study, it would be necessary to pay careful attention at the outset to selecting, developing, and field-testing assessment tools. Researchers should also investigate the value of using various alternative means of assessment, such as portfolios and performance measures, now being developed and used by native language literacy practitioners. Concurrently, in order to interpret the test results accurately, and to understand issues concerning the broader outcomes of instruction, qualitative and longitudinal components would be needed in the study. Qualitative research could yield a better understanding of learner uses of literacy outside the classroom and their perceptions of what they have gained

from instruction. A longitudinal component, which would follow a subset of learners over time, would also enhance the study.

The proposed study is clearly ambitious. However, even less ambitious, short-term studies at one or two sites would be an asset to the field. In either case, in order to achieve the credible results so needed by literacy educators, rigorous attention must be paid to the research design and particularly to the use of experimental controls.

Collaborative Program-Based Research

Although a large-scale study could do much to improve our understanding of native language literacy instruction, many other kinds of research would also be useful. The common data bank mentioned earlier would also form the basis for various kinds of applied research projects initiated by program collaborations. For example, as was discussed above, many providers believe native language literacy instruction leads to an increase in student enrollment and higher retention rates. By developing common data and record-keeping processes and collecting and analyzing student enrollment data, providers might be able to begin the process of confirming or denying this assertion.

Other kinds of information could also be collected, depending upon the needs and interests of practitioners. For example, the development and field testing of appropriate assessment tools is a central concern, both for teachers and researchers. The common data bank could be used to gather and study assessment tools such as language inventories, attitude scales, and writing portfolios. Materials developed in one program could be shared and field tested at other sites, perhaps eventually leading to the development of a series of common benchmarks to measure progress in native language literacy programs.

Although practitioners would need funds for gathering data and assistance in developing their research activities, a common data bank could be a relatively low-cost means of making available information needed for program improvement, while at the same time building the capacity of program staff.

Studies of Language Use in Communities and Classrooms

Within the field of adult literacy, there is limited knowledge of the process of becoming literate from the perspectives of immigrant and non-English-speaking adults. However, useful studies do exist. Ethnographic researchers, who have investigated the functions and uses of literacy in the everyday lives of various social groups, have done much to clarify the differences between home and school literacy. Reder (1987), for example, helped the field recognize the collaborative nature of literacy practices among members of Hmong, Eskimo, and Hispanic communities. In her work with Hmong adults, Weinstein-Shr

(1994) showed that the strength of immigrants' social networks was often much more important for survival than their degree of skill with literacy. In Chicago, Farr (1994) explored how informal literacy learning took place among a group of men of Mexican origin. Looking closely at the lives of nine immigrants in Toronto, Klassen (1991) helped the field learn more about the language domains in which the adults managed to get along effectively and those in which they encountered problems. Interestingly, not all studies show a learner's preference for native language literacy instruction. Studying the lives of a group of immigrant women, Rockhill (1987) found that many women preferred learning English, since it was a route to escape oppressive family conditions associated with their native language. In Philadelphia, Hornberger and Hardman (1994) studied the classroom uses of English and the native languages of Puerto Rican and Cambodian learners in adult ESL classes and a GED program and found that the learners preferred to develop their literacy in English, although they tended to interact orally in their native languages.

Many more such studies are needed to understand the complex ethnic, gender-related, cultural, and economic variables among minority populations enrolled in adult education. Additional studies are needed, for example, to further understand the various uses of English and the native language and the circumstances under which literacy instruction in English may be preferred over instruction in the native language. As Hornberger and Hardman (1994) have argued, making linguistic choices is less of an either/or choice than one of context. Multiple and complex inter-relationships between bilingualism and literacy should be considered when deciding how to offer instruction and in what language.

Language Use in Other Countries

Many more studies of language use in communities and in adult programs are needed to guide the field and policymakers in arriving at these decisions. More knowledge of research conducted outside the United States would be particularly helpful. For example, it would be useful to examine more closely policies toward native language instruction in various industrialized countries. Two UNESCO publications might be useful starting points in this regard (Barton & Hamilton, 1990; Hautecoeur, 1990), as might studies by Kroon and Sturm (1989) in the Netherlands and Giltrow and Colhoun (1989) in Canada. Detailed, country-wide overviews of literacy for many parts of the world can also be found in Grabe (1991). In addition, there is a need for researchers and practitioners to review information about models of native language instruction used in Canada (Cumming & Gill, 1991; Klassen & Robinson, 1992), the United Kingdom (Baynham, 1988), the Netherlands (Hammink, 1989), and other countries.

