Narrowing Down to Find Common Ground:
Shared Agreements for Effective Literacy Instruction in California

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In service to all California students, it's critical that there be a clear, aligned vision from literacy advocacy, policy, practitioner, and research communities. The California Department of Education has provided policies and resources in the area of comprehensive literacy, all grounded in California's current ELA/Literacy and English Language Development Standards, operationalized in the *English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten through Grade Twelve* (2015) and codified in the *California Comprehensive State Literacy Plan* (2021). Along with these policies and the literacy experts' general agreement on what constitutes evidence-based and comprehensive early literacy instruction, details and nuances are needed to promote clarity that can be felt at the ground level in schools, where it matters the most.

With funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation, Pivot Learning led a project that brought together leading literacy practitioners, researchers, advocates, and others from the reading, literacy, and advocacy communities to develop a shared vision for how to approach some of the most complex disagreements in California's literacy policies and implementation practices. Beginning in March 2022, organizations and individuals representing multiple perspectives within the broader California literacy community began identifying the most pressing issues for their communities and discussing whether and how common ground could be found.

This project created an opportunity for listening and learning from others immersed in different aspects of literacy policies and practices, focusing on different student populations. The hope was to forge an alignment among the various perspectives by: (1) finding areas of convergence; (2) establishing productive working relationships; and (3) discussing specific promising areas of consensus that could inform policies to accelerate reading proficiency growth for all California students, particularly those historically underserved. The ultimate aim of this collective work is that each student has adequate and equitable opportunities for success in school and beyond.

Recognizing that a functional literacy policy requires a degree of consensus among those most knowledgeable about policies and practices, Pivot Learning engaged with Drs. Eduardo R. Muñoz-Muñoz, Assistant Professor, San José State University, and Claude Goldenberg, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University. Together, they designed a process intended to identify and address areas of agreement and disagreement in the field while attempting to promote mutual understanding and, to the extent possible, consensus. This process is described in detail in Appendix A; an overview follows.

This document reflects the collective consensus among literacy experts who participated in the project and is intended to inform state-level policymakers on future policy and implementation decisions. It represents the collective thinking of the following individuals:

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Step 1. Interviews: Capturing Individual Detail and Perspective

The initial interviews aimed at eliciting the multiple layers and angles of some of the complex issues facing literacy education in California. It was essential to try and determine which topics had to be addressed for the project to have a meaningful impact on aspects of policy about which there were different perspectives. In essence, the general guiding questions could be summarized as follows:

"How would you characterize current literacy debates?"
"What are the main areas of disagreement among various perspectives?"

In practical terms, the interviews sought to identify the themes required for the project to be legitimate, representative, and constructive. Four focal areas were identified based on the interviews: (1) phonics and decoding; (2) early screening; (3) power and control; and (4) professional preparation and development of the knowledge/research base (see Appendix B).

Step 2. Focus Groups: Integrating Perspectives, Defining Engagement Setting

The participants were then invited to participate in one of three focus groups where they worked to clarify terms and identify missing items in the themes and generative questions that arose from the interviews. The generative questions served to prompt open-ended discussions from problems, encapsulating statements, and wonderings surfaced in individual interviews in Step 1. In each focus group, participants were asked for validation and any additional contributions to each of the focus groups. Second, the participants engaged in conversations to clarify the generative questions themselves. The focus groups led to the refinement of the baseline document, which was collectively reworked to identify five target topics (Appendix D). These five areas were synthesized into three for operational purposes, which became the grounding discussion themes for the convening in Step 3 (Appendix E).

Step 3. The Convening: Touching Ground

The convening took place in Irvine, California, in September 2022 with attendance from 14 expert participants, most of whom also participated in the focus groups and individual interviews that preceded the convening. The **stated purpose** was to identify promising areas of consensus to inform California's state-level literacy policies, focusing on three thematic areas identified in the interview and

focus group stages (Appendix E): **(1) literacy and multilingual learner (ML) and English learner (EL) students,**[1] **(2) early screening and assessment, and (3) foundational skills.**

These three areas do not define a comprehensive and evidenced-based literacy program. Rather, they are three important topics comprising complex issues, which emerged during the preceding interviews and focus groups.

During **the first day of the convening,** the focus was on building relationships and starting discussion. The first substantive conversation was about the **baseline agreements** stemming from the interviews (Appendix C). With the discussion as a prelude, the group dove into the **key themes and generative questions** (Appendix E) that were synthesized from the focus group discussions and selected the highest-impact matters to be discussed on day two. Participants agreed to the recommendation that the convening focus on three topics—**(1) literacy and multilingual learner (ML) and English learner (EL) students, (2) early screening and assessment, and (3) foundational skills**—for the purpose of clarification and understanding of multiple perspectives. Participants discussed each of the areas in three groups, tackling key generative themes and questions first and then articulating areas of agreement and disagreement. In the next section, we report a synthesis of the discussions in each of the three areas, featuring the points of agreement and the key points, terms, and details upon which further discussion was needed. With additional time, some of these remaining issues may in fact lead to further agreements. Where possible, we include a quote from a participant, highlighting the main agreement or issue.

Narrowing Down: ML and EL Students

Agreements

1. To the extent feasible, ML and EL students should be in programs that utilize and build competence across at least two languages (English and the home language), honoring, cultivating, and sustaining language competencies in at least two languages.

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[1] As defined in California Department of Education's (CDE) "Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students," the term "multilingual learner (ML)" refers to "students who have developed or are developing proficiency in both English and one or more other languages, which may be their home language. Students may be mostly dominant in one language or proficient in both" (CDE, 2020, p. 32). CDE also uses the term "English learner (EL)" to refer to students who are formally (by federal civil rights law) identified as having a home language other than English and levels of English language proficiency that indicate they need programs and services that will support them in becoming English proficient. They are a federally protected class of students with the right to specialized services to become fully proficient in English and achieve grade-level standards. We use "ML and EL students" to signal both subgroups of students.

"[There should be] an asset-based approach … which is implicit about using and viewing home languages as assets and resources."

2. Literacy instruction should be guided by relevant research on ML and EL students, vary by learner profile as needed, and be differentiated for learners with diverse strengths and needs, including different language proficiency levels.

3. For ML and EL students, English oral language should be developed simultaneously with literacy. In addition, all EL students should be provided integrated and designated English language development aligned with the CA ELA/ELD standards. (See the Foundational Skills section for a related agreement about this issue.)

