

**EFFECTIVENESS  
REPORT**

# Building Language for Literacy

Pre-Kindergarten Study

Los Angeles Unified School District

2001–2002



# An Evaluation of Pre-K Reading Programs

**INDEPENDENT STUDY  
FINDS SCHOLASTIC'S  
BUILDING LANGUAGE FOR LITERACY (BLL)  
PROGRAM SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASES  
VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AND  
LETTER AND WORD IDENTIFICATION SKILLS  
FOR BOTH ENGLISH-AND  
SPANISH-SPEAKING CHILDREN.**

# THE RESEARCH

## **PRESCHOOL NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

Until recently, early childhood policies have not included clear educational standards and recommendations regarding preschool curriculum. However, the *No Child Left Behind* federal legislation, and new policies that define appropriate learning outcomes for children in preschool settings are now preparing educators and families for important changes in what is taught to young children. Most importantly, these curriculum changes may profoundly impact the achievement outcomes for children who have been left behind academically.

There are several sociopolitical issues in early childhood education that policy makers and education experts are now beginning to address and resolve. Historically, there has been a general lack of clarity and agreement regarding the developmental goals or learning outcomes for early childhood education (Carta, Schwartz, Atwater, & McConnell, 1991). Empirical support and general acceptance of the key developmental outcomes that prepare young children to meet the academic and behavioral standards of early elementary school are now being recognized as essential. Similarly, there has been associated ambiguity about curriculum in early childhood education, and thus ambiguity about the standards against which preschool children should be evaluated (Carta, Schwartz, Atwater, & McConnell, 1991).

## **EARLY READING FIRST LEGISLATION:**

The *Early Reading First* legislation is one of the first federal initiatives to emphasize the critical importance of literacy skills in early childhood education. Furthermore, *Early Reading First* shares the position taken in the *No Child Left Behind/ Reading First* legislation that scientific reading research should provide the basis for informed decisions about teaching early literacy skills to young children.

## THE RESEARCH *continued*

*The overall purpose of the Early Reading First program is to prepare preschool children to enter kindergarten with the language, cognitive, and early reading skills necessary for reading success. . .*

The overall purpose of the *Early Reading First* program is to prepare preschool children to enter kindergarten with the language, cognitive, and early reading skills necessary for reading success, thereby preventing later reading difficulties. The specific purposes of the *Early Reading First* program are as follows (U.S. Department of Education, 2002):

- To support local and state efforts to enhance the early language, literacy, and early reading development of preschool age children, particularly those from low-income families, through strategies and professional development that are based on scientifically based reading research.
- To provide preschool-age children with learning opportunities in high-quality language and literature-rich environments, so they will attain the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for optimal reading development in kindergarten and beyond.
- To demonstrate language and literacy activities based on reading research that supports the age-appropriate development of:
  - Oral language (vocabulary development, expressive language, and listening comprehension)
  - Phonological awareness (rhyming, blending, and segmenting)
  - Print awareness
  - Alphabet knowledge (letter recognition)

# THE STUDY

## **EARLY LITERACY INDIVIDUAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS:**

Recently, researchers at the Early Childhood Research Institute on Measuring Growth and Development have been evaluating best practices in measuring the growth and development of preschool children. A small set of Preschool Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs) specifically designed to assess preschool children's progress in early literacy development have been agreed upon. Although it is expected that a broader set of measures will emerge in the coming years, for now, three learning outcomes have been developed and evaluated that assess phonemic awareness. They include alliteration and rhyming, both adapted from the pivotal research by Lonigan and colleagues (Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony, & Barker, 1998), as well as phoneme blending.

It is with knowledge and appreciation of the current educational climate described above, that the following research was designed and implemented to evaluate two preschool early literacy programs. For the purposes of this executive summary, the research conducted by the Program Evaluation and Research Branch of the Los Angeles Unified School District has been summarized to highlight the quantitative results. Results with an effect size equal to or greater than .2 are presented in this summary. The full 52-page research report can be found at <http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/perb/reports.html>

## **STUDY BACKGROUND:**

In keeping with the national and statewide move toward direct instruction in early reading skills for young children, the Early Childhood Education Division (ECED) of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) conducted a 2001–2002 pilot implementation of two pre-reading programs: Building Language for Literacy (BLL) and the Letter People (LP). Key Researchers included: Dr. Katherine Hayes, Dr. Ebrahim Maddahian, and Ms. Alicia Fernandez of LAUSD's Program Evaluation and Research Branch.