Teacher Inquiry and Action Research

Within the field of adult education, various kinds of teacher inquiry and action research projects have recently been initiated. In these projects, teachers become active researchers—reading other research studies, observing and documenting their own classes, sharing their findings with other teachers, and critically analyzing their own practice in order to improve it (Crandall, 1993). Based on an ongoing project in Philadelphia, participants of the Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Research Project contend that research by adult literacy practitioners can "enhance and alter, not just add to, the wider knowledge base of the field" (Lytle, Belzer, & Reumann, 1992, p. 4). Teacher inquiry projects, in which native language literacy teachers examine their own classroom experience, would be particularly useful in helping to understand not only the conditions that lead to successful native language literacy instructional programs, but also the conditions that lead to their failure. Through a series of such inquiries, the field might be able to identify optimum program contexts and structures for native language literacy instruction.

Longitudinal Studies

Literacy researchers are beginning to concur with Beder (1991) that "while the short-term effects of adult literacy education may be modest, the long-term effects, compounded over a lifetime, may be enormous" (p. 157). Native language literacy practitioners at the Working Group Meeting argued that longitudinal studies are vital if the impact of native language literacy and ESL instruction in the lives of adult learners is to be understood fully. Longitudinal studies could help the field learn more about why some learners drop out, why others remain in programs, and why others choose not to attend classes at all. The following could also be examined: educational attainment over the course of several years as learners interrupt their studies and later rejoin educational programs, how and in which contexts learners use both English and their native language over time, and the length of time required to achieve educational goals.

Survey Research

In addition to the studies already mentioned, survey research is also needed to ascertain how many limited-English-proficient adults lack basic literacy skills and what their educational needs are. Although the recently issued National Adult Literacy Survey report (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 1993) improves understanding of the literacy needs of English-speaking residents of the United States, the survey does little to assess the abilities of nonnative speakers of English. Although non-English speakers were included in the sample, the test itself was given only in English. Those who could not read and

write in English completed a brief questionnaire in their native languages. As Chisman, et al. (1993) point out, while the field may learn somewhat more about the literacy levels of the language minority population when the data related to them are analyzed, this analysis will not provide all the necessary information about the language instruction needs of the nonnative speaker of English. The test assessed English reading ability only. It did not assess how well non-English speakers could speak or understand spoken English, how well they could write in English, or how well they could use English in their daily lives. In addition, the test did not assess whether adults who speak a language other than English could read and write in their native language.

It is vital that a national survey be undertaken that would focus on nonnative speakers of English. Such a survey would need to measure proficiency in speaking and understanding English as well as in reading and writing it. To the extent that it is feasible, reading and writing proficiency in the native language should also be measured. The survey might also assess other variables such as subjects' educational attainment levels, educational goals, and the kinds of educational and training services they need (Chisman, et al., 1993).

CONCLUSION

Within the field of adult education, it is difficult to imagine an area of endeavor more marginalized than native language literacy. Adult education, itself a field of low priority in national education initiatives, has traditionally relegated ESL to a position of yet lower priority (Chisman, et al., 1993). Given the controversies engendered by the notion of teaching immigrants and other non-English speakers in any language other than English, it is perhaps not surprising that native language literacy has received the limited attention it has in the United States.

Yet in spite of the lack of recognition native language literacy receives at a policy level, its chronic and pervasive underfunding, and the (occasionally vocal) public opposition to it, the number and variety of native language literacy classes for adults has continued to grow since the late 1970s. Native language instruction appears to be successful for some adult literacy learners for a variety of reasons. One factor may be that native language literacy teachers, who share the language (and often the culture) of learners, are able to establish an atmosphere of trust and demonstrate an understanding of the immigrant experience; trust and understanding foster learning. Another reason may be the facilitating role the native language plays in allowing teachers and learners to communicate complex information. Use of a common language facilitates the discussion and examination of issues related to adjusting to a new culture and makes it possible to discuss topics such as strategies used in learning to read and write and learners' literacy needs. Although studies confirming the effects of native language literacy instruction on *adult* English literacy acquisition do not yet exist, research with children indicates that many reading and writing skills learned in the native language transfer to the learning of reading and writing in a second language. Thus, for most beginning level learners, some basic introduction to literacy in the native language actually may lead to more rapid acquisition of English literacy than ESL literacy instruction alone. In addition to these reasons for supporting native language literacy instruction, there also exists a powerful sociopolitical rationale supporting the notion that adults have a right to be educated in the language they speak and that, in an increasingly global culture, bilingualism should be seen as a national resource to be promoted and preserved.

At present, issues related to the politics of linguistic diversity and language choice may receive limited attention. Given the current and vocal bias, in some quarters, against immigrants in the United States, many policymakers and educators have chosen to focus on other, less controversial issues. No national organizations exist to share information and garner support for research and program development projects

related to native language literacy. With the population of non-English speakers growing and the skills needed to live and work in our society becoming more complex, the issue of how best to teach non-English-speaking adults to read and write must not continue to be neglected. It is hoped that this paper will invite dialogue among learners, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers concerning the role of native language literacy in adult literacy instruction.

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