4. Monolingual English-speaking students should have the opportunity to be in multilingual programs to build competence in English and another language.

Remaining Issues

Complexity is a challenge; details matter. There was clear agreement that English oral language must be developed simultaneously with literacy, but there was insufficient time to delve into the relationship between language and literacy teaching with precision. The complexity of this issue, as well as the necessity for thoughtfulness around sociocultural status, historical exclusion, and identity issues for language minority populations, should be considered as the state considers new policies concerning ML and EL students.

Narrowing Down: Screening for Possible Reading Difficulties in K-2, *Not* to Identify Dyslexia

Agreements

1. The purpose of universal early screening is not to diagnose a disability but to identify children who might be at risk for reading difficulties. Valid and reliable screeners for the student populations that we address help determine children's current skill levels in order to help inform and differentiate instruction. Participants agreed that screening does not diagnose dyslexia and that identifying *risk of dyslexia* is inherently different from *diagnosing dyslexia* or a reading disability. Additional assessment, administered by a specialist, would be needed for a diagnosis.

"We did spend some time talking about the confusion that screeners are identifying risk and not risk [of dyslexia]. And they're not putting a label. It's not a diagnosis. It's not a diagnostic assessment. And they're meant to be just a brief, quick look at risk versus non-risk [of dyslexia] that you can use to help inform instruction. And [one participant] brought up a point, in an example, in Texas, where they've been screening for 25 years, how they also looked at strengths and that strengths can help you also inform instruction. It's not just looking at deficits."

2. A screener needs to be part of a Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) approach, not a standalone activity, but rather part of a larger-scale plan for promoting literacy development over time and for all students:

   "Any given early literacy screening tool should be part of comprehensive assessment within a larger literacy plan, that takes into account the languages of instruction. Screening is not the sole assessment tool for literacy. Some qualifiers [for what] the screener should be: (1) reliable and valid for the population; (2) culturally and linguistically appropriate for the given goal; (3) used in alignment with the biliteracy goals; (4) used to identify students' needs and to monitor student progress over the course of the year; and (5) be accompanied with teacher knowledge and development, [including] how and when to use a screener as part of a comprehensive assessment plan, how to interpret results, and link[ing] to instruction that takes English proficiency levels for EL into account. The screener should not be a proxy for a high-stakes assessment to be placed into special ed[ucation.]"

3. In line with the previous statement, a screener must have clarity of purpose conceptually and in implementation (not "high stakes"—i.e., leading to consequential classifications), be connected to instructional planning, be culturally and linguistically relevant, and consider the multiple profiles of ML and EL students, using existing, vetted resources.[2]

4. Parents must understand and be engaged in the use of screeners, as it is part of MTSS.

   "[There should be a] bi-directional relationship with parents, so not just informing parents, but also making sure we're including parental input in our analyses and evaluations."

5. One of the challenges with "screening" and "screeners" is uneven implementation due to lack of understanding and confusion about types of assessments and interpretation and use of screening and other types of data:

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[2] One example of a resource is the Multitiered System of Supports for English Learners, a project of the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education.

"It's going to be helpful to contextualize [the screener] within the other types of assessments and their purpose. There is still lots of confusion around progress monitoring, especially in tier two and three."

"The concern [is] more about what does the field [do] with the screening or how they interpret those results or the use of it."

6. Given the many factors involved in a well-designed and executed universal early screening system (from policy to design to implementation), there are inherent risks of misuse and inequitable outcomes such as over- and underidentification of students.

7. Training prior to implementation of screeners is required and is the school and district leadership's responsibility:

    "We were using the word 'accountability,' but maybe not in the sense that [it] has been used in the past. It was really to make sure that leaders are really aware of what's going on for the purpose of supporting teachers for giving teachers the access and opportunities to really develop the teaching skills that are needed for this, this whole enterprise."

8. There should be universal early screening for reading risk, with caveats around attending to different student profiles, assuring the necessary infrastructure, providing teachers with the knowledge needed for effective utilization, and other safeguards needed to prevent poor implementation.

Remaining Issues

Some participants felt more conversation is necessary to get to a full agreement about how universal early screening should be implemented to ensure equitable implementation. This is largely the result of some groups of students having a history of inappropriate special education placement by both over- and underidentification:

"There's a history and an equity issue that is so key … which is both about kids not being well-served historically, but also about assessments being used in ways that have tracked [i.e., segregated students into lower academic tracks]. … There's something that has to be said that doesn't get captured just by saying 'if you have the right guardrails it will do a good thing.'"

A related issue also requiring additional discussion was around the term "screener." Some participants thought a different term would be preferable. However, as one participant noted:

> *"In the field, in legislation or among psychometricians, a 'screener' is a 'screener.' If we change the name of what we're talking about, we're just going to confuse everybody further. … I don't agree with changing the name 'screener' to something else."*

Another participant added:

> *"Exactly. It doesn't solve the problem because the issue really is there's not enough education out there to really understand it. So we're kicking the can down [the road] by changing the name thinking that's gonna solve the problem."*

Narrowing Down: Foundational Skills

Agreements

1. The definition of foundational skills[3]—print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency—should be grounded in the CA ELA/ELD framework (CDE, 2014) and is an important part of a comprehensive literacy program.

2. Foundational skills should be directly connected to additional elements in instruction, such as oral language development, cross-linguistic connections, morphology, or considerations for bidialectal students.[4]

   > *"Oral language and English language development is paramount and must be developed concurrently, in order for the foundational skills to really be effective."*

   > *"And we also felt it very, very important for all of us to agree that cross-linguistic connections need to be considered. And students' English language proficiency where they are on the English language development continuum is essential for teaching foundational skills. And we felt that [to also be true] for bidialectal English speakers."*

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[3] CA ELA/ELD Framework (2014) states: "Acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy—print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency—is crucial for literacy achievement. In order for students to independently learn with and enjoy text and express themselves through written language, they need to develop facility with the alphabetic code" (p. 89).

[4] Bidialectal refers to students who can communicate in both standard English and another dialect of English (e.g., African American English), as described in the CA ELA/ELD framework (CDE, 2014, p. 885).

"Morphology was [moved from the upper to the lower grades] in our standards because we found [that] it's so beneficial in the early years, because it's a great resource for ML and EL students."

3. Foundational skills should be implemented in a way that is connected to an overarching literacy plan leading, in the words of one participant, to "skilled proficient readers who make meaning of complex text."