# THE STUDY

The Evaluators compared and contrasted three groups of Pre-K students:

- Those receiving Building Language for Literacy (BLL) instruction
- Those receiving Letter People (LP) instruction
- Those receiving no specific early literacy program

The following research questions were posed by the evaluation:

- What is the nature of Pre-K literacy instruction in classrooms administered by the ECED?
- What is the difference in implementation between the two pilot reading programs (Building Language for Literacy and the Letter People)?
- What are the effects of the two Pre-K reading programs on student achievement outcomes?

*Classroom quality and program implementation were closely investigated in this research.*

## **STUDY DESIGN:**

The study employed a quasi-experimental design with random selection at the classroom level. Data were obtained through classroom observations, and a pretest and posttest administration of student achievement data to measure growth over time. Data collection consisted of pre- and post-testing 348 children and the observation of program practices in 31 classrooms within 19 child-care centers.

## **SAMPLE:**

The sample selection was stratified by geographic location, size, and school population characteristics. Classrooms for the three early literacy program groups were randomly selected for the study, such that ten classrooms within each program (BLL, LP, and comparison) were investigated and ten children were randomly selected from each chosen classroom for the study sample. There were no significant differences between the three groups of teachers with respect to number of children enrolled, teacher age, years teaching, years teaching preschool, or number of courses taken in teaching reading and

language. While the three groups of children were similar with respect to gender, there were significant differences between the groups in age, ethnicity, and language. Children in the LP group were slightly older on average at pretest than their BLL and comparison peers. Only the BLL group had a sizeable representation of Asian children. However, the percentages of Latino children were approximately the same across the three groups. With respect to language, the BLL classrooms were comprised of 39% native English-speaking children, while the LP and comparison classrooms had 23% and 26% native English-speaking children, respectively.

#### **MEASURES: CLASSROOM QUALITY AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Classroom quality and program implementation were closely investigated in this research. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) was used to assess Pre-K program quality, including: personal-care routines of children, furnishing and display for children, language and reasoning experiences, fine and gross motor activities, creative activities, and social development. To assess the prereading program implementation, a Classroom Observational Instrument was developed for this study. The instrument measured the following areas of preliteracy instruction: Oral Language, Listening/Phonological Awareness, Alphabetic Knowledge, and Story Knowledge.

#### **MEASURES: ACHIEVEMENT TESTS**

Four standardized assessment tools were used to measure the achievement outcomes of preschoolers in this study. All of the tests were administered individually and were designed for use with young children. They included the following:

- The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-Third Edition) and its Spanish equivalent (TVIP) to assess vocabulary acquisition and language development
- The Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (WJIII)—The Letter and Word Identification Subtest to assess letter and word identification skills

## THE RESULTS *continued*

- The McGraw-Hill Developing Skills Checklist (DSC) to assess general skills and achievement including: concepts of print, letter recognition, language skills, and letter-sound knowledge

*Spanish-speaking children receiving BLL instruction significantly outperformed Spanish speakers in the LP and comparison groups of children on the WJIII.*

### **RESULTS: CLASSROOM QUALITY AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Children in the BLL and LP classrooms were more often observed learning about the letters of the alphabet and also “writing” than their comparison group counterparts. Significantly more vocabulary development occurred in the BLL and comparison classrooms than in the LP classrooms. However, more grammar development and initial sound emphasis occurred in the LP classrooms. **In addition, BLL teachers focused on rhyming activities to a much greater degree than did their LP and comparison group counterparts—a preliteracy skill that is strongly correlated to increased WJIII outcomes.**

### **RESULTS: DISAGGREGATING BY LANGUAGE**

An examination of the relationship between implementation and significant achievement outcomes revealed a strong positive correlation between WJIII gains and rhyming activities ( $r=.44$ ). Rhyming games and activities expose children to the sounds of language and are particularly effective for English-language learners. **The Spanish-speaking children in the BLL group, where 80% of teachers engaged children in rhyming activities, significantly outperformed Spanish speakers in the LP and comparison classrooms on the WJIII.**



