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Beyond Access:

Effective Reading for All

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EDITORS

William G. Brozo and Elizabeth G. Sturtevant

COORDINATORS

Janeen Haase and Sakil Malik

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: Deanne Web

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Introduction

Learning to read is a basic need and right of every young learner throughout the world, and increasing the level of literacy in every community and nation is a key to global development. Yet, obstacles often stand in the way of efforts to improve basic education in developing countries. Over the past decade, educators from many countries have worked toward designing programs that are helping children around the globe gain the literacy skills and access to excellent education they deserve.

On March 30, 2009, three organizations that have been leaders for international literacy improvement collaborated in sponsoring a symposium (Beyond Access: Effective Reading for All) in Washington, DC, at the Carnegie Institute for International Peace. The sponsors included the International Reading Association, the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International, and Plan USA/Plan International. At this symposium, researchers, program developers, and members of many international and research organizations shared their experiences, wisdom, and questions. Well-known literacy experts and representatives from key development organizations reported on research as well as successful practices. The meeting provided a forum for sharing what is known about excellent program development for early grades reading.

This report contains the remarks of the speakers at the meeting as well as a summary of discussion among participants and speakers. Dr. Marjorie Y. Lipson, Professor Emerita at the University of Vermont, gave the keynote address, "Focusing on the Early Grades in Developing Countries." Dr. Lipson was co-director of literacy projects in Ghana and Tanzania in the 2004 and 2005. Following her address, a panel of experts provided diverse perspectives on related topics including assessment, language contexts, and professional development. The panelists included Dr. Joseph P. Carney, USAID; Dr. Amber Gove, RTI International; Mr. Djibo Alfari, Plan International, Niger; Dr. James Hoffman, University of Texas at Austin; and Dr. Robert Prouty, Education for All Fast Track Initiative Secretariat.

The audience then engaged in a general discussion with all of the panelists, later splitting into three groups to discuss topics further. Following these break-out sessions, the entire group reconvened to revisit the most important points of discussion. The meeting was attended by representatives of nonprofit and government agencies that are dedicated to working as partners to improve literacy.

Keynote Address: Focusing on the Early Grades in Developing Countries

Dr. Marjorie Y. Lipson
Professor Emerita, University of Vermont

For some time, there has been a broad-based awareness of the role that education generally, and literacy specifically, plays in the future success of developing countries. The UNESCO Education for All initiative (EFA), for example, has been in effect since 1990. The general goals of EFA were reaffirmed in 2000 within the Dakar Framework for Action. In 2002, these were given an additional boost with the Fast Track Initiative with its specific focus on primary education. The focus on universal primary schooling has been enormously successful in many areas, and the ongoing thrust of activities should make it achievable in many others (UNICEF, 2009; Wils, Carrol, & Barrow, 2005). There is much to celebrate (see Education for All, 2008).

A much more ambitious goal—*universal literacy* among primary-aged children—is much further from achievement. There are some promising developments upon which to build further success. First, there is a much greater appreciation for the role of language and context in learning to read. Second, building upon this knowledge, some models of successful literacy programs have been successfully implemented in specific contexts. Finally, additional assessment tools have been developed that can help us to know whether we are making a difference.

To make real further progress, we need to move both urgently and wisely. The impulse is to move urgently at any cost, but wisdom requires some self-reflection and the willingness to examine evidence from a wide array of sources. In this paper, I will review some existing literature and use it to propose actions that should be considered in crafting literacy initiatives for and with developing nations.

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

If we were successful, what would it look like? What goals and aims (both direct and indirect) guide our work in early literacy? Are we looking for economic impact? Reduction in poverty? Prevention of disease? Improved access to higher education? The identification of literacy goals informs our thinking about the next question: What type of literacy performance would be necessary to achieve these goals? Is name writing enough? Would accurate word reading be the answer? Is students' ability to think with print crucial? The answers to these questions are critical because they constrain and direct both development and assessment efforts.

I argue here that individuals are literate only when they can think with print for varied personal, academic, and civic purposes. Because "success" in literacy can take a long time to develop, it is important to examine assumptions about the relationship between early reading development and later literacy. The belief that accurate and rapid word recognition will automatically lead to skilled reading and comprehension has been called into question by recent research evidence. While important, accurate word recognition is not sufficient to ensure higher levels of reading and school achievement: "Research has shown that many children

who read at the third-grade level in grade 3 will not automatically become proficient comprehenders in later grades. Therefore, teachers must teach comprehension explicitly, beginning in the primary grades and continuing through high school" (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002, p. xii). Early literacy is important, but a well-conceived set of outcomes is needed right from the start or we risk falling short.

