DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 442 140 CS 217 193

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TITLE Fostering and Eliciting Emergent Literacy Skills in Potentially English Proficient Students.
PUB DATE 2000-05-00
NOTE 68p.; M.A. Research Project, Saint Xavier University and SkyLight Professional Development.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Masters Theses (042) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; *Classroom Environment; *Emergent Literacy; *Instructional Effectiveness; Kindergarten; Kindergarten Children; Primary Education; *Reading Readiness; Reading Skills; *Writing Readiness; Writing Skills

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This report describes an early intervention program to elicit emergent literacy skills in Potentially English Proficient kindergarten students. The school is located in a suburb of a large city near a naval base. The problem, lack of literacy readiness skills, was documented with a battery of tests given prior to entrance in kindergarten and the results of teacher and parent surveys. Analysis of probable cause indicated that there was a lack of literacy readiness skills in the Limited English Proficient population needed in order to start the formal academic kindergarten instruction. This was due to developmental factors, dysfunctional families, frequent exposure to fast paced stimuli (television), and limited exposure to pre-educational opportunities. Another factor is due to some parents not aware that literacy was a form of discourse that is developed from birth and is translated into the academic environment when the child starts school. A review of the solution of strategies suggested by other researchers, combined with an analysis of the test results, resulted in the development of age appropriate activities to foster an environment conducive to the development of literacy skills. The program included lessons involving emergent literacy activities and the use of the multiple intelligences. Post intervention data revealed an increase in emergent literacy behaviors due to a literacy environment that was conducive to the students' needs. This included mnemonics, field trips, exposure to many forms of printed materials, developmental play, and centers related to pre-literacy and literacy skills. (Contains 37 references and 10 tables of data. Appendixes contain pretest and posttest data.) (Author/RS)

# FOSTERING AND ELICITING EMERGENT LITERACY SKILLS IN POTENTIALLY ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

St. Xavier University & Skylight Professional Development

Field-Based Masters Program

Chicago, Illinois

May, 2000

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This report describes an early intervention program to elicit emergent literacy skills in Potentially English Proficient kindergarten students. The school is located in a suburb of a large city near a naval base. The problem, lack of literacy readiness skills, was documented with a battery of tests given prior to entrance in kindergarten and the results of teacher and parent surveys.

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# CHAPTER 1

## PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

### General Statement of the Problem

The students of the Potentially English Proficient (PEP) targeted kindergarten class exhibit a lack of emergent literacy skills which are essential for success in learning to read. Evidence for existence of the problem included teacher and parent surveys, and results from a battery of tests.

### Immediate Problem Context

The research site was an elementary school with a total enrollment of 744 students. Although it was originally constructed as a junior high in 1953, it now serves an Early Childhood through 5th grade population. Starting the 1998-1999 school year, it changed to a kindergarten through 5th grade building. This building houses 30 mainstream classrooms, 1 primary self-contained behavior disorder class, 1 learning disabilities class, and 4 self contained Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) pull-out resource classrooms. The staff consists of one principal and two assistant principals, one part-time pullout gifted resource teacher, social worker, counselor, nurse, and psychologist. There are four Title I/Reading Recovery teachers, one speech/language pathologist serving the whole school and another who specifically serves the Potentially English Proficient (PEP)

students once a week. A full time music teacher serves grades 1-5 and a part-time music teacher serves the kindergarten students. There is a full-time physical education teacher that serves grades 1-5 and a part-time physical education teacher who serves the kindergarten students. With the exception of the TBE staff, not many teachers, administrative, or support staff speak Spanish. One bilingual clerk translates for administrators, teachers, parents, and students. The site consists of 40 classrooms, a computer lab, a gym, 2 lunchrooms, a music room, a band room, a learning resource center, a playground, and two playing fields.

The programs implemented at the site consist of bilingual services, Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO), Girl Scouts, a breakfast program, parent volunteers, military volunteers, and Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.). The bilingual program is considered to be part immersion and part Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE). The students are placed into a regular mainstream classroom and receive instruction in English as well as music and gym with their classmates (immersion). For two hours a day, they receive instruction in the core subjects of math, reading, science, and social studies in their native language (Spanish) and thirty minutes of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction (TBE program). Kindergarten is an all day program.

Ethnic characteristics for the site are as follows: 11.8% Caucasian, 55.9% African-American, 30% Hispanic, 1.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.9% Native American. The enrollment of the Limited English Proficient (LEP) students is 10.1% and rising annually. The school consists of 83.5% low-income students, which is 47.2% higher than the state percentage of 36.3%. The attendance rate at the school is 94.1%. This rate is higher than the district rate of 92.8% and the state rate of 93.9%. The mobility

rate is 39.7%, which is higher than the district rate of 38.8%, and the state rate of 18.2%. The high mobility rate for the students is partly because approximately 40% of the children come from military housing. The chronic truancy rate is 5.5% which is lower than the district rate of 10.6% and higher than the state rate of 2.3%. In the following section, the surrounding community will be described.

## Surrounding Community

Located in a large unit school district, the site serves 4,300 students in grades Pre K-12. There are a total of 251 full time classroom teachers. The ethnic background of the teachers is 69.7% Caucasian, 26.3% African-American, 1.6% Hispanic, and 2.4% Asian/Pacific Islander. The gender is being denoted as 24.7% male and 75.3% female. The average teaching experience of all of the teachers is 14.2 years. Forty-seven percent have a Master's Degree or above. The average teacher's salary is $41,231.

The administrative structure of the district includes a nine member school board, a superintendent, an associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction, a director of personnel/students services, a director of special education, a bilingual coordinator, a director of technology, and a business manager. The average administrator's salary is $66,528.

The site is located in a mid-sized community that is between two major cities. The population of the city is 34,978. This is represented by 19,813 Caucasians, 11,977 African-Americans, 3,277 Hispanics, and 1,357 Asian or Pacific Islander. The rest of the numbers are listed as others. English speaking only citizens dominate the city by 27,991. An interesting note is that the single ancestry number is listed as 24,195. Out of all the work that was listed, one third of the population was cited a working in the armed forces.

A Total of 18,740 are above poverty and 3,273 are below poverty (1990 Census of population and housing).

The city has several large businesses and light industry. The community also has many family based businesses, churches, civic organizations, and a large naval training facility. The city also benefits from colleges and universities that give their support. There is a part time mayor and the citizens are professionals as well as blue-collar workers. The median income is $25,500.

Major influences that impact the school are failure to communicate between home and school, poverty level, and drug and alcohol abuse. These influences can negatively affect the education of the children. The school and its staff play an important role in providing the needed services to assist children and their families. In the following section, the problem in its national context will be examined.

## National Context of the Problem

"Every educator, parent, and child knows that reading is the most important skill taught in elementary school" (Learning First Alliance, 1998, p. 3). Approximately 40% of all U.S. nine-year olds score below the "basic" level of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Learning First Alliance, 1998). Failure in reading is one of the most common reasons why students are retained, assigned to special education, or given long-term remedial services (Learning First Alliance, 1998). Our society is demanding higher reading skills and technology is replacing manual labor (Hall & Moats, 1999). Even with this knowledge, according to teachers, at least 35% of children in the United States are not ready to learn when they enter school (Boyer, 1991). The area in which children are most deficient is "proficiency in language" (Boyer, 1991, p. 7). School

language is considered a type of secondary discourse that children have to learn to use in order to be successful in formal learning situations. This proves to be difficult if the primary discourse, language that is used to express oneself with intimate members, is not fully developed (Gee, 1991). Those children "who fail to develop adequate speech and language skills in the first years of life are up to six times more likely to experience reading problems in school than those with adequate stimulation" (Boyer, 1991, p. 35). The problem may be severe enough to be categorized as being learning disabled. Out of all the students in the U.S., 5 to 6% are categorized as being learning disabled and are eligible for special instruction (Hall & Moats, 1999).

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) feel that the concept of reading readiness interferes with the pre-reading behaviors of children and reading that is taught in formal educational settings. The term should be emergent literacy. An emergent literacy perspective views literacy related behaviors in preschool as legitimate and important and "reading, writing, and oral language develop concurrently and independently from an early age from children's exposure to interactions in the social contexts in which literacy is a component, and in the absence of formal instruction" (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 2). Emergent literacy has two parts. The first part is inside-out skills which are phonological awareness and letter knowledge. The second part is outside-in skills which are language and conceptual knowledge. These skills are correlated with literacy environments that can be measured. Not much is known of the sources of inside-out skills (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

There are many emergent literacy skills that parents need to help foster in their children before they are ready to start reading and writing. Some of these skills are

conventions of print, decontextualized language, knowledge of letters, linguistic awareness and discrimination, and phoneme-grapheme correspondence. All of these are developmental and no one child will have the same ability in each area (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

One of the most difficult readiness skills for children to acquire is phonemic awareness. This is the awareness that words are a sequence of phonemes (sounds). One can demonstrate this awareness by identifying and manipulating the sounds orally through readiness activities such as rhyming words and alphabet songs. This needs to take place before a child is ready for formal instruction in reading and writing. "Learning to read is not a linear process. While children need instruction in phonics, in early reading development, even then, attention to meaning, comprehension strategies, language development, and writing is essential" (Learning First Alliance, 1998, p. 16).