## Results: Achievement

After the Pre-K reading intervention, children in the BLL group made significant adjusted gains on all assessment measures (See Table 1). In keeping with the What Works ClearingHouse (WWC) standards, this research reported accurately derived Effect Sizes (ES) to determine educationally significant outcomes. The Effect Size conveys the magnitude of the difference between the scores of BLL, LP, and comparison groups on achievement measures. The results of this research reveal that children receiving BLL significantly outperformed their LP peers on the PPVT (ES=.27). Children in the BLL group also significantly outperformed the comparison group children on the PPVT (ES=.30). In addition, children receiving the BLL program significantly outperformed children in the Letter People group on the WJIII (ES=.35). The BLL group also significantly outperformed comparison group children on the WJIII (ES=.29). Spanish-speaking children receiving BLL instruction significantly outperformed Spanish speakers in the LP and comparison groups of children on the WJIII. However, it should be noted that children in the LP group significantly outperformed their BLL peers on one of the four Developing Skills Checklist subtests, the Language subtest (ES=.28). (See Graphs 1–3)

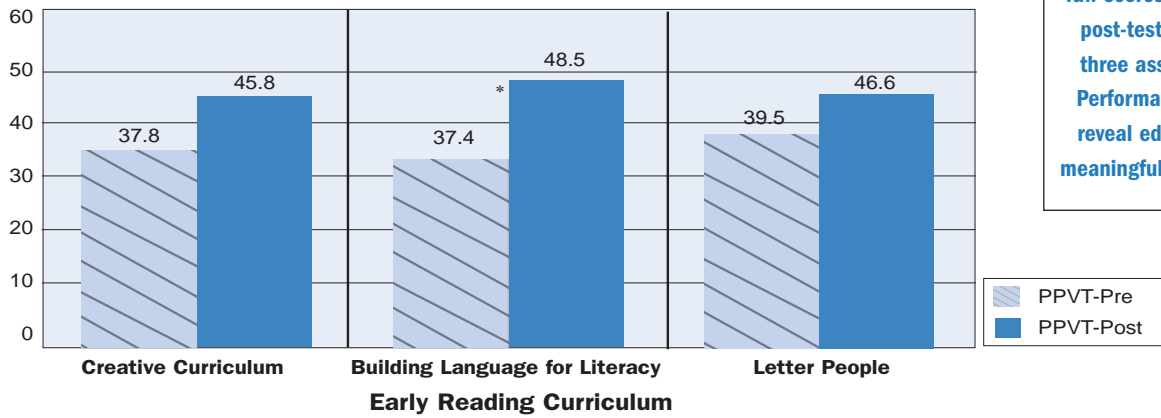
**TABLE 1:** Adjusted Gains by Prereading Program

ASSESSMENT	GROUPS COMPARED	EFFECT SIZE*
<b>PPVT-III</b>	• BLL Significantly higher than LP group	0.27
	• BLL Significantly higher than the comparison group	0.30
<b>WJII—LETTER WORD IDENTIFICATION</b>	• BLL Significantly higher than LP group	0.35
	• BLL Significantly higher than the comparison group	0.29
<b>DSC—LANGUAGE</b>	• LP Significantly higher than BLL group	0.28

BLL—Building Language for Literacy  
 LP—Letter People  
 Comparison—Creative Curriculum

\*Effect Sizes greater than .20 standard deviations are cited as educationally significant.

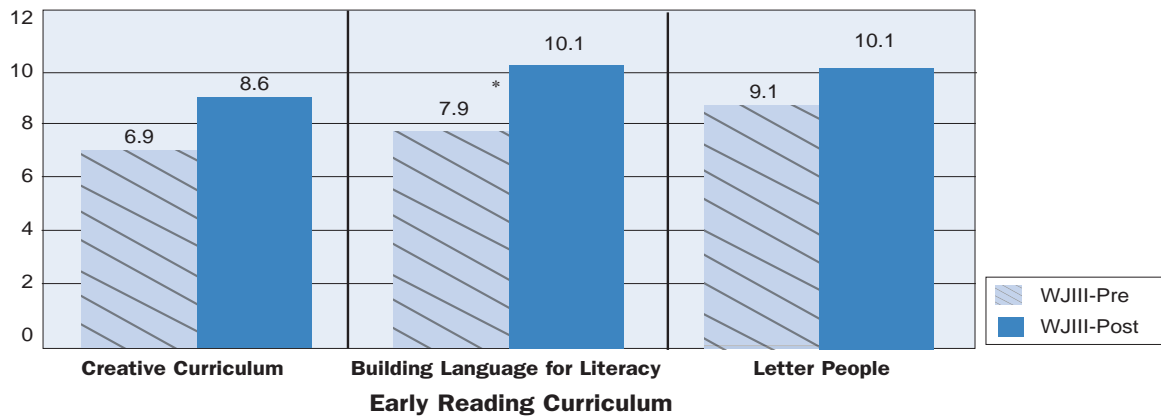
**GRAPH 1:** Students in the BLL group made significantly greater gains than students in either the LP or Comparison group on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT).