INTENDED AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Without a sufficiently complex concept of literacy, success is unlikely. The prevailing model conceives of literacy development as complex and interactive and includes a consideration of the specific contexts in students learn to read. As Brandt and Clinton (2002) have noted, "If the field of literacy studies has learned anything over the last twenty years, it is how highly contextual literacy and cognition can be; people's skills reside in and lean on particular contexts, practices, and human relationships." This more elaborated concept of literacy makes visible both the appropriate but also the *unintended* consequences of social policy and educational activity.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Developing countries are often multilingual contexts. The specific languages of these cultures and their role in the society are important because they influence student achievement in very specific ways. In planning policy and practice, it is important to consider questions like (a) What is the official language? (b) What language(s) do people actually speak and use? (c) What language is used by professionals to conduct business and government affairs? (d) What is the language of instruction? (e) What texts are available? In what languages?

The research literature is filled with examples of the challenges facing those who teach children to read in multilingual environments with limited print (see Lipson & Biggam, 2005; Lipson & Wixson, 2004). Children all over the world speak one language at home and another in school. Many speak a language that is not the language of instruction and, not infrequently, the language of instruction is different still from the language they are being asked to read. There are some excellent examples of literacy programs designed to help children acquire literacy in their first language while at the same time needing, eventually, to learn to read in a different one (Akinnaso, 1993; Bamgbose, 2000; Dutcher, 1995).

Despite the success of these programs, they can carry with them some unintended consequences. For example, in northern Ghana, the official language is English and the language of instruction after the primary grades is officially English. Yet, no one speaks English. In some of these villages, children will participate in an early reading program designed for children to learn to read in "mother tongue" (e.g., Gonja, one of the 8–11 other officially recognized languages). The problem is that many of these children do not speak *that* language at home, either. In schools where there is more than one mother-tongue language, only one will be used. Thus, it is possible for a 6-year-old child to come to school speaking Wali, for example. Then, she has a teacher who speaks Gonja and is trying to teach her to read in that second language, and then—after two years—she will be asked to "transition" to English for both reading and instruction (although the classroom teacher may not actually speak much English either).

This scenario highlights several important, but unintended, consequences of even the "best" practices. First, no matter what the official policy, the language of instruction is often the local language. Second, the language of instruction (and text) is often different at the secondary level and accessed by relatively few students. Finally, students' knowledge and skill in the school-sanctioned language are generally not sophisticated enough to engage in higher level thinking.

Other unintended consequences of language policies and literacy practices are related to the features of diverse languages. Inattention to the nature of the language can result in assessment and instruction practices that are ill-suited to the target language. For example, "phonics" knowledge and skill are crucial to learning to read in alphabetic languages (like English, Spanish, Kiswahili, even Arabic). But not all languages are alphabetic. Logographic languages like Chinese and Japanese (Kanji) rely on different knowledge and skill. In addition, even so-called alphabetic languages are very distinctly different from each other. In Spanish, for example, there is an almost completely transparent one-to-one correspondence between sounds (phonemes) and letters/letter combinations (graphemes), whereas in English there are more phonemes than letters and also multiple ways to represent a given phoneme (for example, /a/ can be represented as *maid*, *made*, *hay*, *hey*, *neigh*, *straight*, *great*). And, in Arabic, only the consonants are represented in most written text. Thus, learning to read is highly dependent on the language to be learned. Without careful consideration, we may spend too much time on some outcomes that are not needed and not enough on those that will be challenging.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Good professional development is essential to the improvement of literacy achievement in such complicated settings. It can help teachers to feel efficacious and more committed to helping all students. Similarly, packaged programs can help teachers with limited expertise to provide improved (if not ideal) instruction. These intended consequences need to be balanced against the reality that the new techniques teachers are acquiring may not be supported by the resources or contexts. If teachers do not have essential materials, they will quickly abandon even the most promising practices. When they do have materials and resources, they must be taught to use them flexibly and creatively because their specific contexts are likely to be quite different from the intended ones. Alternatively, when schools are given materials but no professional development, the texts often languish in locked spaces, sometimes in unopened packages.