One of the problems facing educators is the change of the student population. Presently, out of the public school population, one in every three children is from an ethnic or racial minority group. One in every seven children speaks a language other than English as his/her first language (Neuman & Roskos, 1998). There is a growing gap between Caucasian and minority group students. In 1994, 31% white fourth graders, 69% African American fourth graders, and 64% Hispanic fourth grade students scored below basic on the National Assessment of Education Progress (Learning First Alliance, 1998). "These differences have major consequences for our society, as they lead to inequalities among this nation's students that lasts throughout their schooling and beyond" (Learning First Alliance, 1998, p. 4). Children who are limited English proficient are particularly disadvantaged because they have difficulty communicating with mainstream classroom

teachers and peers who don't speak their language. Teachers who are effective with mainstream students are frustrated because they aren't always effective at teaching language minority students (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990). They do not take into consideration that many of these children do not come from literate homes and have not had ample opportunity to develop literacy skills in their native language (Lucas, & et al., 1990). These children have more of a disadvantage than their English speaking counterparts because the regular mainstream teacher has little or no training in teaching to the needs of the Potentially English Proficient (PEP) population (Lucas, & et al., 1990).

Language is not a determiner of academic achievement unless the native language of the child is not the language of the teacher (Neuman & Roskos, 1998). This poses a very big problem when the child comes to school without the readiness skills needed to be successful. A long term effect of this problem is shown through the U.S. Bureau of Census (1992) that shows the high drop out rate of Latin Americans versus other ethnic groups. The percentage of Latin Americans no longer enrolled or not finishing high school is 33.9% compared with African Americans at 16.3% and Caucasians at 12.2%. Another long term effect of illiteracy in the U.S. is represented by 75% of the unemployed, 33.3% of mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children, 85% of juveniles who appear in court, and 60% of prison inmates (Hall & Moats, 1999).

Not being able to educate language minority students impacts the child's education, from the very beginning when he or she enters school and when that child leaves the school system, "because their language skills are not developed enough to master cognitive concepts required for academic success" (Burke, 1999, p. 4).

Many forms of bilingual education plans have been put in place to help remediate the problem of instructing the potentially English proficient students. The key word here is remediate. Teaching a child in his/her language is to develop and maintain first-language skills while learning the same skills to the best of his/her ability in English. They should not be treated as special education students, but as valuable members in the classroom that have talents and abilities (Kwiat-Yturriago, 1999). The following chapter will discuss the problem of the lack of emergent literacy skills in depth.

# CHAPTER 2

# PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

## Problem Evidence

In order to document evidence of the problem of the lack of emergent literacy skills necessary in order to learn to read successfully, a battery of tests, and teacher and parent surveys were utilized. The tests were given to all students entering kindergarten before October 31 by the classroom teacher or a paraprofessional. All of the students that were determined to be Spanish dominate were tested by the bilingual kindergarten teacher and a Spanish speaking paraprofessional.

### Student Tests

A battery of five tests were given to all of the entering kindergartners a week before school started. Scores from 24 LEP students were used in the research. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (3rd Ed.) was given to determine level of auditory vocabulary. The examiner says a word and the child has to point to the appropriate picture out of four. The Visual-Motor Integration test determines the level of hand-eye coordination. The child is shown a sequence of pictures which he or she has to copy. The Draw A Person is used "to determine developmental progress or delay, to estimate intelligence, and to measure ability"(Werner, 1998, p. iii). The Motor Activity Scale

determines hand, eye, and foot dominance of the child. This test also looks for coordination and ability to follow oral directions. The Language and Literacy Assessment test determines a wide range of pre-reading abilities. The students that were limited English proficient were also given The Idea Proficiency Tests to determine level of English. All of the tests are age level and norm-referenced. The validity, of the five tests combined, is 92% accurate (Werner, 1998).

For the purpose of the research, the researcher only focused on the results that determined level of emergent literacy skills in the area of reading. These results were reported as assessment of: auditory, expressive language, receptive language, visual discrimination, and visual memory. The categories of assessment are further divided into age level abilities. The level of abilities are noted as being: considerably above age level (7), moderately above age level (6), at expected age level (5), moderately below age level (4), and considerably below age level (3). The results are calculated by chronological age as compared with developmentally appropriate age level benchmarks in each skill area. The results can be found in Appendix A.

Seventy-one percent of the limited English proficient students, scored considerably below age level in auditory skills. Twenty-five percent scored moderately below age level. Only 4% scored at expected age level. In the area of expressive language, over 50% scored considerably below age level, 37% scored moderately below age level, and only 8% scored at expected age level. The receptive skills were even lower with 75% scoring considerably below age level and the other 25% scoring moderately below age level. The visual discrimination skills were higher with 46% scoring at considerably below age level, 42% at moderately below age level, and 12% scoring at

expected age level. The visual motor results were the best with 50% scoring at expected age level. This was the only category in which 4% scored at moderately above age level.

Results of the battery of tests showed that a majority of limited English proficient students were either moderately or considerably below age level in the area of emergent literacy skills in the area of reading. This means that the developmental age of the student is either four years old, three years old, or younger. A test to further define the correct developmental age was not provided by the program coordinator. Further inquiries to the extent of the problem district-wide was initiated by a teacher survey. The following section discusses those results.

Teacher Surveys

All kindergarten teachers (16) in the district were given surveys to determine whether or not there was a lack of literacy readiness skills in their students at the time of entrance in kindergarten. Seven of the surveys were returned. All seven teachers said they noticed a lack of literacy readiness skills in their kindergarten students. They then were asked to rank five skills they thought were the most lacking; with one being the skill that is most lacking to five with the skill that is least lacking. The skills are as follows: follows one and two step directions, puts in proper sequence a chain of events, forms letters correctly, identifies initial sounds, and left to right progression. There was also a space to write in an important skill that the teacher felt was overlooked. Only one teacher filled in the blank space. She stated that recognizing colors and numbers, and the students having low vocabulary are also some skills that are lacking in her students. Each teacher ranked the skills in an entirely different way. Table 1 shows the pattern.

Table 1

Teacher Survey of Readiness Skills in Students

| | (most lacking) 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | (least lacking) 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Follows 1& 2 step directions | 29% | 0% | 14% | 43% | 14% |
| Puts in proper sequence a chain of events | 14% | 14% | 43% | 14% | 14% |
| Forms letters correctly | 14% | 29% | 14% | 0% | 57% |
| Identifies initial sounds | 43% | 57% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Left to right progression | 0% | 0% | 43% | 29% | 29% |

Results indicated that almost half of the teachers saw identifying initial sounds as the skill that the students lacked the most. This skill was also listed by close to 60% as being the second skill that was most lacking. Left to right progression and follows one and two step directions were both at 43%. Follows one and two step directions was in fourth place also with 43%. Forming letters correctly was the skill that 57% of the teachers found the least important readiness skill in students to learn. This survey also gave the teachers the opportunity to share their ideas about why students lacked these skills. Most of the answers given will be discussed in the probable cause section. The following section discusses the results of the parent surveys.

Parent Surveys

A survey was also given to each parent as the children were being tested. Twenty-three out of 40 were returned. It asked parents if they felt that their child was ready for

school emotionally, physically, and academically. The results are shown on table 2 below.

Table 2

Result of Parent Survey in Percentages

| | Yes % | No % | No Answer % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ready emotionally | 74 | 17 | 9 |
| Ready physically | 87 | 4 | 9 |
| Ready academically | 48 | 35 | 17 |
| Any concerns | 22 | 61 | 17 |

Although a majority of parents felt their children were emotionally and physically ready to start school, over a third felt their child was not ready academically. A little over 20% indicated that they had concerns about their child in school.

This survey also gave parents the opportunity to share how they prepared their child for school. Most stated that they have talked to their child about what is expected as far as behavior in a school setting. Several parents indicated that they showed their child how to read, color, and write at home. The following section will discuss the probable causes of the lack of emergent literacy skills in the area of reading in kindergarten students.

## Probable Causes

A child's readiness for school is defined in terms of physical capabilities and activity level, cognitive ability, learning style, and knowledge base, and social and psychological competencies. These characteristics reflect the child's nutrition and

> health status as well as psycho-social development at the time of school entry. This psycho-social development results from the child's interactions with a number of environments, including the family. (Myers & Landers, 1998, p. 2)

Failure in school has been attributed to many factors: poverty, dysfunctional family structures, limited English proficiency, and substance abuse in the home. All of these factors put children at a disadvantage in a formal learning setting (Kwiat-Yturriago, 1999). The following sections will discuss: factors that inhibit physical and cognitive growth, role of parents, developmental aspects, lack of sleep, pre-educational opportunities, and the teacher's role in a child's life. These are some of the reasons why a child would lack the emergent literacy skills needed to be successful in a formal learning situation.