4. Foundational skills should be taught explicitly and systematically and based on students' strengths and needs.

5. There is a need to reach terminological precision around potentially contested or ambiguous terms specifically in regard to implementation, such as "systematic," "scripted," "integrated," "prescriptive," "direct," and "fidelity." Where possible, these definitions should be aligned with the CA ELA/ELD framework.

6. Low literacy scores cannot be attributed to a single cause or literacy component.

"[We discussed] how people understand the gaps that have resulted in low literacy, and that we don't want it to just be pinned on one thing or another. And so we were pointing out that there are multiple things that haven't been happening in literacy instruction that we're concerned about … in particular, the phonics, word recognition, and ELD pieces."

Remaining Issues

There was no agreement on how much time should be devoted to foundational skills, as instruction should be differentiated based on student needs. The most commonly mentioned allocation was 20 to 40 minutes per day, but there was no agreement to which grade levels or within which total reading or language arts block this time span should be applied. Participants also contended with whether foundational skills should be taught by being integrated into general instruction rather than in a designated time with a focus on foundational skills.

Participants were concerned that "integrating" foundational skills into the general curriculum may conflict with their being taught systematically, regularly, and effectively, as sometimes happened with integrated English language development (ELD) instruction.

"Foundational skills and ELD are … suffering from the same issue: that [they're] not done in the schools. And it's not done 'systematically,' and it's not done regularly, and it's not done well. And so we were saying that by saying 30 minutes [or another range of time for ELD, there would be] protected time where we're saying [ELD] needs to be done. And if we [just] say it can happen throughout the day, and it's embedded, and it's 'integrated,' it may not happen. And so there's two sides to this."

Conclusions

The agreements reached and discussions of concerns raised during the Literacy Expert Convening give the field reasons to remain optimistic and speak to the possibility of receiving evidence-based and consistent guidance on complex topics. If the convening participants had additional time to discuss some of the key points of divergence, additional areas of agreement may have emerged. A reflection on the process among organizers and participants highlights the benefits of sustained interaction over time with opportunities to engage directly.

Ideally, ML and EL students should be in programs that utilize and build competence across at least two languages: English and the home language. Monolingual English-speaking students should also have the opportunity to be in multilingual programs to build competence in English and another language. Literacy instruction for ML and EL students, as for all students, should be guided by relevant research and differentiated for learners with diverse strengths and needs. Educators should build on student assets and resources, not just their needs. For ML and EL students, this includes regular, daily attention to ELD, which includes both integrated and designated ELD.The complexity of language and literacy teaching and development requires continued discussions among educators and policymakers. Similarly, how ML and EL students' home languages are supported during literacy instruction and how best to address status, exclusion, and identity issues for these students also deserves further consideration in developing relevant state policies.

Participants agreed that the purpose of universal early screening is not to diagnose a disability, but to identify children who might be at risk for reading difficulty or a reading disability. Moreover, screeners provide information about students' current literacy skills, which aids teachers in providing targeted and differentiated instruction, as needed. As discussed by participants, at least one state has been screening ML and EL students for 25 years, identifying strengths and needs, not just looking at deficits. Screening needs to be part of an MTSS approach—not a standalone activity, but rather part of a larger-scale plan for promoting literacy development over time and for all students. Screeners must have clarity of purpose conceptually and in implementation (not "high stakes"—i.e., leading to consequential classifications), be connected to instructional planning, and be culturally and linguistically relevant. Parents must understand and be engaged in the screening process, and training, infrastructure, and adequate implementation must be ensured. Past inequities and misidentification of students must be addressed and procedures developed to prevent recurrences.

Foundational literacy skills should be directly connected to additional elements in literacy instruction, such as meaning-making, oral language development, cross-linguistic connections, morphology, and considerations for bidialectal students. For ML and EL students and bidialectal English speakers, cross-

linguistic connections must be considered. Foundational skills should be taught explicitly and directly and implemented in a way that is connected to an overarching literacy plan leading to skilled readers. Since much more than foundational skills is necessary for full and comprehensive literacy attainment, low literacy scores cannot be attributed to a single cause or component. Foundational skills should be taught explicitly and systematically, but there was no agreement on how much time should be devoted to them. The most commonly mentioned allocation was 20 to 40 minutes per day, but there was no agreement to which grade levels or within which total reading or language arts block this time span should be applied. Contested or ambiguous terms such as systematic, scripted, integrated, prescriptive, direct, and fidelity should be defined so that educators and policymakers have a shared understanding of their meanings.

Future Directions

Literacy policy in California should take into consideration agreements reached in this project and reflected in this paper, both in its approach and implementation. Either in legislation, policies, or guidance by state agencies (California Department of Education, Board of Education, Commission on Teacher Credentialing), concerted efforts should be made to promote continued discussions leading to:

- All students having access to a comprehensive literacy program that builds oral language (speaking and listening) and written language (reading and writing) skills in English and at least one other language, to the extent possible (depending on feasibility, personnel, community preferences, resources, and other relevant considerations).
- Adequate instructional time devoted to making sure all students acquire necessary foundational literacy skills—print concepts, phonological awareness, letter-sound knowledge, word recognition primarily using phonics and decoding, and fluency—within a comprehensive language arts program that helps all students attain the highest possible levels of literacy development.
- Children identified as EL students receiving literacy instruction that includes integrated ELD and adequate instructional time devoted to aligned designated ELD instruction. This would ensure EL students' steady literacy development and enable successful participation in all aspects of the instructional program.
- Universal early screening, within an MTSS framework, using reliable, valid, and linguistically and culturally appropriate instruments to determine current reading ability and the risk of reading difficulty. Results should inform instruction, and if progress is not made, then further assessment may be recommended. Procedures must include safeguards and training to promote appropriate administration, accurate interpretation of results, and effective follow-up instruction.

Additional considerations include: building on student assets as well as addressing instructional needs; clarifying terms to ensure general understanding of their intended meaning; recognition of history of inequity with lower academic tracks and misidentification for special education; careful scrutiny of the most valid, reliable, and relevant research to guide policy decisions (including appointing an expert panel to vet this research); pre- and in-service educator preparation and training to support successful implementation of initiatives undertaken per the above recommendations.