\*BLL higher than LP (ES=.27); BLL higher than comparison group (ES=.30)

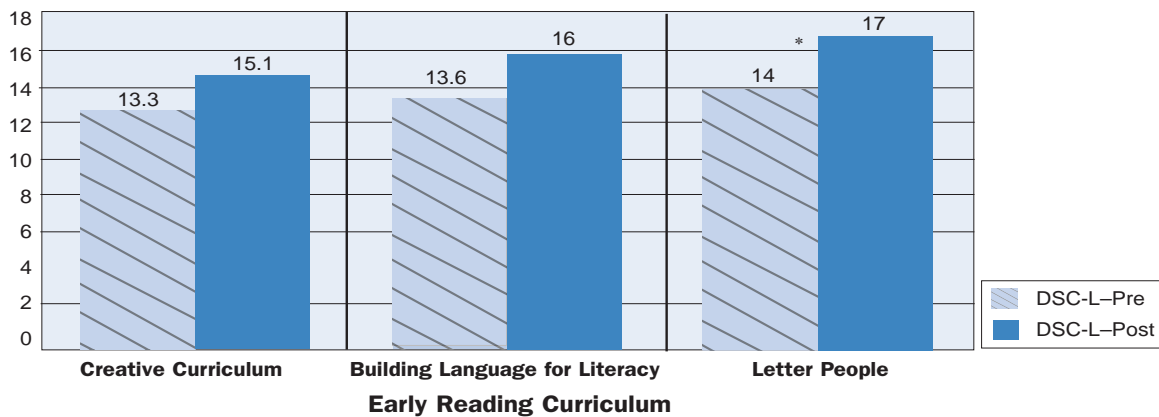
The graphs display the raw scores at pre- and post-testing for the three assessments. Performance results reveal educationally meaningful differences.

**GRAPH 2:** Students in the BLL group made significantly greater gains than students in either the LP or Comparison group on the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (WJIII Letter-Word identification subtest).



\*BLL higher than LP (ES=.35); BLL higher than comparison group (ES=.29)

**GRAPH 3:** Students in the LP group made significantly greater gains than students in the BLL group on the Developing Skills Checklist-Language subtest (DSC-L).



\*LP higher than BLL (ES=.28)

## THE SUMMARY

### SUMMARY:

These findings indicate that Building Language for Literacy was successful in helping children who received the curriculum’s direct instruction in preliteracy outperform children who received little or no early literacy instruction. Results reveal that students in the BLL group significantly outperformed children in the Letter People and Comparison groups on vocabulary acquisition and language development, as measured by the PPVT-III, as well as letter and word identification skills, as evaluated by the WJIII. Findings further reveal that children in the LP group outperformed children in the BLL group on one subtest of the DSC—the Language subtest. Observational records of classroom instruction imply that the activities embedded in Building Language for Literacy, particularly those pertaining to rhyming, helped children with either English or Spanish as their primary language learn to recognize letters by name.

*Results reveal that students in the BLL group significantly outperformed children in the Letter People and Comparison groups on vocabulary acquisition, as well as letter and word identification skills, as evaluated by the WJIII.*

### REFERENCES:

1. Carta, J.J., Schwartz, I.S., Atwater, J.B., & McConnell, S.R. (1991). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Appraising its Usefulness for Young Children with Disabilities*. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 11, 1–20.
2. *Early Reading First Program Draft Guidance*. (June, 2002). United States Department of Education.
3. Lonigan, C.J., Burgess, S.R., Anthony, J.L., & Barker, T.A. (1998). *Development of Phonological Sensitivity in 2 to 5-year-old... children*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 90, 294–311.



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1-800-SCHOLASTIC  
(1-800-724-6527)