Factors Inhibiting Physical and Cognitive Growth

In 1993, there were 9.6 million children supported by welfare and the number has been increasing every year (Abner, Brooks-Gunn, & Maynard, 1995). "One in every four children under the age of six is growing up in a family that cannot afford safe housing, good nutritional or quality health care" (Boyer, 1991, p. 4). Many children born into poverty lack proper nutrition in either prenatal or postnatal stages of life, or both. "Some researchers believe that specific academic abilities, such as reading or math, may be affected by hormones secreted during pregnancy". (Healy, 1994, p. 9) Poor diet, emotional stress, or substance abuse by the mother during pregnancy can cause premature birth, and physical and intellectual problems later on in life (Healy, 1994). Many fathers do not know that they too can harm the fetus during intercourse with contaminated seminal fluid, "if they have been exposed to toxic substances" (Healy, 1990, p. 58). Birth

defects can also be caused by sperm that has damaged genetic structure (Healy, 1990). The food that most people eat today is filled with additives, they eat fewer natural foods. Exposure to toxins, lead, certain medications, and certain food ingredients are possible causes of learning problems and brain growth or non-growth (Healy, 1994; Burke, 1999).

At times, children come to school without eating breakfast. This affects their ability to function in class.

> Nutritional status also affects activity levels. Malnourished children, suffering from protein-energy malnutrition or vitamin and mineral deficiencies, are less active, less able to concentrate on learning activities and less interested in the environment than their well nourished peers are. (Myers & Landers, 1989, p. 3)

Howard (1995), states cognitive development occurs at times of biological stability and is changed by learning and changes in the nervous system after birth. Up until the age of two, synapses in some parts of the brain are overproduced. Production gradually decreases until the age of seven and then starts again. Eliminating unnecessary synapses happens as the cognitive capacity matures. Cognitive ability betters as the child matures because the ability to ignore interference and control actions increases with maturation. These characteristics are linked to the frontal lobes of the brain which grow in spurts (Howard, 1995). A brain is constantly changing physically and functionally and it is influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic stimulation (plasticity). If a child doesn't receive the right kinds of stimulation, cognitive and linguistic development can be impeded.

Abner, et al., (1995), state that timing of parenthood can also hamper the cognitive and developmental growth of the child. Being born to teenage parents, early arrival of siblings, and welfare dependency adversely affects the school readiness of

children more often than children born to older women. Forty-two percent of women receiving welfare, began receiving services while in their teens (Abner & et al., 1995). Younger mothers or mothers with more than one child tend not to have the time or patience to spend much quality time with their children. A lot of the communication that goes on has more of a directive quality to it instead of an exchange of ideas and information (Pflaum, 1986). Mothers from lower income groups showed fewer teaching behaviors during shared reading with the child than mothers from middle class groups (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Forty-seven percent of parents sampled, that were reported to be on public aid, had no alphabet books in the home compared to 3% of professionals who had none in the home ( McCormick & Mason, 1986, as cited by Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). On the other hand, Lyon (1998) states that poverty alone cannot predict reading failure because 32% of fourth graders who scored below basic levels of reading had parents with college degrees.

Most of the teachers surveyed felt the reason why the students lack the readiness skills to start school is that the parents do not read to their children or spend quality time with them. The students lack exposure or proper training from parents in the area of reading. Students also spend a lot of time watching TV. In the following section, the role of the parents will be discussed further.

Role of Parents

The home environment is very important for the emergent reader. Children who aren't read to or exposed to print at an early age, don't develop background knowledge or language skills necessary to develop pre-reading skills. These children usually lack the readiness skills to start kindergarten. Pflaum (1986) states that some parents fail to realize

that meaning is negotiated through communication when one is developing language. These parents view language as control over their behaviors and the behaviors of their children. They are not aware of the theoretically based instructional methods and rely on advice from TV, neighbors, and own experiences as children (Pflaum, 1986). Most parents surveyed expressed that they did not spend time with their child in formal or informal pre-reading activities in the home; such as reading and discussing books. Those parents who were concerned about their child starting school stated the child had never been in a formal school setting prior to entering kindergarten.

> In some low socioeconomic groups, parents may not believe that teaching is part of their role. These parents may not provide sufficient opportunities for interchange with their children and may not respond to children's initiations to enhance their thinking (Pflaum, 1986, p. 117).

Building a consistent approach to family experiences is difficult if the family situation is too emotionally, economically, or physically stressful. Parents want their children to succeed in school, but without community support and with the fragmentation of family life, it is difficult for the parents to keep their focus on the needs of the children.

Many times parents aren't aware of or knowledgeable enough to help educate their children. Certain cultures feel that it is the job of the school to teach their children (Pflaum, 1986). At home, children are bombarded with TV, video games and other fast paced stimuli in which they are unable to pick up all of the sounds that they hear. "When there is a constant noise such as music or TV in the background, it lulls the brain and interferes with the normal processing" (Healy, 1990, p. 175). This relaxed state is called

alpha. When someone is in a constant state of alpha, his or her brain is unable to desynchronize (or break the rhythm) and therefore unable to think.

> Some TV and video programs artificially manipulate the brain into paying attention by violating certain of its natural defenses with frequent visual and auditory changes known as saliency. TV induces neural passivity and reduces active problem solving. TV may have a hypnotic possibly neuralogically addictive effect on the brain by changing the frequency of electrical impulses in ways that block active mental processes (Healy, 1990, p. 199).

Since these children are not engaging in meaningful conversations about the world, they fail to develop adequate speech and language skills (Boyer, 1991). Most students at the research site reported that they played Nintendo or Sega and watched TV on a daily basis. Many of these emergent readers are not good at learning analytically, abstractly, or auditorily (Eastin, 1998). This in turn impedes the development of phonemic awareness. In order to learn to read, one needs to learn a system of correspondences beyond the letters of the alphabet (Learning First Alliance, 1998). There are between forty and fifty speech sounds in the English language and several hundred ways to spell them. Intelligence alone doesn't guarantee success at reading (Hall & Moats, 1999). Young children are engaged in a lot of learning about the world and they don't need to read or write to communicate. They are not "future-oriented" about literacy to engage in all of the learning that is prerequisite to successful independent reading (Pflaum, 1986). This means that the children are thinking about what is happening to them now, not how it will be related to what they will be doing in school at a later time. The following section will discuss further the developmental aspects of children.

Developmental Aspects

"Writing requires the encoding of one's language knowledge into representative graphemes" (Pflaum, 1986, p. 92). Beginning writers write according to the placement of the tongue and the sounds that they hear when they say the words. Learning to read and write is not easy for most children, especially if they have poor phonological memory (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Some children fail to develop phonemic awareness due to individual inability or lack of training at an early age (Learning First Alliance, 1998). Another aspect of this is failure to develop adequate speech and language skills (Boyer, 1991). Children need many experiences in their daily lives in order to develop these skills. Some children come from homes where the discourse of the school is a secondary discourse and has to be learned just as another language would be learned (Gee, 1991). Children with poor receptive language skills may fall behind when they are required to associate ideas. The higher the level of understanding that is required, the more sensitive they are to environmental stimulation (Healy, 1994). Hall & Moats state that research conducted by a group from Yale believes that between 17 to 20% of students have reading impairments. With structured learning, only 5% will continue to have serious disabilities.

Some children miss their window of opportunity for early literacy because of poor vision and hearing. Frequent ear infections cause temporary hearing loss. Some children are not developmentally able to focus on print depending on its size. "Visual and auditory processing may be impaired if cells in parts of the brain that receive signals from these organs fail to fire during a particular time of development" (Healy, 1994, p. 76).

These developmental aspects are often overlooked by parents and educators because some attribute these problems to the child just wanting attention, not paying attention, or is lazy, if there is an expressed problem. Many of these difficulties are not identified or diagnosed until the child is in the upper grades and is still making the same complaints or the teacher notices that the problem interferes with the completion of work. Developmental problems affect the emergent reader in ways that impede the student's progress learning to read. Lack of sleep will be discussed in the following section.

Lack of Sleep

Lack of sleep also has an adverse affect on being ready for school. When one sleeps, the brain processes what was learned or experienced during the day. Many children don't have a regular bedtime and are tired during instruction (Burke, 1999). In some instances, children as young as seven-years-old will be expected to miss school or stay up late hours to care for younger siblings. The researcher noticed that many of the students were tired during the school day. After lunch, many complained they were tired and wanted to go home on a daily basis. There was a marked difference in the productivity of the students in the morning compared to the afternoon. Limited exposure to pre-educational opportunities will be discussed in the following section.

Limited Exposure to Pre-Educational Opportunities

There are not enough public preschools to fit the needs of the community. Each preschool has a different purpose and quality. Various preschools and parents may ask for concrete language and classification skills whereas the schools ask for a more abstract and representational use of language (Myers & Landers, 1998). Healy (1990) states in many instances, availability is limited. Since preschool is not a requirement, most

children who attend preschool do so because both parents, or a single parent, work. It was estimated that three-fourths of both parents would be working in 1995 and children would be either expected to care for themselves until parents came home or be taken care of by low quality daycares or baby-sitters (Healy, 1990). For many people who are not in the professional job market, earning a minimum wage does not allow the luxury of having quality or state of the art child care. Forty-three percent of children in the U.S. under the age of five have a mother that is working (Pflaum, 1986). At the research site classroom, parents reported that they shared the responsibility for child care. Some stated through conversation that one would work in the day while the other worked at night. Those who did have a caregiver, had one that was related to that person or was a neighbor. Only two of the children had attended a structured learning environment prior to entering school. The following section will discuss the teacher's role.