Acknowledgments

About Pivot Learning

In pursuit of educational justice, Pivot Learning partners with teachers and leaders to improve instructional coherence and ensure a rigorous, relevant, and inclusive public education for all students. Pivot Learning is merging with UnboundEd on April 1, 2023.

Appendix A: Process and Methodology

The **theory of action** for this project was that if a collaborative space is created, successive iterative group discussions will shed light on pivotal matters at a level of granularity that promoted agreements, thus securing a path forward in the public debate and avoiding blockage. The agreements and nuances would then be collected in this working paper, which has been in turn workshopped with participants to ascertain its validity and representativeness.

Participants were selected in a combination of purposeful (based on relevance to the issue and context) and snowballing (participants would suggest or facilitate connection with other potential participants) sampling (Saldana, 2011). Additional considerations for the selected participants were their professional positions, public stances regarding literacy, and representation of organizations and constituencies.

Step 1: Interviews

The interviews were the first stage in the process, allowing the project team to build rapport and capture fine-grained nuances in each of the participants' perspectives. Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006) of approximately one hour each. The protocol evolved from eliciting the positionality and professional trajectory of the interviewee in relation to literacy in California to inquiring into the perceived areas of agreement, tension, and impasse concerning literacy. Finally, the participants were asked about ways in which they would advance the public conversation and experiential or scholarly knowledge that would be important to consider as the project evolved.

Step 2: Focus Groups

The focus groups marked strategic gradual progress toward the development of a collective engagement arena and building up toward a choral conversation. Three two-hour focus groups (Stewart et al., 2014) were conducted with four to five participants each following this structure: Overview of the interview process, description of analysis and sense-making, verification of themes and identification of missing components, and description of next steps. Each focus group further subdivided into two small groups and worked with an electronic copy to prepare clarifying questions and potential additions. Importantly, participants were not only validating and inquiring into the themes derived from the interviews (i.e., member check), but also adding additional data to complete the landscape of the discussion during the convening.

Step 3: The Convening

During the first day of the convening, energy and time were devoted to building the relationship and reaching the community agreements that would foster a space of relational trust. With this critical foundation in mind, the facilitators worked to establish agreements and processes through dialogue. The first substantive conversation was about the **baseline agreements** (Appendix C) that had been identified by qualitative analysis based on the data from the interviews and the focus groups. Such baseline agreements included the assertive description of common ground, such as the recognition of literacy as a human right, the complexity of literacy, the inherent assets in multilingual learners, and the affirmation of knowledge—for example, the National Reading Panel's "Big Five" (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).

With a common foundation built, the group engaged with the **key themes and generative questions** (Appendix E) that were synthesized from the focus group discussions. The target was to identify questions that may be missing in the three sections (literacy for multilingual learners, early screening and assessment, and foundational skills) with an eye to identifying those whose responses have a greater urgency (i.e., further refining information in the process of selecting pivotal topics, per the theory of action). As the outcome of this process, groups contributed to the selection of the highest-impact matters on day two.

The **second day of the convening** saw a combination of small- and large-group discussions on the topics selected previously. Three groups were designed and facilitated to engage with the second synthesis of themes and generative questions by means of three guiding prompts in each section (Appendix E). During these discussions, notes were taken, and the presentation of agreements and findings was audio recorded.

Analysis and Findings

The interviews, totaling approximately 14 hours, were recorded and transcribed. The authors conducted an iterative thematic analysis with codes (Saldana, 2021) that were both deductive (e.g., foundational skills, English learners) and inductive (e.g., implementational challenges, terminological tension) using the qualitative software ATLAS.ti. The authors engaged in the drafting of a summary of findings leading to the first iteration of the themes and generative question synthesis (Appendix B), recurrently referring to the data to secure the validity and accurate terminological representation presented by the interviewees.

The focus groups were also recorded (five hours total) and also yielded data as written annotations by the participants on their copy of the first synthesis described above. The analysis and triangulation of these two sources of data led to a second iteration of the synthesis (Appendix D) containing five topic

areas (early screening and assessment, foundational skills, literacy and multilingual learners, control and power, and professional preparation and development about the knowledge/research base) and the drafting of an initial document of agreements (Appendix C), both to be used during the planning of the convening.

The main data source of data in the convening was the recording of the final share-out and whole-group discussion (approximately two hours long), aided by the notes taken by facilitators during the small-group discussion. The recording was transcribed and thematically analyzed following a similar procedure to that of the interviews and the focus groups.

The quotes used to substantiate the agreements presented in this paper were selected based on the following criteria: explicit agreement by the whole group to a statement; reported agreement by one of the small groups without opposition; and repeated mention of an idea across groups. As such the authors and organizing team have worked to ground the assertions in representative quotes with minimal modifications to improve readability.

Last but not least, two validation rounds of paper draft revisions were conducted with all participants. Between November 2022 and January 2023, participants had the opportunity to provide written feedback to individual copies of successive drafts and to participate in two open sessions for discussion offered by the project team and authors.

Appendix B: Baseline Theme and Generative Question Synthesis After the Interviews

Based on interviews with 14 literacy experts—primarily, but not exclusively, California-based—in spring 2022, Pivot Learning, in partnership with Dr. Claude Goldenberg (emeritus, Stanford University) and Dr. Eduardo Muñoz-Muñoz (SJSU), held a series of focus group discussions with these same literacy experts to explore some emerging themes in these interviews. Together, these interviews and focus groups informed the agenda for an in-person convening in September; the goal of this convening was to identify potential common ground across varied literacy experts on improving literacy instruction and student outcomes in California.

Goal for Focus Group Discussions

Our goal for the focus group discussions was to clarify terms and identify missing issues from an initial synthesis of our interviews. Any attempt to resolve disagreements or seek agreements was incorporated into our in-person convening in September.

Topic Clusters

Power and Control

What is the role of power and identity, especially regarding language, in the current debates?

- Have some communities not been allowed at the table?
- Which communities, if any, are disproportionately disadvantaged when schools don't teach students to become fully literate?
- Who has the resources to influence literacy policies and practices?
- What should be the role of centralized programs/expectations vs. district or school site autonomy?
- What degree of autonomy should educators have in determining literacy policies and practices?

Phonics and Decoding (aka foundational skills, word-reading skills; includes phonological awareness and fluency with these skills)

- What should be the role of phonics and decoding in relation to everything required to become a successfully literate person?
- Are phonics and decoding primary or one of many important elements in literacy pedagogy?

