

National Early Literacy Panel: An Overview

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The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) was convened in 2002 to conduct a synthesis of the scientific research on the development of early literacy skills in children ages zero to five. The National Institute for Literacy (Institute) funded the panel's work in consultation with the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Office of Head Start in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL), working closely with the Institute, coordinated NELP's work in the completion of the synthesis.

The panel's primary purpose was to synthesize research to contribute to decisions in educational policy and practice that affect early literacy development and to determine how teachers and families could support young children's language and literacy development. In addition, this evidence would be a key factor in the creation of literacy-specific materials for parents and teachers and staff development for early childhood educators and family-literacy practitioners.

Members of the NELP panel included experts in literacy and early childhood education:

- **Dr. Timothy Shanahan** (panel chair), Professor of Urban Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and Director of the UIC Center for Literacy.
- **Anne E. Cunningham**, Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education and Director of the Joint Doctoral Program in Special Education at the University of California, Berkeley.
- **Kathy Escamilla**, Professor in the School of Education at the University of Colorado and affiliated with the BUENO Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Colorado.
- **Janet E. Fischel**, Professor of Pediatrics and Psychology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and Director of Pediatric Medical Evaluation, Director of the Division of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Director of the Stony Brook Reading and Language Laboratory, and Associate Director of the Pediatric Residency Training Program.
- **Susan Landry**, Michael Matthew Knight Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, Chief of the Division of Developmental Pediatrics, and Director of the Children's Learning Institute (formerly, the Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education [CIRCLE]) in the Department of Pediatrics.
- **Christopher J. Lonigan**, Professor in the Department of Psychology at Florida State University and Associate Director of the Florida Center for Reading Research.
- **Victoria J. Molfese**, professor and Ashland/Nystrand Chair in Early Childhood Education, at the University of Louisville; and Director of the University's Early Childhood Research Center.
- **Chris Schatschneider**, Professor of Psychology at Florida State University and Associate Director of the Florida Center for Reading Research.
- **Dorothy S. Strickland**, Professor of Reading and Samuel DeWitt Proctor Professor of Education at Rutgers University.

Questions Addressed by the National Early Literacy Panel

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To identify interventions, parenting activities, and instructional practices that promote the development of children's early literacy skills, the NELP posed four questions:

1. What are the skills and abilities of young children (age birth through five years or kindergarten) that predict later reading, writing, or spelling outcomes?
2. Which programs, interventions, and other instructional approaches or procedures have contributed to or inhibited gains in children's skills and abilities that are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, or spelling?
3. What environments and settings have contributed to or inhibited gains in children's skills and abilities that are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, or spelling?
4. What child characteristics have contributed to or inhibited gains in children's skills and abilities that are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing, or spelling?

National Early Literacy Panel Methodology

NELP adopted a methodology that allowed for the identification and selection of published studies relevant to the panel's questions, a coding system that allowed for the combination and comparison of studies, and an appropriate method of statistical analysis. Electronic searches were conducted using PsycINFO and the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and these were supplemented with hand searches of major research journals, reference checks of past literature reviews, and nominations from leading experts in the field of early literacy.

These search procedures yielded more than 8,000 potential articles that were screened to determine their relevance to the research questions and their consistency with all selection criteria established by the panel. This led to the identification of approximately 500 research articles that were used in the meta-analyses conducted by the panel. The meta-analyses summarized both correlational data showing the relationships between children's early abilities and skills and later literacy development and experimental data that showed the impact of instructional interventions on children's learning.

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