Teacher's Role

The teacher's role in problems that children face when they arrive at school with limited early literacy skills will be discussed. According to Lucas, Henze, & Donato (1990), many teachers are unsure that the school system is equipped to educate these children, especially if they are poor and from a language or racial minority group. A strong feeling that parents need to be more supportive of their child's educational endeavors lets teachers place the blame without feeling guilty about failing to educate these children (Lucas, & et al., 1990).

> In our endeavors to make schools/teachers better, we have forgotten that family is a more imperiled institution than the school and that many of education's failures related to problems that precede schooling, even birth itself. We have focused on

> school outcomes, forgetting if children don't have a good beginning- if they are not well nurtured and well loved during the first years of life- it will be difficult; if not impossible to compensate fully for such feelings later (Boyer, 1991, p. 4).

Mainstream teachers often times have difficulty teaching language and racial minority students because of lack of training. It is important that novice teachers are trained by experienced teachers in the field as opposed to faculty in colleges and universities who have never taught in such schools (Haberman, 1991). They don't keep abreast with research on literacy and language acquisition (Lucas, & et al., 1990). Compounding the problem is the decrease in the number of teachers with ethnic, racial, and linguistic minority backgrounds and an increase in minority students in all categories. Most teachers starting out in the 1990's were Caucasian, monolingual, females from rural or suburban communities that were not equipped to deal with the more than 40% of the students of color attending the K-12 schools in the United States (Wimett & Blachowicz, 1997). "Reading problems can be created by forced early instruction" (Healy, 1994, p. 240). Teachers who aren't aware of developmentally appropriate instruction can do more harm than good to children who aren't ready for formal academic instruction. Fewer than 20% of experienced educators surveyed knew sounds, spellings, and language structure well (Hall & Moats, 1999). This is a frightening thought when most educators in the elementary schools teach reading as a core subject.

A child entering school with a lack of the emergent literacy skills needed to be successful in learning to read creates a challenge for all of those involved. Many factors are involved in the development of the child beginning with conception. Before a child enters kindergarten he or she is exposed to many situations whether they are positive or

negative to the cognitive, social, or physical development of the child. A few of the causes were mentioned such as lack of healthy pre- and post natal care, poverty, lack of proper developmental growth and pre-educational opportunities. The following chapter will provide possible solutions for parents and educators to work together to facilitate emergent literacy skills in kindergarten students.

# CHAPTER 3

# THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

## Literature Review

It takes numerous first hand experiences for children to develop knowledge and the ability to manipulate it mentally. As information is organized, absorbed and added to, it is combined into patterns (or mental operations) which help the child develop abstract thought (Healy, 1994). This is fostered when the home and the classroom are rich literacy environments. The following sections entitled: creating a literacy rich environment, creating a literacy program, developing parent and guardian education, and teacher education will give strategies and solutions that will help facilitate pre-reading skills required of students prior to reading. The first section will discuss how to create a literacy rich environment.

### Create a Literacy Rich Environment

Creating a rich literacy environment is very important to the emergent reader because the more he or she is exposed to print, the more familiar it is to him or her (Calkins & Bellino, 1998). It is easy to do. A rich literacy environment consists of a variety of books, newspapers, catalogues, child created materials, and anything that has meaningful print (Chapman, 1993). One could elicit parents, colleagues, or family

members to donate used magazines, newspapers, or books. Grocery stores or other stores in the community could donate old sale adds. Material that has environmental print logos written on them such as McDonald's, Burger King, and other familiar stores, are also important because these are usually words that children first recognize. A literacy environment should also have learning centers that are comprised of reading, listening, and writing (Cunningham & Allington, 1999). These are important because they are different ways children can be exposed to and become familiar with print. A reading center can be very easy to put together. A small space filled with a variety of reading materials and a couple of chairs or carpet squares for the children to sit on while they read silently or discuss books together. Many times teachers like to use different kinds of chairs such as a beanbag, an old recliner, or a rocker. The listening center can be adjacent or combined with the reading center since they both involve books. One would need at least four copies of the same book and a cassette recording of the book. The cassette can be manufactured, teacher, or parent made. The cassette player has to be one that young children cannot destroy very easily. A writing center needs to have pencils, markers, crayons, stencils, alphabet and number stampers, paper, stapler, and whatever else one could think of that would a make a good book. A learning center is similar to all of these things combined, but it usually has a theme or a skill to master. The following section will describe how to create a literacy program.

Create a Literacy Program

A literacy program that is meaning-centered, natural, and functional for the participants will be more successful than lecturing the children (Gee, 1991). Students learn more when they are actively involved with learning (Gee, 1991). The classroom

instruction should be focused on acquisition of the material, not just learning information to complete a worksheet or take a test. A classroom that is more child-centered is more age appropriate than a classroom that expects a child to fit into a certain way of learning (Calkins & Bellino, 1998).

Kutz (1997) states that literacy has begun to be seen as a form of discourse. Parents and teachers should see reading and writing as an extension of other uses of language which children acquire through participation in a literate discourse community. "Reading and writing need to contribute in integral ways to the ongoing process of making sense of the world of a child and acting on it" (Kutz, 1997, p. 224). Children who are learning a secondary discourse in their non-native language need to be exposed to many forms of primary and secondary discourses including reading and writing (Gee, 1991). Reading aloud to (and with) children every day helps improve their listening (receptive) and their speaking (expressive) vocabulary (Hall & Moats, 1999). It builds onto their background knowledge to help learn new concepts (Lyon, 1997). The language in books is more complex, organized, and is less repetitious than the way most people speak (Calkins & Bellino, 1998). Initially, children believe that when someone is reading, they are looking at the pictures to tell the story. As one reads aloud, he or she is modeling left to right, top to bottom, and that spoken words are represented by print (Eastin, 1994). An example is instead of using a small book, one should read a big book to the students. Place the book on an easel and point to the words as they are read. This draws the attention away from the pictures to the words. Also the teacher should stop and ask questions about the pictures, text, and what he or she is doing (modeling). Such as, "Can anyone find the letter a?" or "Where do I begin to read if I want to continue the story?"

Children who make their own books are usually able to tend to print and "read" them. This is an important pre-reading skill that shows directionality (left-to-right), pointing to the words instead of the pictures, and possibly recognizing some of the words and sounds of the letters. Common readiness books that children can successfully make are pattern, rhyming, counting, and letter. Old magazines, books, and grocery store adds are good materials for students to use to make their books. For example, if the students are making a number book, they find what they are looking for in the materials, cut it out, and glue it in their book. The child then writes the text that goes with the picture.

Some children can learn implicitly, this means indirectly. More children learn when there is explicit, systematic teaching of skills. This is true "especially for children with learning disabilities, with linguistic differences, and children of poverty" (Hall & Moats, 1999, p. 114). To help develop early literacy skills for all children, part of the instruction needs to be in the child's native language (Cummins, 1986; Kwiat-Yturrtiago, 1999). Developing language and processing what is heard is done mentally in the primary language of the child and then translated into the secondary language that he or she is learning. If there are children that speak another language other than English in the classroom, they need to be able to discuss in their native language what they are learning (Minami & Kennedy, 1991). All children need a time to reflect and discuss what they are learning. Teachers and parents need to listen to what children have to say and respond thoughtfully. A child needs to initiate conversation, grow ideas, analyze situations, elaborate on or create plans, and also need to learn how to make decisions (Calkins & Bellino, 1998). This can be done during whole group or small group instruction. A teacher may allow for children to talk quietly with a partner while doing class work.

Language and writing skills need to be modeled on a continuous basis. "Explicit instruction in the sound structures of oral language and in the connections between speech, sounds, and spellings" needs to be done on a daily basis (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p. 4). To plan for effective instruction, teachers need to understand their students' current level of functioning. Children learn only what they are developmentally capable or ready to learn (Pflaum, 1986).

Part of a literacy program that is very important is exploratory or developmental play. This encourages spontaneous language, social, and organizational skills (Neuman & Roskos, 1998). Many times, the instructor uses developmental play or centers to develop the multiple intelligences in the students. This improves reading readiness by allowing students the time to organize thoughts and hold meaningful conversations with peers. In creating centers, the teacher uses different modalities of learning to reinforce instruction. Centers give the students an opportunity to work with each other cooperatively. The students are expected to use some responsibility to carry out an individual or group activity. It gives them the freedom to discuss and execute an activity with the help of others without being punished. Lazear, (1999) states that there are eight multiple intelligences that were determined by Howard Gardener. The verbal/linguistic intelligence is the use of words and language. Poetry, reading books, other oral language activities help develop this intelligence. The intrapersonal intelligence relates to the inner state of being. Teaching thinking activities, using reflection journals, and independent activities help to develop this intelligence. The interpersonal intelligence focuses on relationships with others. Oral discussion about feelings and how to communicate better are ways to develop this intelligence. The naturalist intelligence relates to the

appreciation and understanding of nature. Field trips, growing plants, and caring for pets in the classroom are ways this intelligence can be developed. The visual/spatial intelligence relies on vision and how images are perceived. Art and cut and paste activities are ways this intelligence can be developed. The bodily/kinesthetic intelligence is related to the physical movement of the body. Dramatic play and gym class are ways this intelligence is developed. The musical/rhythmic intelligence is based on a sensitivity to rhythm and beats. Learning songs, rhymes, and poetry are ways this intelligence is developed. The logical/mathematical intelligence deals with scientific thinking and number reasoning. Learning numbers and their relations and graphing are ways to develop this intelligence (Lazear, 1999).