LITERACY ASSESSMENT

The development of good early reading assessments is potentially very helpful because assessments of early literacy learning can provide a more sensitive measure of progress than has generally been available in international literacy contexts. Large-scale assessments such as Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which assesses students' reading ability in grade 4 (see Baers, Baldi, Ayotte, & Green, 2007), provide a snapshot of students' functional skills long after the initial stages of literacy. While useful for long-term tracking of the big picture, these types of assessment are not useful in measuring near-term progress—for either students or new initiatives. In the United States and elsewhere, the development of reliable and valid early literacy assessments has resulted in more powerful evaluations of growth and opportunities to inform decision making (see, e.g., Clay, 2002; Denton, Ciancio, & Fletcher, 2006; Lipson & Wixson, 2004; Rathvon, 2004; Sprenger-Charolles, 2008).

Assessment can help teachers and policymakers collect longitudinal change data and monitor progress over time, but the wise development and use of new tools is especially critical in the assessment arena. There is very good evidence that what gets assessed is what gets taught (Au, 2007; Popham, 2000). For a variety reasons, high-stakes assessments often become "curricular targets" (Madaus, 1988), which can lead well-intentioned teachers to focus time and attention on inappropriate tasks.

Tests that are suitable for screening or measuring aggregate achievement generally contain tasks that are only a weak "proxy" for the actual behavior we are after. For example, although rapid reading of nonsense words is quite highly correlated with other measures of reading, no one thinks that this is a desirable outcome of literacy instruction. Rather, it is a by-product of learning to read well, not the object of it. In its most benign form, this can result in what Andy Porter (2000) calls "lumpiness": "High-stakes assessment can make the enacted curriculum (what is actually taught) lumpy. Lumpiness in the enacted curriculum happens when parts of the desired curriculum receive excess focus while other equally important content is underemphasized." In its least benign form, the wrong types of testing can actually do harm (Popham, 2000). By creating the wrong image of the fundamental nature of literacy it creates the wrong goals—for teachers and for students. Importantly, it may divert attention (and resources) away from the practices and materials that will be essential to achieve ambitious goals.

We know, for example, that phonological development plays a pivotal role in early reading achievement in alphabetic languages like English (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; National Research Council, 1998). This has caused a significant increase in the amount of attention focused on phonics assessment and instruction. However, even in alphabetic languages like English, phonological development has a somewhat limited impact on later reading comprehension (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Torgesen et al., 1999). The vocabulary development of very young children, on the other hand, predicts comprehension at later grades (e.g., grade 4; see Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001). Any instruction and assessment program that does not address and include measures of comprehension and vocabulary *from the very beginning* is likely to create a response that is "lumpy" at best and almost certainly unsuccessful.

LEARNING FROM SUCCESS: RESEARCH ON SCHOOL CHANGE AND LITERACY REFORM

There is a growing body of evidence on "what works" at the school level to increase literacy achievement (see, e.g., Taylor & Pearson, 2002; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). My colleagues and I have been studying successful schools for almost a decade (see Lipson, Mosenthal, Mekkelsen, & Russ, 2004; Mosenthal, Lipson, Torncello, Russ, & Mekkelsen, 2004). The results of this work are consistent with that done by other researchers (see Consortium for Responsible School Change in Literacy online at cehd.umn.edu/reading/SchoolChange.html); it suggests there is a small but essential set of factors that result in improved outcomes for all students, but especially high-poverty students. The four major elements that emerge from our work are (1) expertise, (2) opportunity, (3) commitment and stability, and (4) school community. Each of these has relevance in the developing countries and can create a framework for considering both intended and unintended consequences.

EXPERTISE

Teachers in successful schools are knowledgeable about good practice, are able to use time effectively during instruction, and are expert in managing complex activity (using small groups, independent work, etc.). It is important to know that in our studies (and in many others since then) there was no *one kind* of program that was used in all successful schools. In fact, there were programs that were used in both successful and less-successful schools—suggesting that teacher expertise is likely more important than specific programs.

OPPORTUNITY

The quantity of books available and the amount of time devoted to sustained engagement with reading, writing, and discussion are critical to success. Importantly, the texts need to be accessible to students—both physically accessible (students are able to select texts during the day for reading practice and pleasure) and also cognitively accessible (there is a wide variety of texts at different levels of difficulty).