- How much time should be devoted to phonics and decoding—during the day, over the year, for how many years?
- How do you make sure phonics and decoding don't crowd out important other elements?
- How should phonics and decoding be connected to students' language and cultural backgrounds?
- How explicit, structured, and systematic should phonics and decoding instruction be?

Early Screening

- Does early screening help identify students with possible reading difficulties?
- Should early screening be used to intervene with students with possible reading difficulties?
- Does universal early screening for early identification run the risk of overidentification? If so, do the risks outweigh the benefits?

Professional Preparation and Development (PD) About the Knowledge/ Research Base

- Do teachers need to understand how the "reading circuit" works in the brain if they are to be effective literacy instructors?
- How do policies on the ground (in schools and classrooms) sometimes fail to line up with research?
- Do policies on the ground fuel stereotypes/oversimplifications about "science of reading," "balanced literacy," and other terms that are frequently used in these discussions?
- Is there miscommunication about what the "science of reading" means?
- Are teachers adequately trained to deliver evidence-based literacy instruction?
- Are administrators and school personnel generally informed about literacy instruction?
- What role should higher education faculty play in determining the content of teacher prep in literacy?
- In general, what is the quality of professional development in literacy education offered by PD providers? If a lot of it is poor, what should be done?
- Do poorly prepared teachers create/justify a need for scripted curricula?

Appendix C: Baseline Agreements

California Literacy Expert Interviews

Summary of Potential Areas of Convergence

A majority of voices we heard in the interviews surfaced some potential areas of agreement about literacy instruction:

1. Literacy is a basic human right and essential for school success and access to opportunities.
2. Equity demands that all children have the opportunities to become fully literate, whatever their strengths and needs.
3. All children have strengths, and the vast majority can learn to become literate.
4. Multilingual learners have their home languages and other strengths to build on.
5. Multilingual learners need English oral language development to support literacy and general academic development.
6. Literacy is complex and multidimensional.
7. Foundational skills (phonological awareness, letter-sound associations, phonics, decoding, and fluency) are essential.
8. Writing, comprehension, vocabulary and oral language development, and background knowledge are essential.
9. The National Reading Panel's Big Five should be part of any literacy program, and we need an even more comprehensive and integrated perspective (see other points, esp. 5, 8, and 10).
10. A language- and content-rich environment is essential.
11. Teacher capacity-building (pre- and in-service) is essential.

Appendix D: Themes and Generative Questions After the Focus Groups

California Literacy Convening
Themes and Generative Questions from Focus Groups July 2022

Context

Led by Drs. Claude Goldenberg and Eduardo Muñoz-Muñoz, Pivot Learning conducted a series of 1:1 interviews with experts on effective literacy practices, established and emerging literacy research, and California literacy policy. In order to ensure we adequately captured the issues and questions regarding improving student literacy outcomes in California, we conducted a series of focus groups that included most of these experts to explore emerging themes in greater depth. This document summarizes the themes and generative questions stemming from these focus groups, which will be the subjects of further exploration and discussion at an in-person convening later this year.

Emerging Themes and Generative Questions

Early Screening and Assessment

- What are the data about benefits (e.g., effective early intervention) vs. challenges (e.g, overidentification of multilingual learners [ML and EL students][5] for dyslexia; cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*; see below) of early screening? Are there places (e.g., states) where early screening has been or is being implemented that we should look at (e.g., Multitudes pilot underway in CA, study by Dr. Maryanne Wolf)?
    - What are the benefits of early screening to identify children at risk for reading difficulties? What are the risks? Does overidentification (or other) risks associated with universal early screening outweigh the benefits? What about risks of underidentification?
    - How well does early screening help identify students with possible reading difficulties?
    - What are the major precursors of reading acquisition and development that predict reading difficulties and should therefore be incorporated into early screeners to ensure that all relevant cultural and linguistic factors are included (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?

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[5] For the purpose of this document, ML and EL students means students classified as English learners.

- How, if at all, should early screening be used to intervene with students with possible reading difficulties?
    - How can policies offer guidance to districts so that screening and intervention are effective?
    - How can we ensure that the interventions are appropriate when applied to students identified as "at risk" via universal early screening?
    - How is a student's language background taken into account in the screening and identification process (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
    - How can we ensure screenings and interventions are appropriate for ML and EL students? And that we don't fall into past practices (e.g., overidentification of dyslexia) that were harmful to students (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
    - Are there screeners that differentiate the risk of early reading difficulty from learning English (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
    - How does the type of instructional program (English medium vs. bilingual) influence the screening process, especially with regard to variables impacting the screening process and results (e.g., language profile variation will vary depending on the program a student is in)?
    - How do we determine the external factors of language of instruction and opportunity when interpreting results and potential need for intervention (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
    - What is the ideal frequency of early screening beginning in transitional kindergarten (TK)?
- How do we avoid a "deficit perspective" and recognize students' strengths and assets?
- How do and should teachers interpret and use screening data for instruction?
    - How do we ensure that teachers are adequately trained to use the screening, language, and other classroom-based data to provide more appropriate and targeted instruction for diverse learners (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
    - What do and should teachers do when they don't get expected results? Or results with overrepresentation among certain groups of students?
    - What is the role of the teacher in identifying students in need of further assessment? Is there a need to screen every student?
- Early screening is one type of assessment data. There is also progress monitoring (aka formative assessment) and summative assessment. How do we ensure that all relevant aspects of literacy development that need to be assessed are assessed?

Foundational Skills (i.e., "speech-to-print-to-speech" and "word reading" skills: phonological awareness, letter-sound associations, phonics, and decoding and automaticity and fluency)