Centers help develop reading readiness by allowing students to do activities that are related to what is being taught in a less structured, more relaxed fashion. Usually there is more than one student working on the activity and collaboration takes place. This is related to the multiple intelligences because developmental play and centers do not rely on direct instruction. They involve using different ways and intelligences to carry out an activity. "Children learn new concepts and language skills through concrete, manipulative, and sensory experiences" that focus more on content than correctiveness (Herb & Willoughby-Herb, 1994, p. 7). When planning centers the teacher needs to focus on the developmental age of the child. This can be determined through a battery of tests or observation with age level benchmarks for development (Hall & Moats, 1999). Planning and execution of exploratory play and centers can be a great learning experience for the students in a fun way, but a lot of work for the instructor. This cannot be done in a haphazard fashion. Saracho & Spodek (1998) state there are five steps in the process of

planning for play in the classroom. The first one is to tell the children what they should be doing and what they should not be doing. The teacher needs to set clear rules about what will happen so there will be no confusion. The second one is to provide a sensory rich environment. Items such as a fully stocked play kitchen, a listening center, unifix cubes, pattern blocks, and computers are just a few items that the children can use independently. The third one is to practice and model using the materials with the children. The fourth one is to use exploratory play as an opportunity to reinforce skills learned. An example, is putting numbers from a calendar or alphabet letters in order, working puzzles, making numbers, letters, and shapes with different mediums such as geoboards, clay, sand, paint, or unifix cubes. The teacher can set up learning centers that pertain to the subjects that are being taught. The last one is that the teacher and the children should reflect on experience in order to provide feedback and evaluation (Saracho & Spodek, 1998). The teacher can discuss with the students as a whole group or individually what they learned that day or how things could have gone better during the developmental play time. Feedback and evaluation from the teacher and students makes everyone more aware of skills that need to be reinforced or improved upon. It helps the students be aware of their own thinking, learning, capabilities, and limits. All of this helps reading readiness. To help children to extend and get more out of the activity, there needs to be a limited choice so the children will use their imagination to devise new ways of using the toy or game (Calkins & Bellino, 1997). In the following section, the role of the parent/guardian will be discussed.

Develop Parent or Guardian Education

The parents' role in helping their children become literate is very important. They are the child's first teachers and influence early attitudes about education (Eastin, 1997). Parents or guardians need to provide stable and responsive care to help facilitate social development and learning. Stable care is having a consistent routine in the home and what is expected of everyone in the family. An example would be a set time for all meals and bedtime. Responsive care is when the parents and children have trust and empathy for one another. Parents just don't talk to their children, they talk with them. They wait for responses to questions and answer questions asked of them ( Boyer, 1991; Calkins & Bellino, 1997). "The way in which parents talk to their children about experience influences what knowledge the children will gain from the experience and gain later ability to draw on the knowledge when reading" (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 22). The children who come from these homes will develop trust, curiosity, and confidence about self (Boyer, 1991). Hall and Moats (1999) state that medical research has shown that both emotional peace and psychological energy expands thinking and learning. A child who feels secure in his or her environment is more willing to take risks in learning (Hall & Moats, 1999). "A caring environment builds emotional maturity and social confidence, keys to school readiness, but such an environment is also consequential to language development. Language is the key to learning" (Boyer, 1991, p. 34).

Another component for a child to develop properly and be ready for school is good nutrition. Good nutrition and (or) nutritional supplements have long term benefits on readiness, level of activity, and social cooperation with or without maternal tutoring

(Myers & Landers, 1998). If a family is not able to afford to feed the child breakfast and lunch, most schools provide a free or reduced lunch for all who apply and qualify. One way a school can provide guidance in the aforementioned areas is to develop parent literacy nights that teach the parents how to work with their children at home. These nights can be taught by teachers, administrators, or a specialist from the local health department. Some topics of importance that affects children both in and out of school are: ways to talk with child to develop language, items a child should learn to use at home, proper nutrition, and ways to teach parents letter word awareness to their child. Because of the breakdown in the family and community, schools may need to become the focal point for the interaction of social service agencies concerned with health, nutrition, child abuse, poverty, and housing (Calvin, as cited by Kwiat-Yturriago, 1999).

The role of the parent has three parts. The first one is to encourage the child's interests. The second is to monitor the child's reading development against "benchmarks" that are age and developmentally appropriate. These benchmarks can be found in any public school for each grade level. The third is to be actively involved in child's education. Too many parents blame teachers or feel that they don't influence their children (Hall & Moats, 1999). "Teaching a child to read is a shared responsibility between school and parents" (Hall & Moats, 1999, p. 37). Developing teacher education will be discussed in the following section.

Develop Teacher Education

"One characteristic that distinguishes effective classrooms from ineffective ones is the teacher's commitment to the belief that all children can learn to read" (Anderson, et al., 1985, p. 86). All educators need to be knowledgeable of literacy development and the

importance of instruction in facilitating literacy development in children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Many teachers and parents teach the way they were taught (Bayles, 1997). Teachers need formal instruction on reading development and disorders (Lyon, 1997). This should be expanded on by taking classes, workshops, and district inservices that deal with the problems they face when they are unfamiliar with the types of students they are instructing. A teacher or administrator should also be trained in areas in which they need improvement. The knowledge to structure schools and implement programs is documented, but many times it is not utilized. Colleges of education play a role in the education of administrators and educators. "Colleges of education must be committed to preparing teachers to work effectively with students from a variety of economically, culturally, and ethically different backgrounds" (Bennett, 1991, p. 47).

Literacy instruction needs to reflect a bigger view of literacy as it exists in the child's world in and outside of school. The role of literacy has changed many times during history (Wimett & Blachowicz, 1997). With education mandates that keep on changing, not just the elite have an opportunity to become literate (Hall & Moats,1999).

"Before teachers can be prepared for teaching the poor and racial and language minorities, they must first have a vision of what multiculturalism in America means for all citizens and its specific implications for the work of the teacher" (Haberman, 1991, p. 277). In order to reach all of the students in the classroom, educators need to use a form of instruction that has meaning and is culturally responsive to the students. Since there is such cultural diversity in the classroom, the teacher needs to consider what it means to be literate in the different cultures that comprise the student population (Wimett & Blachowicz, 1997). Many times misunderstandings in oral dialectal discourse can cause

confusion, anger, and withdrawal from the teacher and the student. There needs to be teacher "awareness of potentially confusing feature differences, teacher ability to demonstrate clear answers, and teacher understanding of pupils' use of language learned at home" (Heath, as cited by Pflaum, 1986, p. 92). The teacher's awareness of these discourses and points of potential misunderstandings could be eliminated if they are surmised and planned for in the instruction. Teachers also need to understand that there will be the possibility that there will be a child who will have a hard time assimilating into the "expectations of the mainstream school culture" (Wimett & Blachowicz, 1997, p. 319). Instead of remediating disadvantaged students, educators need to accelerate the rate in which they learn (Kwiat-Yturriago, 1998). If this is not done, these children will always be behind their peers. Their experiences are, however, culturally and literacy rich. Building on insights from reflections on experiences in cultural diversity will benefit all of the people involved, teacher, student, and parent. Understanding the living conditions of families and supporting the culture of the home will create a positive partnership with the families of the students (Neuman & Roskos, 1998).

## Summary

The review of the literature provided many possible solutions and ideas to help parents and educators to facilitate emergent literacy skills in children. Key solutions start at conception for proper health care for mom and baby and continue on throughout life. Talking with children to elicit more than just correct answers will help develop important oral language skills. These skills, in turn, will transfer over to recognition of print that will be meaningful to the child. Teacher understanding of cultural and language

differences in the children and in the parents will help foster positive relationships between school and home.

The following section will explain the project objectives and processes. It also contains the action plan implemented by the researcher in an effort to foster and elicit early literacy skills in the potentially English proficient students and also children in the regular mainstream classroom.

## Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of fostering emergent literacy skills through multiple intelligences and varied teaching strategies, during September, 1999 through December, 1999, the targeted Potentially English Proficient (PEP) kindergarten students will increase literacy readiness skills. This will be measured by anecdotal records, student skill checklists, and ongoing periodical testing. In order to accomplish the targeted objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Development and implementation of parent literacy nights to teach parents how to work with their children.

2. Create activities from the multiple intelligence that will help foster the acquisition of pre-reading behaviors.

3. Development and implementation of strategies to foster and reinforce readiness skills.

## Project Action Plan

Students who are determined to be Limited English Proficient (LEP) are mainstreamed into regular classes and receive native and English as a Second Language

(ESL) instruction for 2 to 2-1/2 hours a day. All kindergarten students at the research site attend a full day program.