COMMITMENT AND STABILITY

All of the successful schools we studied, and those we have worked with subsequently, have maintained a long-term commitment to literacy improvement (8–10 years). In addition, they have enjoyed stable leadership from an administrator or key teacher. Success in worthwhile literacy achievement takes time, and someone needs to maintain and extend the literacy focus. This requires building internal expertise and systems for sustaining change over time.

SCHOOL COMMUNITY

The individuals involved with successful schools share a common vision that generally evolves over time. Successful schools are characterized by collaboration, an orientation to problem solving using data, and coherence across teachers and grades. Importantly, the school community is culturally responsive to the larger context—taking into account the goals and expectations of parents and others. A recent study by Sailors, Hoffman, and Matthee (2007) suggests that most of these key elements are critical to success in South African schools as well.

LITERACY INITIATIVES/POLICIES WITH POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Taken together, the evidence from varied sources points to many lessons learned. To make progress, we must

- Collaborate
- Create coherent frameworks for literacy development ages 5–12 (minimally)
- Develop expertise
- Stay focused over time (8–10 years)
- Provide and/or support the development of instructional and other print materials
- Consider the local context and language(s)
- Try to anticipate the consequences—both intended and unintended.

There are probably no individuals or agencies in the world that are better positioned to take up this challenge than those who work on international literacy efforts. As Fullan (1997) has noted, "Productive educational change roams somewhere between over-control and chaos…. You cannot mandate what matters because what really matters for complex goals of change are skills, creative thinking, and committed action" (pp. 33–34). We have an opportunity at this time to dig deeper and to think harder to move down a road that will take a long time to travel. There is a good deal of evidence that systemic change can help schools to overcome educational inequality (O'Day & Smith, 1993). Only if we are working together—across agencies and institutions and with international partners—will we have any chance of arriving there.

Panel: Success in Early Grade Reading Project in Mali and Niger

Mr. Djibo Alfari
Country Learning Advisor, Plan International, Niger

Plan International (plan-international.org) is a child-centered nonprofit organization with the mission to improve the rights and conditions of children in 49 developing countries in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Plan USA (www.planusa.org) is the U.S. affiliate of Plan International. Basic Education is one of our program pillars, with investments of nearly $100 million every year worldwide. In Mali and Niger, Plan's education and development programs reach nearly 750,000 people in rural and urban areas. Our programs in Niger, where I am from, are focused on building schools and teacher training.

SUCCESS IN EARLY READING PILOT PROJECT

This project was one year in duration (2007–2008). The total direct cost was $255,000, and the program covered the Dosso and Tillabery regions in Niger and the Baguineda region in Mali. In Niger and Mali, pretesting by Plan showed none of the students, through grade 6, could read more than 15 words per minute in any language. In addition, evaluations done in 2007 by the Ministry of Education of Niger showed 71% of first-grade students did not meet the minimum requirements in reading or writing in French. This situation is widespread in most Sahelian countries, because teachers must cope with large and multigrade classes, they lack instructional materials, and pupils lack the necessary learning tools. Additionally, many teachers are ill-equipped to teach foundational reading literacy and numeracy skills, and teacher-centered pedagogy stresses lectures and memorization rather than active learning.

In 2007, my colleagues in Niger and Mali joined forced with our U.S. affiliate, Plan USA, to begin a one-year pilot project to improve reading abilities in the early grades. Our pilot project tackled three issues: (1) the need for children to master reading skills, (2) experimentation with improved methods for reading instruction using national languages (Bamanankan, Zarma), and (3) building capacity for the development of locally based assessment tools and supplemental reading materials. The project applied the Systematic Method for Reading Success (SMRS) developed by Dr. Sandra Hollingsworth from the University of California at Berkeley in collaboration with Plan. This method is inspired by the method called SIPPS (Systematic Instruction in Phoneme Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words) with the following core steps: (1) phonemic awareness (recognition of sounds that make up words; connecting letters to speech); (2) slow introduction of one- or two-letter sound combinations and one or two sight words that students can practice, thus enabling them to recognize sounds and words in a given text; (3) use of pictures to illustrate other words (sight words); (4) listening to the teacher read aloud, followed by vocabulary and comprehension questions; and (5) rereading at each individual student's own pace.

In our experience, the Success in Early Reading method demonstrates results to teachers and parents in a very short time, thus encouraging enthusiasm around schooling. Moreover, it is designed for teachers with little pedagogical experience, schools with limited resources, and oversized classes. Teachers are trained on how to use simple assessment tools to evaluate students' skills on an ongoing basis. SMRS is easily implemented in school curricula with minimal disruptions since it is only implemented for a four- to five-month period at the beginning of the school year. This makes it cost-effective and time-limited.