- What constitutes literacy acquisition? Is Scarborough's rope a helpful model of literacy acquisition and development? What are its pros and cons, and what is missing, if anything?
    - Is literacy acquisition (and development) similar or different for children learning to read and write in a language they already understand, in contrast to those learning to read and write in a language they are simultaneously learning (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
- What should be the role of foundational skill instruction in relation to everything else required to become a successfully literate person?
- One way to think about foundational skills is that they bring together listening and speaking (oral language, or oracy) and reading and writing (written language, or literacy). This presumes there are distinctions between oracy and literacy; they can't be treated as the same thing, even though they are correlated. Alternatively, maybe there is no distinction to be made between oral and written language, and therefore language and literacy can be used synonymously and interchangeably. Which is the more accurate and useful perspective?
- Is foundational skills instruction the primary or *one of* the many important elements in literacy pedagogy?
    - What analysis indicates that foundational skills are the missing piece in literacy instruction? What other essential elements of literacy instruction have been missing?
    - Is foundational skills instruction sequenced as needing to happen first in school? Or does it work in interaction with other aspects of literacy instruction that should occur simultaneously?
    - Does "simultaneously" literally mean at the same time, within the same lesson? Or does it (can it) mean while learning foundational skills during one part of a lesson (or day), students can also be learning other skills at other times (e.g., building language and comprehension skills while listening to stories read aloud)?
    - The National Reading Panel: "Phonics instruction is never a total reading program. In 1st grade, teachers can provide controlled vocabulary texts that allow students to practice decoding, and they can also read quality literature to students to build a sense of story and to develop vocabulary and comprehension." Is there agreement on this statement?
    - Does primary mean most important, or does it mean "first" in the sequence? Can it be both primary and one of many important elements? Is the analogy between "foundational skills" in literacy and a building's foundation valid? Or is it misleading?

- How do we make sure foundational skills instruction doesn't crowd out other important elements of the curriculum, but that instead there is a strong multidimensional literacy focus throughout?
- How much time should be devoted to foundational skills instruction—during the day, over the year, for how many years?
  - How does foundational skills instruction differ across students of different strengths and needs and developmental/age-related factors?
  - How are assessment data used to inform instruction/practice/materials? Are the assessments valid and reliable for use with students from different language backgrounds? How will we know when students have mastered skills?
  - How do we factor time vs. frequency of instruction to determine actual instructional emphasis?
  - The National Reading Panel: "Phonics should not become the dominant component in a reading program, neither in the amount of time devoted to it nor in the significance attached. It is important to evaluate children's reading competence in many ways, not only by their phonics skills, but also by their interest in books and their ability to understand information that is read to them. By emphasizing all of the processes that contribute to growth in reading, teachers will have the best chance of making every child a reader." Is there agreement on this statement?
  - The National Reading Panel reported that the effect of foundational skills instruction was strongest in K-1 and then declined overall, but still had an effect for struggling readers, although not necessarily in comprehension. One implication is that foundational skills instruction should be focused in the early grades, primarily K and 1. Some students will need additional focus on foundational skills (including fluency), but ideally the focus should then turn to language, comprehension, background knowledge, and other factors that influence literacy development beyond foundational skills. Is there agreement on this statement?
  - How skilled do students need to be with phonics and decoding so that foundational skills are no longer an area that needs instructional attention? Which measures can be used to make this determination?
- Should the definition of "foundational skills" be expanded, and how should foundational skills be integrated with other literacy skills?
  - How are semantic, syntactic, and morphological skills integrated with the more traditional items of foundational skills at the sublexical, lexical, and sentential levels?
  - How explicit, structured, and systematic should foundational skills instruction be?
  - When and how should writing, encoding, and syntax be taught?

- When and how should vocabulary be taught and what approaches are recommended? During the day, over the year, for how many years? Across content areas?
- When and how should comprehension be taught and integrated into reading development?

Literacy and Multilingual Learners (ML and EL students)

- To what extent, if at all, do teachers need to understand how the "bilingual brain" differs from or is similar to that of monolingual students?
- How, if at all, are the issues, factors, and considerations different for ML and EL students learning literacy in a bilingual instructional program (where L1 is used prominently) in contrast to learning literacy in an English-only instructional program?
- Given the large proportion of children in the state from homes with languages other than English, and given the state's commitment to bilingualism/biliteracy as a goal, how should this shape our understanding of literacy instruction and promoting optimal literacy development?
- How does—or should—the distinction between learning/teaching reading and learning/ teaching language influence the discussion on ML and EL students learning to read in English?
- What is the interaction between English language development/acquisition in ML and EL students and literacy development in English and biliteracy?
- How should foundational skill development be connected to students' language and cultural backgrounds? How should it reflect language variation across speakers and languages?
    - Is the role of foundational skills instruction different for students from different language backgrounds, including those who are English-only speakers?
- How can we ensure that systems are in place to ensure that if ML and EL students are found to be at risk for reading difficulties, the interventions are appropriate?
- How are administrators and teachers supported in connecting evidence-based practices with high-quality materials, especially when it comes to linguistically diverse students?
- What is the role of integrated and designated ELD in ML and EL students' literacy development?
- How do we attend to the broader themes in the CA ELA/ELD Framework without diluting the need for students to develop foundational reading skills?

Professional Preparation and Development about the Knowledge/Research Base

- What level of training are teachers receiving to deliver evidence-based literacy instruction? Is it sufficient for successful implementation?
    - What level of training are teachers receiving to deliver evidence-based literacy instruction for ML and EL students/multilingual learners and other linguistically diverse populations?

- Do teachers adequately understand the difference between learning/teaching reading and learning/teaching language?
- How well are district and school administrators and other school personnel such as reading or curriculum specialists informed about effective literacy instruction?
- To what extent, if at all, do teachers need to understand how the "reading circuit" works in the brain of the general population and of linguistically diverse (including bi-dialectal) students (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
- Are there misunderstandings about what "science of reading" means from individuals and groups with varying perspectives on the "science of reading"? How, if at all, does the media contribute to misunderstandings?
    - To what extent do policies or practices in schools and classrooms fuel misunderstandings about the meaning of "science of reading," "balanced literacy," or other terms by not enacting them accurately?
- What role should higher education faculty play in determining the content of teacher preparation in literacy? What accountability should there be about this content?
- What is the role of professional development offered by PD providers in promoting teachers' knowledge and skills around literacy instruction? How is pre- and in-service preparation articulated?
- What policies, guidance, and implementation supports will result in clearer implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction and avoid oversimplification of specific literary stances?
    - What role do site and district leaders play in supporting teachers to implement sound literacy practices?
    - What sort of teacher and administrator preparation and capacity-building is required so that site leaders know how to implement and bring to life the ELA/ELD Framework (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
    - What systems need to be created or be in place to support teachers in implementing sound literacy practices?
    - Given that CA is a local-control state for education policies, including instructional materials adoption and implementation, are the current supports sufficient for the successful implementation of state policy or guidance? What accountability should be established to ensure adequate local resource allocation?
- What is the role of expertly designed curriculum (some of which may be scripted) in teaching? Do poorly prepared or novice teachers create a particular need for scripted curricula?