I. Data collection for evidence of the problem (September)

A. Parent survey

1. Parents fill out on site while the child is being tested

2. Used to document evidence of the problem

B. Battery of district skills tests

1. Students come at appointment time

2. Used to document evidence of problem

C. Ongoing periodical assessment of student by teacher

1. Teacher evaluates student by observation or interview

2. Used to document growth or non-growth of student

II. Development and implementation of parent literacy nights to teach parents how to work wit their child.

A. Take place at school for one and a half hours after school once a month

1. September

a. Topic-Ways to talk with child to develop language

1. Role-playing

2. Modeling

3. Make an oral language book

2. October

a. Topic-Items child should learn to use at home

1. Self help skills

2. Drawing, cutting, gluing

3. Make a self-help book

3. November

a. Topic-Proper nutrition

1. Devise a menu that is nutritious (parents)

2. Discuss why it is important

3. Share a healthy snack

4. December

a. Topic-ways to teach letter-word awareness

1. Make an alphabet book

III. Create activities from the multiple intelligence that will help to foster the acquisition of pre-reading behaviors

A. Star Student of the Day (ten-fifteen minutes daily)

1. Child is randomly picked and name written on sentence strip

a. Spell name

b. Focus on first letter and last letter

c. Write name again as child watches and then cut it up and have two or three turns putting it back in order

B. Songs and Poems (ten-fifteen minutes daily)

1. Children learn songs and poems relating to physical environment and letters

2. Pick out rhyming words

3. Pick out letters they are studying (in words)

C. Counting Words (bi-weekly)

1. Each student gets a cup and ten counters

2. Say a sentence two times

3. Children put one counter for each word they hear

D. Chanting the Sounds of the Letters of the Alphabet

1. Mnemonics-every day two-three minutes

E. Centers-that facilitate and elicit phonemic and letter awareness ( 60 minutes daily)

1. Listening center

2. Exploratory play

3. Different ways of making letters with a variety of mediums

4. Journaling

F. Whole Group and Small Group Instruction (between 5-30 minutes daily)

1.Formal instruction of letter and sound associations

2.Opportunity for students to share with teacher and peers their knowledge

IV. Development and implementation of strategies to foster and reinforce readiness skills.

A. Model using correct way of reading (5-10 minutes every day)

1. Left to right progression

2. Top to bottom progression

3. Read orally to children

B. Children make own books (20-30 minutes once or twice a week)

1. Pattern

2. Rhyming

3. Counting

4. Letter

C. Centers (10-15 minutes at each center)

1. Cut and paste projects dealing with fine motor and eye hand coordination

2. Following two or more directions

3. Role-play to learn cooperation.

V. Data collection to assess effectiveness of intervention

A. Analyze data from anecdotal records

B. Analyze data from skills checklists

C. Analyze data from periodical testing

## Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the interventions, the researcher will be assessing the students periodically using the readiness skills checklist provided by the district during the initial screening of the students. Using these results, anecdotal records, student skill checklists, and ongoing periodical testing, will determine growth or non-growth in literacy readiness skills in the targeted English Proficient Students.

# CHAPTER 4

# PROJECT RESULTS

## Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this program was to foster the emergent literacy skills in the Potentially English Proficient students in the area of reading. A program was designed to meet these objectives. There were three parts to the program. The first was to develop and implement parent literacy nights to help parents/guardians learn how to work with their children. In the month of September, the topic for discussion was ways to talk with children to encourage language development. The researcher planned activities for modeling, role-playing, and making an oral language book to take home. This provided parents with an activity that could be replicated at home. In October, the topic was items children could learn to use at home that would help them with their daily activities at school. This encompassed using scissors, holding a pencil, gluing, and other self-help skills. Making a self-help book was included in the session. In November, the topic was proper nutrition. The parents would plan a nutritious menu, discuss why proper nutrition is important, and share a healthy snack. In December, the topic was ways to teach letter-word awareness. Parents would work with their child to make an alphabet book.

The parent literacy nights did not transpire because not one parent came. After two tries, the researcher decided to try to have the parents come during the day. The kindergarten Title I teacher agreed to set aside an hour once a week to come in to help guide the parents to do reading activities with the children. Several parents verbalized interest, but never came. The researcher decided to send home a monthly newsletter containing the information on the topics that were to be modeled by the teacher. Also, daily homework was sent home with the students that contained detailed descriptions and dialogue that the parents should say to their children to help them with the homework.

The second part of the program was to create activities from the multiple intelligences that would help foster the acquisition of pre-reading behaviors. An activity that was introduced to the students on the first day was mnemonics. The students chanted pictures of the alphabet with the correlating initial sound. An example is bear, bear, b, b, b. This activity was included along with the daily oral language activities. Daily oral language activities were a series of whole class activities that included reciting the alphabet, adding a number to a line to count how many days there were in school, calendar, identifying shapes and numbers, songs, poems, and reading a story and discussing it. The poems, songs, and stories change monthly to correlate with holidays, seasons, or content area being studied at the time.

Another activity that was done during the oral language activity time was called star student of the day. A child was randomly picked and his/her name was written on a sentence strip. Children were asked to raise their hand if they recognized the name. Once everyone knew who the name belonged to, they orally spelled it together. The teacher focused on the first and last letter of the name, counted how many letters (sounds) there

were in the name, compared it with other names, and talked about how they were the same or different. The teacher then wrote the name again, cut it up, and placed the letters of the name in random order in a pocket chart. Two or three students came up one at a time and put the name in order. This was implemented starting the third week of November. It was done three to four times a week instead of every day. In the beginning, only a few of the students were willing to participate in the activity. When they all saw how it was done and became comfortable with the activity, everyone wanted a turn. This was a way to motivate the students to learn sequencing, counting, and matching letters and sounds without being tedious. When all of the names of the students had been modeled, they were put into a box to use as a center activity.

More activities that facilitated and elicited phonemic and letter awareness were practiced in centers. Groups of four students moved around every 10-20 minutes depending on the size of the class. The morning class had no more than four groups while the afternoon group had six. The kinds of centers that were set up were thematic, journaling, exploratory/dramatic play, and sustained silent reading (SSR). Other centers focused on fine motor development, hand-eye coordination, following two or more step directions, and role playing to learn cooperation.

The teacher also planned whole group and small group instruction. The small group instruction was included in the center rotation. This was 5-30 minutes daily depending on the needs of the children. There was formal instruction of letter and sound association with many opportunities for students to share their knowledge with teachers and peers. In the beginning, the small group instruction and center rotation went smoothly. Towards the end of September, 17 students were added to the transitional

bilingual kindergarten program and set the numbers askew because in the beginning there were 15 students in the morning and 15 students in the afternoon. The students were divided between five regular kindergarten classes. The researcher then had to accept 29 students in the morning and 18 students in the afternoon. Because one teacher had problems with the scheduling of her part time paraprofessional, the researcher agreed to take her students in the afternoon which made 21 students in the morning and 26 students in the afternoon. Three students from the morning moved and that made 18. In the afternoon, the numbers remained steady until four moved.

When students came and went, this made the other students unsettled and an adjustment period for everyone took place. This affected instruction and learning. Therefore, the centers were not working because instead of four groups, there were more groups of students. The students were too hyper, immature, and didn't work well as a team like the first group without the new students. The researcher waited and then tried the centers again. Even though the students knew the rules and the teacher modeled all of the activities, the centers were very limited to the use of computers, puzzles, SSR, geoboards, and items that can be used alone or with one more person.

The third part of the intervention was to develop and implement strategies to foster and reinforce readiness skills. Components of this part were reading and discussing books with the students and modeling the correct way of reading using left to right and top to bottom progression. Children made their own books that were letter, patterned, rhyming, and counting. The reading program and activities were started on the first day of class. There was no wait time. The students fell into the routine and guided the new students as they came along.

An activity called counting words was never done because it was too advanced for beginning kindergarten students. The teacher says a sentence two times while the students put counters in a cup for every word they hear.

Since the students were very low in language, a deviation from the plan was to take more field trips. These were designed to help students create background knowledge and language experiences to help them in the content areas. A KWL was used in every instance for assessment. This determined what the students knew and what they wanted to learn about on the trip, and what they actually learned about and experienced in their environment outside of school. The field trips taken were as follows: Pappa John's, Fire and Police Stations, Lincoln Park Zoo, and Green Meadows. Some of the students were not allowed to go because some parents felt their child would be in danger if they took a trip on the school bus away from the school. These students usually stayed home or in their regular classroom on the day of the trip.

Another positive deviation from the plan was Title I services for all of the kindergarten students in the morning. The Title I teacher decided to take a group of LEP students each quarter and work with them for 30 minutes on Tuesday and Thursday mornings of each week. She determined who would receive services for the year by taking the class list and dividing it into four groups alphabetically. She took the first group during the first quarter, the second group the second quarter, and so on. She first tried to work with the groups in the classroom and this proved to be too distracting. She then decided to take the groups to her classroom. The bilingual paraprofessional went with her the first two times to translate.

Some factors that affected the action plan was the gym and music schedules, assemblies, days off from school, field trips, and regular classroom holiday and birthday parties. The gym time was scheduled in the morning instead of the afternoon and two or three days of the week were affected. A number of assessment methods were used to measure the effects of the emergent literacy intervention plan.

## Presentation and Analysis of the Results

In order to determine the effectiveness of the intervention, the researcher used the same battery of language and literacy tests, anecdotal records, and a skills checklist for report card testing. Results reflect the growth of 23 students. Data from these measures will be described in the following sections.