Since the method is uniquely based on maternal languages, Plan worked with local non-government organizations (NGOs) and the Ministries of Education in the two countries. In Mali, Plan worked with the Institut pour l'Education Populaire (IEP) to undertake the project in Bamanankan language. Participants included 1,295 first-grade students in 25 rural primary schools. In Niger, Plan partnered with the local NGO, Volontaires pour l'Integration Educative (VIE), to implement the project in the Zarma language. Participants included 390 children aged 8 to 17 in 16 second-chance rural schools. Second-chance schools were created by Plan to create an accelerated learning education program for adolescent children who were not previously given the opportunity to attend formal primary schooling and are therefore illiterate.

KEY STEPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PILOT

Key steps included (1) the development and pretesting of tools to assess the reading competencies of pupils; (2) the development of instructional materials, teachers guides, pupil and teacher observation tools, and pupil readers; (3) the initial training of teachers and supervisory staff on the program and booklets; (4) class instruction (30-minute daily lessons) based on the two booklets for 5 months (Niger) or 6 months (Mali). Monitoring visits were conducted by the staff of NGO partners at the end of every 10 lessons.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Students were tested on letter recognition, word recognition, and reading and comprehension. In Niger, 193 pupils from 15 schools were tested (May 2008). In Mali, 240 students from 12 schools were tested (June 2008). In Mali, half of the schools tested were control schools demonstrating similar characteristics with pilot schools. No control schools were used in Niger. Results included the following: (1) for letter recognition, in Mali, 49% of children recognized at least 21 of 27 letters in the Banamankan alphabet (vs. 2% in control schools), while in Niger, 46% of students recognized at least 24 of the 30 letters in the Zarma alphabet; (2) for word recognition, in Mali, 42% of students read at least 5 of 10 words correctly (vs. 2% in control schools), while in Niger, 46% of students read at least 5 of 10 words in the test; (3) for reading/listening comprehension, in Mali, 96% of respondents from pilot schools were able to answer correctly 4 or more questions from a text a teacher read aloud (vs. 46% from control schools), while in Niger, 22% of the participating students tested were able to read 40 or more words correctly and respond correctly to 3 or more questions.

In addition to the test results, the anecdotal comments from parents and teachers also demonstrated the impact of the program. One teacher in Mali, Aminata Diarra, expressed the interest of students in the program:

> I have three students in my class who had abandoned school, but after we started giving out the booklets to the class, they came back. Now, these students are in class and have the best

attendance. In addition to reading activities, I also use the images from the method as tools in teaching calculus.

It is important to note that the monitoring visits identified several factors correlated with the students' reading performance, including (1) the teacher's mastery of the method and his or her ability to speak, read, or write in the maternal languages (correlated with high performance, and (2) class size and student and teacher absenteeism (correlated with low performance).

In Niger, Plan has actively engaged the government authorities; the Secretary General of the Ministry of Education has expressed an interest in extending this method to the regular primary schools and the new bilingual schools starting in fall of 2009. My colleagues in Mali are also partnering with their Ministry of Education to negotiate external funding for the program.

There is significant scale-up potential for this method. Several country programs in West Africa face similarly challenged learning environments, and this method can be easily and rapidly introduced at the classroom level with minimum disruptions to existing school curricula. SMRS is proving to be a time-limited and cost-effective contribution to early childhood literacy that can successively contribute to a child's ability to learn a fundamental skill that will allow him or her to more fully participate in the development of his or her society.

Panel: Basic Education and USAID

Dr. Joseph P. Carney

Director, Office of Education, Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, USAID

Basic education is an important focus of USAID's foreign assistance programs. As the foundation for all learning, basic education enables individuals and nations to survive and thrive under changing social and economic conditions. In fiscal year 2010, funding for basic education is expected to increase dramatically from more than $700 million in 2008 and 2009 to more than $965 million. Ten years ago, U.S. assistance to basic education was less than $100 million.

