

# **Effective Reading Programs for Spanish Dominant English Language Learners (ELLs) in the Elementary Grades: A Synthesis of Research**

## **Educator's Summary April 2012**

This review synthesizes research on English reading outcomes of all types of programs for Spanish-dominant ELLs in elementary school. It is divided into two major sections: the effect of language of instruction on achievement (i.e., bilingual vs. English-only instruction) and effective reading approaches for ELLs other than the use of native language. Several proven and promising approaches are identified.

### **The effect of language of instruction on achievement**

To evaluate the effect of language of instruction, researchers reviewed studies of bilingual education that had been completed between 1970 and 2011. The studies had to meet a set of rigorous research standards to be considered for the final analysis. For example, studies had to use randomized or matched control groups, have a duration of at least one school year, and use quantitative measures of English reading performance, such as standardized tests. A total of 14 studies, involving approximately 2,000 elementary school children, met these criteria and are included in the report.

Overall, findings from the studies indicated a positive but modest effect in favor of bilingual education. However, the largest and longest-term evaluations, including the only multi-year randomized evaluation of transitional bilingual education, did not find any differences in outcomes by the end of elementary school between children who were taught in Spanish and transitioned to English and children who were taught only in English. This leads the researchers to suggest that quality of instruction is more important than language of instruction.

### **Effective reading approaches for ELLs other than the use of native language**

For their analysis of reading approaches for ELLs other than bilingual education, the researchers reviewed studies that met similar standards to those required for the language of instruction analysis. They looked at whole-school and whole-class interventions and small-group and one-to-one supplemental interventions. Positive effects were found for programs that used phonetic small-group or one-to-one tutoring, cooperative learning, extensive professional development, and coaching.

## Program Ratings

### *Program Ratings Basis*

Programs are rated according to the overall strength of the evidence supporting their effects on reading achievement. Effect size (ES) is the proportion of a standard deviation by which a treatment group exceeds a control group. The ratings categories are as follows:

 **Strong Evidence of Effectiveness:** At least one large randomized or randomized quasi-experimental study and one additional large qualifying study, or multiple smaller studies, with a combined sample size of 500 and an overall weighted mean effect size of at least +0.20.

 **Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness:** Two large matched studies, or multiple smaller studies, with a collective sample size of 500 students, with a weighted mean effect size of at least +0.20.

 **Limited Evidence of Effectiveness:** At least one qualifying study with median ES=+0.10 or more.

**No Impact:** Studies show no significant differences.

### *Ratings*

The programs and approaches included in this review are rated as follows:

#### **Strong Evidence of Effectiveness**

 None

#### **Moderate Evidence of Effectiveness**

Rating	Program	Description	Website
	Success for All (English-Language Development (ELD) Adaptation of Success for All; Success for All with Embedded Video; Bilingual Transition with Success for All)	Success for All is a comprehensive reform model that provides schools with well-structured curriculum materials emphasizing systematic phonics in grades K-1, and cooperative learning, direct instruction in comprehension skills, and other elements in grades 2-6.	<a href="http://www.successforall.org">www.successforall.org</a>

## Limited Evidence of Effectiveness

Rating	Program	Description	Website
	Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (BCIRC) Disseminated as Reading Wings by the Success for All Foundation	BCIRC was an adaptation of Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, an upper-elementary reading program based on principles of cooperative learning that had been successfully evaluated in several studies.	<a href="http://www.successforall.org">www.successforall.org</a>
	Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)	Key components of PALS include partner reading with story retell, paragraph shrinking, prediction relay, and terms and points.	<a href="http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals">kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals</a>
	Direct Instruction (DI)	A reading program that starts in kindergarten with very specific instructions to teachers on how to teach beginning reading skills. It uses reading materials with a phonetically controlled vocabulary, rapidly-paced instruction, regular assessment, and systematic approaches to language development.	<a href="http://www.nifdi.org">www.nifdi.org</a>
	Instruction with Key Vocabulary	This intervention involved introducing 12 vocabulary words each week using a variety of strategies, such as charades, 20 questions, discussions of Spanish cognates, word webs, and word association games.	N/A
	Improving Comprehension Online (ICON)	An internet-delivered vocabulary and comprehension intervention that targets both English-speaking and Spanish-dominant students.	<a href="http://www.cast.org/research/projects/icon.html">www.cast.org/research/projects/icon.html</a>
	Academic Language Instruction for All Students (ALIAS)	A text-based academic language program designed to build knowledge of words incrementally over time by providing multiple exposures to the words in different forms and in different meaningful context.	<a href="http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=lesaux&amp;tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup23861">isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=lesaux&amp;tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup23861</a>

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Website</b>
	Enhanced Language Arts Transition Program	An enhanced version of a language arts program for grades 2-5 with 12 key instructional components in three key areas: studying literature, skill building, and other supporting components.	N/A
	English Language and Literacy Acquisition (ELLA)	An intervention comprised of three tiers: Tier I is the regular language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies instruction; Tier II is the English intervention; and Tier III is intensive English tutorials delivered in small groups by highly qualified paraprofessionals for low-performing students.	ldn.tamu.edu/project_ella
	Language and Literacy Curriculum	An intervention focused on developing students' literacy skills as well as their oral language proficiency skills, including listening comprehension and vocabulary and providing more practice reading connected text.	N/A
	Small Group Tutorials with Direct Instruction	A small group supplemental tutorial program that used two forms of DI, Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading, for Hispanic and non-Hispanic children who were struggling in reading.	N/A
	An Explicit, Systematic Supplemental Reading Intervention	A supplemental program in which trained bilingual teachers provided systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics applied to word and text reading in English.	N/A
	Literacy Express Preschool Curriculum	A comprehensive preschool program designed to improve young children's oral language, emergent literacy skills, and socio-emotional development. It provides intensive small-group instruction to ELLs.	N/A

Rating	Program	Description	Website
	Read Naturally	A supplementary reading program aimed at improving reading fluency using a combination of books, audiotapes, and computer software for elementary and middle school students.	www.readnaturally.com
	Read Well	Combines systematic, explicit phonics instruction with practice in decodable text and contextualized vocabulary and comprehension instruction.	www.voyagerlearning.com/readwell
	Phonics-based supplemental reading intervention	Scripted lessons are provided to a tutor. Each lesson focuses on several key components including letter-sound correspondences, phoneme decoding, irregular words, spelling, and oral reading practice.	N/A

### No Impact

None

### Conclusion

Language of instruction remains an important question, if for no other reason than building on students' home language gives them skills in that language that are important in their lives. However, when English reading is the goal, different approaches may work equally well (bilingual as well as structured English immersion), and we have identified several approaches with evidence of effectiveness from rigorous evaluations. Educators and policy makers should consider all possibilities to enhance outcomes for their Spanish-dominant ELL children.

### Full Report

Cheung, A. & Slavin, R.E. (2012). *Effective Reading Programs for Spanish Dominant English Language Learners (ELLs) in the Elementary Grades: A Synthesis of Research*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Research and Reform in Education.

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