### Battery of Language and Literacy Tests

The same tests that were given to the students at the beginning of the school year were given to the students, after winter break, to determine if there was improvement in any of the reading readiness areas. Results of the battery of posttests are found in Appendix B. Most of the Potentially English Proficient students gained in all five areas of assessment. Although some students scored moderately and considerably below age level in the posttests, there was an improvement in these areas. The scores do not reflect this improvement because they are age leveled and norm-referenced. Improvement is still recognized in the raw scores. Tables 3-7 compare the results of the pretests with the posttests.

Table 3

Pre and Post Scores for Visual Discrimination Assessment in Percentages

| Age Level | Pretest | Posttest |
|---|---|---|
| Considerably above | 0 | 9 |
| Moderately above | 0 | 4 |
| Expected | 12 | 44 |
| Moderately below | 42 | 26 |
| Considerably below | 46 | 17 |

A significant number of students gained in the area of visual discrimination. Over 40% scored at expected age level.

Table 4

Pre and Post Scores for Visual Memory Assessment in Percentages

| Age Level | Pretest | Posttest |
|---|---|---|
| Considerably above | 0 | 26 |
| Moderately above | 4 | 26 |
| Expected | 50 | 48 |
| Moderately below | 33 | 0 |
| Considerably below | 12 | 0 |

As shown in Table 4, the students improved in all areas of visual memory in the posttests. Close to 50% scored at expected age level. None were categorized as being moderately or considerably below age level in visual memory skills.

Table 5

Pre and Post Scores for Auditory Assessment in Percentages

| Age Level | Pretest | Posttest |
|---|---|---|
| Considerably above | 0 | 9 |
| Moderately above | 0 | 4 |
| Expected | 4 | 56 |
| Moderately below | 25 | 31 |
| Considerably below | 71 | 0 |

Seventy-one percent of the students scored considerably below age level in the area of auditory skills in the pretests. Results of the posttests showed that none scored considerably below age level. Over 50% of the students scored at expected age level.

Table 6

Pre and Post Scores for Receptive Language Assessment

| Age Level | Pretest | Posttest |
|---|---|---|
| Considerably Above | 0 | 26 |
| Moderately above | 0 | 0 |
| Expected | 0 | 4 |
| Moderately below | 25 | 44 |
| Considerably below | 75 | 26 |

In the area of receptive language, the pretests showed that all the students were either moderately or considerably below age level. In the posttests, the students showed an improvement in all levels of this area.

Table 7

Pre and Post Scores for Expressive Language Assessment in Percentages

| Age Level | Pretest | Posttest |
|---|---|---|
| Considerably above | 0 | 9 |
| Moderately above | 0 | 9 |
| Expected | 8 | 78 |
| Moderately below | 38 | 4 |
| Considerably below | 54 | 0 |

All of the students gained in the area of expressive language in the posttests. Close to 80% of the students scored at expected age level. None scored considerably below age level in this area. In the following section, assessment in the form of anecdotal records will be discussed.

Anecdotal Records

The researcher used anecdotal records as another indicator of ongoing understanding of the expressed knowledge of the students in phonemic awareness, letter (sound) identification, story sequencing, and other emergent literacy habits. Oral feedback was part of this and was encouraged on a daily basis. Students were encouraged to talk about what they were thinking and what they learned after each lesson. Also, the students were asked individually to explain the main idea or content after completing an assignment.

In September, very few students were able to sit and listen to a story. Sustained silent reading (SSR) was limited to a crate filled with books. A majority of the students

had to be shown correct way to hold a book and how to turn the pages. Only two of them had been read to at home. After weeks of modeling reading behaviors while reading aloud to students, the researcher noted signs of emergent literacy skills exhibited. In October, the researcher noted the level of interest in books had increased. Students were more attentive and active listeners. At least half were able to distinguish between the pictures and the print. In November, students started to ask about print in the classroom. A majority of them wanted to know what everything said. At least 75% were interested in the titles and authors of books and poems read aloud in the classroom. They also started to ask about titles and words in books they chose for SSR. In December, the researcher noted students exhibiting many emergent literacy skills such as following print, telling a story while looking at pictures of a book, and discussing and recommending books to peers from the classroom library. Some students went as far as to ask which language the book was written in. One girl in particular would not look at a book if it was not written in Spanish. The following section will discuss the results of periodical testing for report cards.

Periodical Testing for Report Cards

Two to three weeks before the each quarter was over, the researcher started to test each student individually from a checklist to document on the district report cards. Part of the testing included upper, lower case, and sound identification of each letter and numerous other pre-literacy skills. Results showed that there was a gradual increase in the number of letters and sounds recognized. Upper case letters are the easiest for the students to recognize and write, while associating a sound with a letter is harder. One item that is important to note is that there are 29 upper case letters and 30 lower case

letters in the Spanish alphabet for the students to remember whereas there are 26 letters of the English alphabet. One powerful predictor of early reading success is familiarity with alphabet letters. "Until children can quickly recognize letters, they cannot begin to appreciate that all words are made of sequences and patterns of letters" (California Department of Education, 1996, p. 5). Tables 8-10 show the results of letter and sound identification from 23 students for three quarters of the school year.

Table 8

Capital Letter Identification by Students in Percentages

| Number of letters | First quarter | Second quarter | Third quarter |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-25% | 87 | 13 | 4 |
| 26%-50% | 9 | 9 | 4 |
| 51%-75% | 4 | 22 | 9 |
| 76%-100% | 0 | 56 | 83 |

Over 80% of the students could identify 76% to 100% of the upper case letters by the end of the third quarter. Few students were still struggling in this area.

Table 9

Lower Case Letter Identification by Students in Percentages

| Number of letters | First quarter | Second quarter | Third quarter |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-25% | 74 | 9 | 13 |
| 26%-50% | 9 | 17 | 0 |
| 51%-75% | 17 | 26 | 43 |
| 76%-100% | 0 | 9 | 13 |

By the third quarter, over 40% of the students knew between 51%-75% of the lower case letters. Over 10% knew between 76%-100% of the letters. Identifying lower case letters is a little harder for students because many students confuse b, d, p, and q.

Table 10

Sound Identification by Students in Percentages

| Number of sounds | First quarter | Second quarter | Third quarter |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-25% | 100 | 26 | 4 |
| 26%-50% | 0 | 9 | 13 |
| 51%-75% | 0 | 43 | 26 |
| 76%-100% | 0 | 22 | 56 |

At the end of third quarter, close to 60% of the students knew between 76% and 100% of the sounds of the letters. Only 4% were still struggling with letter and sound association. In the following section, conclusions and recommendations for the intervention will be discussed.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the researcher felt the program was a success. Most students showed a growth of one, two, or more years in the area of visual discrimination and memory, receptive and expressive language, and auditory skills. Due to the daily mnemonics activities, students scored higher with the letter and sound associations and identifications than when these activities were not actively implemented. One drawback to the daily mnemonics was the repetition of the activities for the students. The researcher had to

think of variations of the content to keep motivation. Some students were not auditory learners.

Students that were in the morning group scored higher than the students in the afternoon group. Several factors affected the scores. There were less students in the morning group. Having less students allowed for more student and teacher interaction time on an individual basis. The Title I teacher worked with the bilingual teacher and paraprofessional in the mornings and not in the afternoons. The researcher felt that this was significant because all of the students that the Title I teacher took from the transitional bilingual classroom were all Limited English Proficient. There was much more of an understanding and comfort level between potentially English speaking peers than when the afternoon group went with their monolingual English speaking peers. Another factor was the students that were in the afternoon group had an intensive academic morning where all of the reading, writing, and language arts activities were in English. It made for a long day for the LEP students when they were expected to do the same in the afternoon, but in their native language, when they knew their English counterparts were doing things in which they felt they were missing out. A better approach would be for the transitional bilingual education teacher to have the students all day if there is an all day kindergarten program provided by the district. The students would not be so tired at the end of the day. When one learns a new language, a different part of the brain is developing the second language.

More research needs to be done in the area of fostering and eliciting receptive language skills in the Potentially English Proficient students. Although the students showed growth in this area, it was not as substantial as the other areas. Another area that

needs to be researched further is the active participation of parents at the research site. Although a comprehensive program was developed and parents expressed the desire to learn how to work with their children, there was no motivation on their part to come to the parent literacy nights. A high volume of parents showed up for parent and teacher conferences, but not many at their scheduled time or day. Better ways to reach parents should be planned school wide. Some examples are parent classes offered at different times to accommodate different schedules and parent rooms that provide child care, refreshments, and educational materials of interest.

Another conclusion is that a program such as the one the researcher planned and implemented would take several years to put into place and have it working smoothly. There were many facets to the program. One has to be organized and prepare many materials to execute the parent literacy nights, developmental and exploratory play, centers, and field trips. Trying to do all of the daily activities along with the centers and formal academic instruction proved to be too much for the teacher and students to do on a daily basis. The researcher believes the same outcome would have resulted if some of the activities were done every other day or two to three times a week to allow for more center and exploratory play time. This is when the researcher observed the most interaction with spontaneous language development and cooperation with peers.