The ability to read, write, and compute is at the core of USAID-sponsored activities, and the international donor community is recognizing literacy as an important component in the quest for universal primary education. Education for All and the recent White House Initiative on Global Literacy have helped draw attention to the consequences of global illiteracy and to the impact of many important and innovative solutions. However, midway through the United Nation's Decade on Literacy, there is still a long way to go with much to be done. Nearly 300 million children and youth do not attend school, and there are more than 700 million illiterate adults worldwide. Although primary school enrollment worldwide is rising, there is still great concern over the lack of access to quality teaching and student learning. To address this mounting concern, USAID's support for basic education will expand its focus on underserved and at-risk populations, particularly youth and women and girls in conflict and post-conflict countries. Monitoring and evaluating its activities, as well as measuring learning outcomes and results, will also become more important strategies for demonstrating progress and accountability.

For the past several years, an important USAID-sponsored program has been the Africa Education Initiative, a $600 million multiyear program of girls' scholarships, textbooks for classrooms, and teacher training opportunities. The initiative's Textbooks and Learning Materials Program has produced about 15 million much-needed textbooks and learning materials since its inception, and the program has helped build capacity within Senegal, Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania (Zanzibar), Zambia, and Ghana.

Textbooks and supplemental learning materials represent a significant aspect of USAID's education programs. In Ethiopia, 1.5 million textbooks and 25,000 teachers' guides have been distributed. *English for Ethiopia*, which consisted of a student book and teacher's guide for first graders, has been adapted by the Ministry of Education as a radio program for broadcasting to first-grade classrooms throughout Ethiopia. The book is also being translated into Braille. The books incorporate some reading aloud, prereading activities, and higher level thinking skills; however, the bulk of the book is used to learn letters of the alphabet and their sounds.

Teacher training is widely supported by USAID through professional development projects that encourage active and child-centered learning. One goal of teacher training is to help teachers improve their reading and writing instruction. In Ghana, for example, instructional reviewers were surprised to find fourth graders who could not be tested because of their lack of reading and writing skills. In addition to teacher training, Ghana officials have begun to implement assessments in the early grades to ensure that children acquire the skills they need early enough to be successful throughout the rest of their school careers.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), which was initially developed by RTI International and Luis Crouch as part of a USAID-sponsored data collection project, is showing promise as a diagnostic tool and has been enthusiastically embraced by USAID's technical staff, as well as host countries and other donors. EGRA has become an important focus of our basic education portfolio, and in October 2008 it was included as a major element of the federal government's basic education strategy mandated by the U.S. Congress.

The goal of EGRA is to ensure that children learn to read in the first years of school—that is they can decode text, read with appropriate speed and accuracy, and understand what they read. Based on the work of Helen Abadzi (2006), the assessment measures reading fluency and comprehension in terms that are meaningful and easily understood so that reading proficiency improves. In her work, Abadzi concluded that international educators serving the poor in low-income countries need to understand the factors that influence learning, particularly short-term memory, a crucial function for reading that requires that students be able to read at least 7 words in 12 seconds. With additional funding from the World Bank, the first EGRA instruments were piloted in French, Wolof (in Senegal), English (Gambia), and Spanish (Nicaragua). Since then, EGRA has become an important diagnostic tool that has been adapted and applied in 23 languages in 18 countries.

Initial experience from USAID missions has shown that a national assessment provides baseline understanding of reading levels, identifies gaps in the curriculum, provides information to plan for teacher professional development, and gathers information for goal setting. The data acquired from these assessments have offered new insight into teacher practices in rigorous but easy-to-understand ways.

In Liberia, EGRA is used in conjunction with helping to introduce more effective practices for teaching reading and for providing standards information for parents and teachers. In Nicaragua, the EGRA methodology is being used to track performance in various projects and to evaluate the results of those projects against other standard public schools. In Kenya, important reading gains have been made in a USAID mission-funded project implemented with the Aga Khan Foundation and district education managers. In Pakistan, the EGRA approach has been used to create a simple index of school reading results. The list of countries using EGRA is growing: EGRA has also been applied in Haiti, Guyana, South Africa, Bangladesh, and Egypt, and baseline work will be carried out in Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, Mali, and Yemen.

Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) is another long-standing innovation that USAID continues to support as a successful and effective classroom teaching and learning tool. IRI is used to deliver lessons on early grade competencies to classroom teachers and volunteers working outside of traditional schools. Typically used to teach reading and math skills, studies have found significant gains in learning with IRI in grades 1 to 4 and the potential for even wider application with out-of-school youth and adults.