Equity, Power, and Control

- Which student communities are disproportionately disadvantaged when schools don't teach literacy effectively?
    - How do we define equitable outcomes for all students and groups of students? Which principles of policy and practice are most important if we are to attain equitable outcomes for all students and groups of students?
- Do power (e.g., access to resources, influence on policymakers, class/societal status) and identity (e.g., cultural, linguistic, racial) affect the current literacy debates? If so, how?
    - Which communities have not been allowed at the table in policy-making or curriculum design?
    - Who has the resources (e.g., logistical, economic, cultural, and social capital) to influence literacy policies and practices?
- At what level should power and control over literacy instructional programs reside: Centralized at the state level? Centralized at the district level? School site autonomy? Some combination?
    - What degree of autonomy should educators (classroom teachers, university instructors) have in determining literacy policies and practices?
- Who are the financial beneficiaries when there are shifts in curricula?
    - Who benefits from shifts in policy and guidance around instructional foci?
- What should be the role of families, and parents/caregivers specifically, in determining literacy instructional programs? Should they be equal partners?
- What is the role of culturally sustaining pedagogy and anti-racist pedagogy in ML and EL students' literacy development?

Appendix E: Themes and Generative Question Synthesis for the Convening, with Prompts for Focused Discussion

California Literacy Convening
Themes and Generative Questions from Focus Groups
Convening - September 15, 2022

Emerging Themes and Generative Questions

Literacy and Multilingual Learners (ML and EL students)

Key question for today: How, if at all, should literacy instruction differ for:

- Multilingual students learning in a multilingual context?
- Multilingual students learning in an English context?
- Monolingual students learning in an English context?

In addition: Of the questions below, which questions are high priority AND which represent areas of likely agreement? Please state your group's agreed-upon assertion clearly and precisely (e.g., assuming appropriate personnel, infrastructure, and support, ML and EL students are better served in bilingual programs that utilize and build on their home language).

And: Of the questions below, which are high priority for your group AND which represent areas of potential disagreement? What do you disagree on, and why?

- To what extent, if at all, do teachers need to understand how the "bilingual brain" differs from or is similar to that of monolingual students?
- How, if at all, are the issues, factors, and considerations different for ML and EL students learning literacy in a bilingual instructional program (where L1 is used prominently) in contrast to learning literacy in an English-only instructional program?
- Given the large proportion of children in the state from homes with languages other than English, and given the state's commitment to bilingualism/biliteracy as a goal, how should this shape our understanding of literacy instruction and promoting optimal literacy development? This is for heritage language students and monolingual students—how does that shape literacy instruction?
- How does—or should—the distinction between learning/teaching reading and learning/teaching language influence the discussion on ML and EL students learning to read in English?

- What is the interaction between English language development/acquisition in ML and EL students and literacy development in English and biliteracy?
- How should foundational skill development be connected to students' language and cultural backgrounds? How should it reflect language variation across speakers and languages?
  - Is the role of foundational skills instruction different for students from different language backgrounds, including those who are English-only speakers?
- How can we ensure that systems are in place to ensure that if ML and EL students are found to be at risk for reading difficulties, the interventions are appropriate?
- How are administrators and teachers supported in connecting evidence-based practices with high-quality materials, especially when it comes to linguistically diverse students? How should this include the ELD standards and culturally responsive instruction?
- What is the role of integrated and designated ELD in ML and EL students' literacy development?
- How do we attend to the broader themes in the CA ELA/ELD Framework without diluting the need for students to develop foundational reading skills?
- How does biliteracy development differ from English literacy development for bilingual learners? What skills are we trying to develop in what instructional context (monolingual vs. bilingual)?
- What is the role of home language in English-taught instruction?
- What's the interplay between literacy and ELD in monolingual and multilingual programs?

Early Screening and Assessment

Key question for today: Let's assume we agree on the attributes of a useful early screening tool (e.g., linguistically and culturally responsive, used for screening but not identification purposes), and that producing such a tool is feasible. What else needs to be true for this screener to be useful? For its upsides to exceed its risks?

In addition: Of the questions below, which questions are high priority AND which represent areas of likely agreement? Please state your group's agreed-upon assertion clearly and precisely (e.g., Universal early screening, if done right with the right training, infrastructure, and guardrails, can help identify students at risk for early literacy difficulties and, if followed by appropriate instruction, can prevent serious problems later on).

And: Of the questions below, which are high priority for your group AND which represent areas of potential disagreement? What do you disagree on, and why?

- What are the data about benefits (e.g., effective early intervention) vs. challenges (e.g., overidentification of multilingual learners [ML and EL students] for dyslexia; cf. *Literacy and*

Multilingual Learners; see below) of early screening? Are there places (e.g., states) where early screening has been or is being implemented that we should look at (e.g., Multitudes pilot underway in CA, study by Dr. Maryanne Wolf)?

- What are the benefits of early screening to identify children at risk for reading difficulties? What are the risks? Does overidentification (or other) risks associated with universal early screening outweigh the benefits? What about risks of underidentification? Given that we have no data for K-2 in California, is it better to have no data, or to risk overidentification?
- How well does early screening help identify students with possible reading difficulties?
- What are the major precursors of reading acquisition and development that predict reading difficulties and should therefore be incorporated into early screeners to ensure that all relevant cultural and linguistic factors are included (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?

- How, if at all, should early screening be used to intervene with students with possible reading difficulties?
  - How can policies offer guidance to districts so that screening and intervention are effective?
  - How can we ensure that the interventions are appropriate when applied to students identified as "at risk" via universal early screening?
  - How is a student's language background taken into account in the screening and identification process (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
  - How can we ensure screenings and interventions are appropriate for ML and EL students? And that we don't fall into past practices (e.g., overidentification of dyslexia) that were harmful to students (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
  - Are there screeners that differentiate the risk of early reading difficulty from learning English (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
  - How does the type of instructional program (English medium vs. bilingual) influence the screening process, especially with regard to variables impacting the screening process and results (e.g., language profile variation will vary depending on the program a student is in)?
  - How do we determine the external factors of language of instruction and opportunity when interpreting results and potential need for intervention (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
  - What is the ideal frequency of early screening beginning in transitional kindergarten (TK)?
- How do we avoid a "deficit perspective" and recognize students' strengths and assets?
- How do and should teachers interpret and use screening data for instruction?