In summation, the lack of emergent literacy (or readiness) skills in entering kindergartners has been documented on a national level. The goal of this research project was to foster and elicit emergent literacy skills in Potentially English Proficient students. The five skills in which the students were tested and instructed in were visual discrimination and memory, auditory, and receptive and expressive language. Visual

discrimination is developed and needs to be practiced by the students on a daily basis in school and at home. This skill is important to be able to differentiate between letters and write them correctly. Visual memory is especially important for LEP students to develop in their native language because it would be twice as difficult to learn a second language if it is not properly developed. Good auditory skills are important to second language learners because they are interactive skills that are required when communicating with others effectively. Receptive and expressive language skills are also important for communication. Vocabulary and background experiences are needed to develop these abilities. It is important for LEP students to be strong in these areas in their native language in order to transition into English.

Creating a balanced literacy approach in the classroom is important at the kindergarten level (Burns, 1999). Specifically taught letter and sound associations and identification in the form of mnemonics, creating a literacy environment, centers, and language experience field trips were implemented to achieve this goal. This study was conducted to help teachers and parents become aware of factors that foster and also impede the literacy growth in children. The activities can be modified for any classroom of preschool to first grade students. The researcher plans to keep on using this program in the transitional bilingual kindergarten program. Modifications and continual fine tuning are planned as the program is implemented.

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# APPENDIX A

## RESULTS OF BATTERY OF PRETESTS IN PERCENTAGES

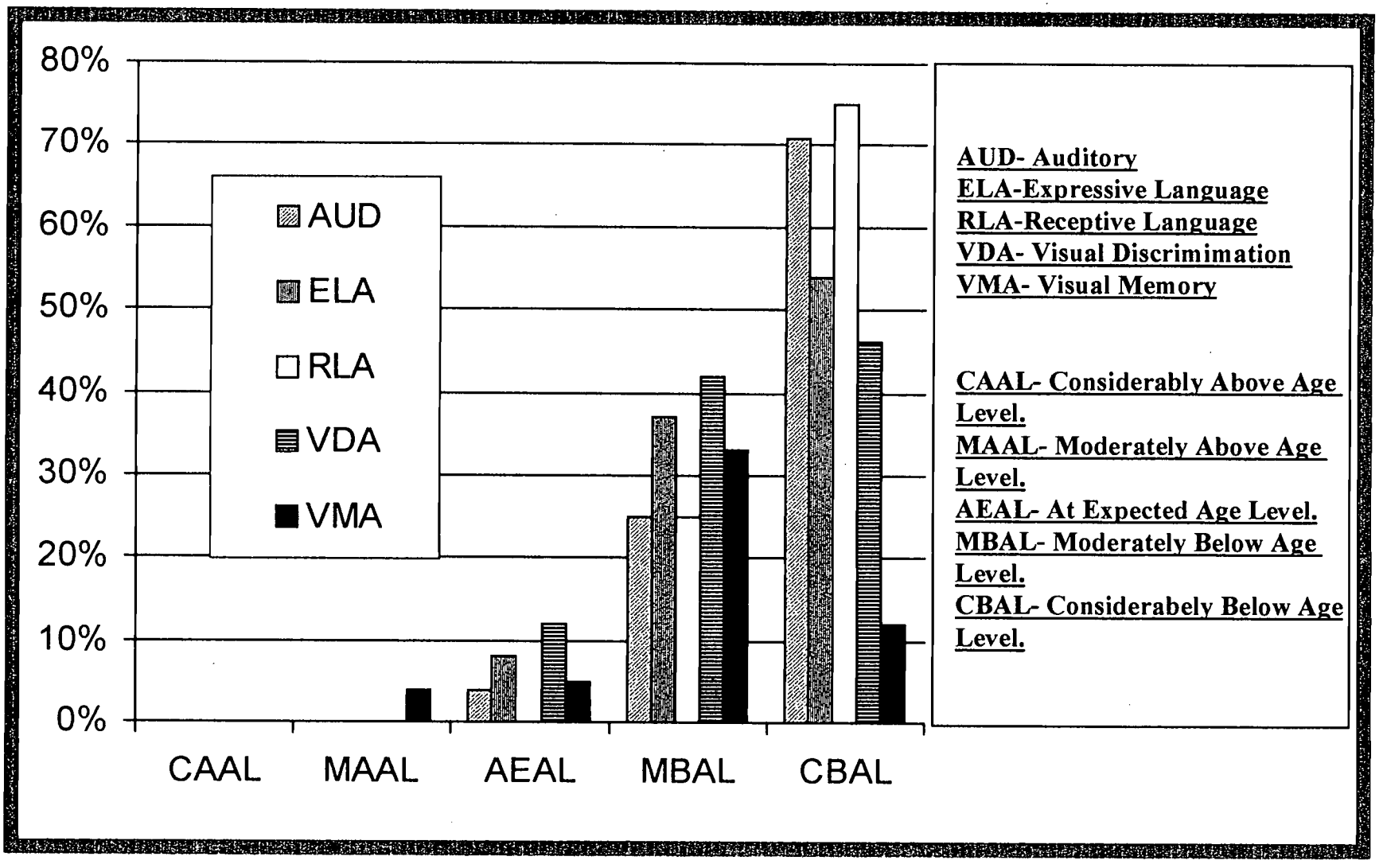


Figure A-1. Results of Battery of Pretests in Percentages

# APPENDIX B

## RESULTS OF BATTERY OF POSTTESTS IN PERCENTAGES

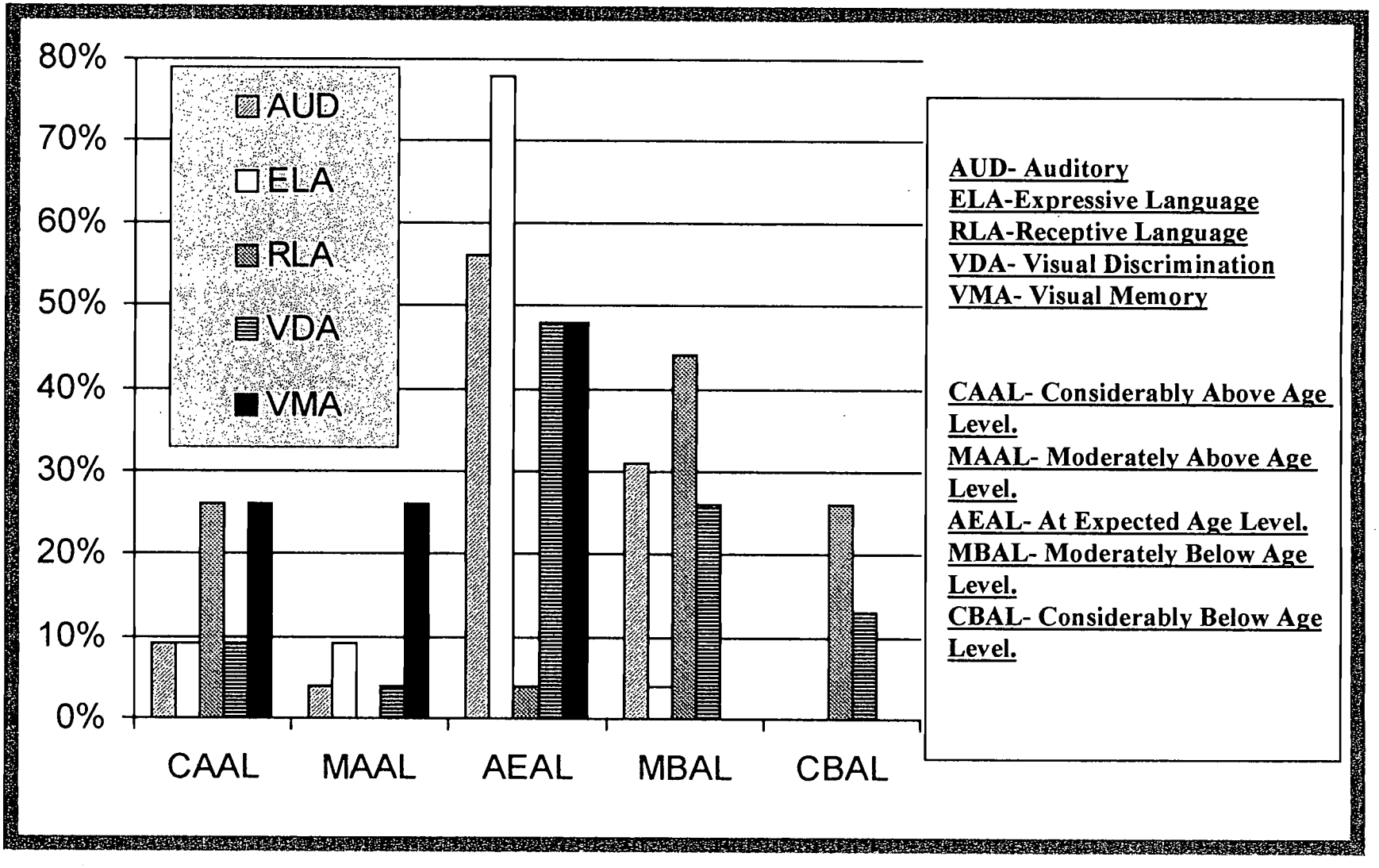


Figure B-1. Results of Battery of Posttests in Percentages

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