USAID is currently developing a new strategic framework that will likely include early grade competencies, starting with reading, as indicators of education quality. An Early Grade Math Assessment has been developed and is being piloted along with the Snapshot of School Management Effectiveness to look at additional factors related to student performance like teacher attendance and time on task. Taken together, we are hoping that these school survey instruments will help us better understand school and classroom learning dynamics and how to use available resources more efficiently.

While recognizing the importance of helping children learn to read early and well, USAID continues to look for effective learning opportunities for at-risk and underserved youth and adults, particularly women and girls. Basic reading and literacy skills make it possible for all learners to care for themselves and their families and participate more fully as productive members of their communities.

Panel: The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)

Dr. Amber Gove

Senior Education Researcher, Research Triangle Institute International

Like many economists and policy analysts working in international development, for many years I took learning and assessment of learning outcomes for granted. Learning was best left to teachers and curriculum specialists, and those of us on the policy side were supposed to take their word for it. We focused on the inputs to the system, tinkering at the margins, and as many have noted in recent years, after decades of investment we wound up having precious little to show for it.

For better or for worse, many of the economists and policy wonks are now meddling in the business of understanding learning outcomes, and in particular reading. The reasons for this conversion are myriad, but in my case derive from a frustration with the existing international assessments (PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS, and the like), which weren't really helping to improve learning in the countries where I work. These assessments are good at telling countries what their students do not know, but are not very helpful in providing solutions for how to improve instruction or in documenting what students do know.

In my brief comments today I'll tell you a bit about the development of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), its implications for instruction and remediation, and the next steps in reaching the goal of Effective Reading for All.

First, to be clear, EGRA is not owned or copyrighted by RTI. This was very deliberate—we believe that simple, effective approaches deserve to be replicated rather than restricted. For this reason all of our instruments and documentation are available on our USAID-funded project website: www.eddataglobal.org (including a recently released toolkit for developing and using EGRA). Following an initial development investment by USAID/Washington, EGRA has spread quickly: At last count, EGRA and EGRA-based assessments had been tried in more than 20 languages in 20 countries ranging from Egypt to Nicaragua to Senegal.

EGRA was designed to be a system-level diagnostic, or policy-level "dipstick," for understanding student acquisition of emergent literacy skills. Requiring about 15 minutes per child to administer, EGRA is an individual oral assessment of those skills deemed to be necessary but not sufficient for becoming a successful reader. EGRA is a cost-effective approach in that in each of the countries where it has been used to date there have been far-reaching policy changes and discussion following a relatively small initial investment. It is not a high-stakes exam, and in its current form (containing a full battery of foundation skills assessments ranging from phonemic awareness to oral reading fluency with comprehension) it is not meant to be used by teachers in the classroom.

The evidence from the early reading assessments conducted to date reveal disheartening results: average third-grade reading levels in English of about 10 to 20 correct words per minute, with virtually no comprehension in many countries. That is about one word every three to six seconds; in the United States we expect students to be able to read about 60 words

per minute (or about 1 word per second) by the end of *first* grade. More worrisome, in one country, nearly half of third-grade students (46%) could not correctly read a single word of connected text.

The evidence-based instructional approaches under development include a detailed scope and sequence for imparting the essential components of reading instruction outlined by the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), namely phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and, above all, comprehension. For languages other than English, we work closely with local-language and curriculum specialists to develop an appropriate scope and sequence; for example, the transparent orthography of many local languages reduces the amount of instruction needed for understanding the relationship between sounds and letters.

The results of these experiments are promising, demonstrating significant improvements in reading fluency and comprehension in less than a year. Based on these results, we believe that with lots of instructional support and quality materials it is possible to ensure that all students read fluently and with comprehension by the end of second or third grade.

Which leads me to my final topic: What are the next steps for EGRA and the goal of Effective Reading for All? There are a few more issues to be tackled along the way.

First, language of instruction is a critical issue for many children around the world. Imagine finally figuring out that the letter *c* makes a /k/ sound, that *a* (sometimes) has a short /a/ sound, and that *t* sounds like /t/, but you have no idea what a "cat" really is. For many children learning to read in a language that is not their own, they may learn the mechanics of reading (even in a second or third language) but lack the vocabulary for making it stick. Accumulated evidence from high-income countries indicates that quality mother-tongue instruction, prior to or in parallel with second-language instruction, is one of the best ways to ensure that children become literate *in the second language*. We need more research in this area in low-income countries, and some of us are trying to better understand what it means to teach and learn in multiple languages.