- How do we ensure that teachers are adequately trained to use the screening, language, and other classroom-based data to provide more appropriate and targeted instruction for diverse learners (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)?
    - What do and should teachers do when they don't get expected results? Or results with overrepresentation among certain groups of students?
    - What is the role of the teacher in identifying students in need of further assessment? Is there a need to screen every student?
- Early screening is one type of assessment data. There is also progress monitoring (aka formative assessment) and summative assessment. How do we ensure that all relevant aspects of literacy development that need to be assessed are assessed?
- Can we screen for reading risk and also be culturally responsive and social justice forward?
- How does early screening help address the needs of different profiles of students?
- What are differences between existing screeners? How does that affect the current emphasis on Multitudes in CA? Why can't we learn from what others have already done?
- What is the balance between the time/resources for screening vs. benefits of screening? Are benefits robust and worthwhile?
- How can we ensure screeners generate actionable information for instruction? How can we generate sufficient teacher knowledge to analyze and use the ensuing data?
- What about cross-linguistic scoring for screeners?
- How can we ensure that the field doesn't confuse screeners with diagnostic assessments?
- What is the right overarching framework for assessments?

Foundational Skills (i.e., "speech-to-print-to-speech" and "word reading" skills: phonological awareness, letter-sound associations, phonics, and decoding and automaticity and fluency)

Key question for today: How would you define foundational skills? What does that look like in K2 vs. other grades, or are progressions a better framework to adhere to?

In addition: Of the questions below, which questions are high priority AND which represent areas of likely agreement? Please state your group's agreed-upon assertion clearly and precisely (e.g., Shanahan and others have suggested that students in early primary grades need to learn to decode and that phonics and phonemic awareness instruction is essential during the primary grades. As a general rule,

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[6] Example based on a blog entry by Dr. Timothy Shanahan (https://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/blog/what-do-you-think-of-phonics-first-or-phonics-only-in-the-primary-grades#sthash.gX4XSBad.dpbs).

about 30 minutes/day should be spent on phonics instruction, and comparable amounts should be devoted to reading comprehension, writing, and the ability to read text fluently).[6]

And: Of the questions below, which are high priority for your group AND which represent areas of potential disagreement? What do you disagree on, and why?

- What constitutes literacy acquisition? Is Scarborough's rope a helpful model of literacy acquisition and development? What are its pros and cons, and what is missing, if anything?
    - Is literacy acquisition (and development) similar or different for children learning to read and write in a language they already understand, in contrast to those learning to read and write in a language they are simultaneously learning (cf. *Literacy and Multilingual Learners*)? How is it different from multilingual learners?
- What should be the role of foundational skill instruction in relation to everything else required to become a successfully literate person?
- One way to think about foundational skills is that they bring together listening and speaking (oral language, or oracy) and reading and writing (written language, or literacy). This presumes there are distinctions between oracy and literacy; they can't be treated as the same thing, even though they are correlated. Alternatively, maybe there is no distinction to be made between oral and written language, and therefore language and literacy can be used synonymously and interchangeably. Which is the more accurate and useful perspective?
- Is foundational skills instruction the primary or *one of* the many important elements in literacy pedagogy?
    - What analysis indicates that foundational skills are the missing piece in literacy instruction? What other essential elements of literacy instruction have been missing?
    - Is foundational skills instruction sequenced as needing to happen first in school? Or does it work in interaction with other aspects of literacy instruction that should occur simultaneously?
    - Does "simultaneously" literally mean at the same time, within the same lesson? Or does it (can it) mean while learning foundational skills during one part of a lesson (or day), students can also be learning other skills at other times (e.g., building language and comprehension skills while listening to stories read aloud)?
    - The National Reading Panel: "Phonics instruction is never a total reading program. In 1st grade, teachers can provide controlled vocabulary texts that allow students to practice decoding, and they can also read quality literature to students to build a sense of story and to develop vocabulary and comprehension." Is there agreement on this statement?

- Does primary mean most important, or does it mean "first" in the sequence? Can it be both primary and one of many important elements? Is the analogy between "foundational skills" in literacy and a building's foundation valid? Or is it misleading?
- How do we make sure foundational skills instruction doesn't crowd out important other elements of the curriculum, but that instead there is a strong multidimensional literacy focus throughout?

- How much time should be devoted to foundational skills instruction—during the day, over the year, for how many years?
  - How does foundational skills instruction differ across students of different strengths and needs and developmental/age-related factors?
  - How does this differ by grade span? K1 or +?
  - How are assessment data used to inform instruction/practice/materials? Are the assessments valid and reliable for use with students from different language backgrounds? How will we know when students have mastered skills?
  - How do we factor time vs. frequency of instruction to determine actual instructional emphasis?
  - The National Reading Panel: "Phonics should not become the dominant component in a reading program, neither in the amount of time devoted to it nor in the significance attached. It is important to evaluate children's reading competence in many ways, not only by their phonics skills, but also by their interest in books and their ability to understand information that is read to them. By emphasizing all of the processes that contribute to growth in reading, teachers will have the best chance of making every child a reader." Is there agreement on this statement?
  - The National Reading Panel reported that the effect of foundational skills instruction was strongest in K-1 and then declined overall, but still had an effect for struggling readers, although not necessarily in comprehension. One implication is that foundational skills instruction should be focused in the early grades, primarily K and 1. Some students will need additional focus on foundational skills (including fluency), but ideally the focus should then turn to language, comprehension, background knowledge, and other factors that influence literacy development beyond foundational skills. Is there agreement on this statement?
  - How skilled do students need to be with phonics and decoding so that foundational skills are no longer an area that needs instructional attention? Which measures can be used to make this determination?
- Should the definition of "foundational skills" be expanded, and how should foundational skills be integrated with other literacy skills?

- How are semantic, syntactic, and morphological skills integrated with the more traditional items of foundational skills at the sublexical, lexical, and sentential levels?
- How explicit, structured, and systematic should foundational skills instruction be?
- When and how should writing, encoding, and syntax be taught?
- When and how should vocabulary be taught and what approaches are recommended? During the day, over the year, for how many years? Across content areas?

- When and how should comprehension be taught and integrated into reading development?
- What is the theoretical framework here?
- When we say we need time devoted to foundational skills instruction, what do we mean by time (e.g., explicit direct instruction)? What does it mean to focus on these skills?
- What is the expanded nature of foundational? How can we contribute to the bridge that we're trying to make between balanced literacy and whole literacy?

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