Second, access to reading materials, of any sort, is a real problem in most schools. Without access to authentic literacy materials, including children's literature, textbooks, and locally produced books, there is little chance students will retain their newly acquired reading skills, even if they are fortunate enough to learn to read.

Third, we need to be very careful about the consequences of our approaches. We all know the lesson "that which we measure becomes important." In the case of EGRA, fluency has become a touchstone, and many have been tempted to advocate for 60 words per minute for all. For this reason we are very careful to stress in all of our communications that fluency is not just about rate. Fluency is a means to an end: comprehension.

Finally, as our experiment in Kenya has shown us, teachers are professionals: hungry for materials and strategies to help their students learn. But they are underprepared, undersupported, and underresourced. If we truly wish to ensure Effective Reading for All, we must begin by supporting teachers in the classroom with professional development opportunities based on concrete, content-driven approaches and an abundant supply of materials.

Panel: Literacy in Developing Countries

Dr. James Hoffman

Professor, University of Texas at Austin

I have divided my brief comments for this panel segment of the day into three areas with respect to literacy projects in developing countries:

1. What needs attention that we can't affect immediately but must keep in focus for the long run
2. What is needed that we can effect now if we set priorities and invest the resources we have in smart ways
3. What is not needed that we are doing and we must stop

Here are eight areas that I think need attention that we can't affect immediately but must get started on now and keep in focus over the long run:

1. Provision for the health and physical and psychological safety of children and teachers
2. Programs of teacher preparation that provide a sufficient supply of teachers who are prepared to teach
3. Access to quality schools for all (not just some) learners at all levels
4. Reasonable class sizes
5. Attention to special needs learners
6. Language policies that match the demands and capacity of the systems to deliver
7. Coherent and comprehensive national curriculum and standards
8. Greater private sector capacity (e.g., in publishing and printing)

I won't elaborate on these. We all know the reality of 100 children in a classroom, of schools that exclude the poor through exorbitant fee structures, of children coming to school undernourished, of children who come to school and can't find the language they speak. These are challenging areas that we must work to change, but in the meantime we must also plan our aid in ways that are considerate of these challenges and limitations.

Here are four areas where there is need and I believe we can make an impact now if we set priorities, focus our energies, and invest in smart ways.

1. *We must ensure classrooms are resourced with high-quality reading materials, with variety—including the use of electronic texts (in languages that are appropriate and in the quantities that are needed).* We have been working over the past three years in the Ithuba Writing Project in South Africa supported by the USAID Textbooks and Learning Materials Program. We have been developing supplementary reading materials for grades 4, 5, and 6, written in Africa, authored by educators in all 11 official languages, printed in Africa, illustrated in Africa with accompany teacher guides linked to the national curriculum. We are printing 2.2 million books

and teacher guides. We are resourcing 2,200 of the lowest performing schools in South Africa with these materials. Ithuba is just one example of the kind of book development work needed in Africa and other developing countries.

2. *We must prepare teachers in the effective use of these materials to teach basic reading skills and to teach content*. A book flood is not enough. Teachers must be supported in the use of materials. In the Learning for Living Project in South Africa we worked in 1,000 schools with 10,000 teachers for five years. We provided quality reading materials, training, and support for implementation. Data from both our internal evaluation and the independent, external evaluation showed statistically significant impact on the reading skills of participating children in word recognition, fluency, and comprehension.

3. *We must teach writing along with reading*. Reading instruction without writing instruction is inherently oppressive in its message to learners. Our observational studies in South Africa document that lack of writing instruction beyond copy work and spelling in schools. The Ithuba Writing Project is about book development, but it is also about preparing teachers to reform their approach to writing. We are thinking along the lines of the National Writing Project in the United States as a model for future work to support the teaching of writing.

4. *We must work to instill a spirit of evaluation and research in the context of schooling*. Teachers must learn to gather, interpret, and use data to inform practice. Assessment as a tool to learn and improve is essential to becoming independent as a teacher/learner.

Finally, here are two things we do not need that we are doing and must stop.

1. *False promises*. We cannot make claims for the impact of programs and approaches that are not supported in research or data. I will use EGRA as the example here because I am somewhat familiar with it—but I am certain there are others. The EGRA intervention "pilot" program in South Africa is currently being promoted as a "no fail approach." "Seventy-five lessons to guaranteed reading mastery!" "Automatic transfer of phonics training in English to home languages." The last time I heard claims this bold was on radio and TV promotions of Hooked on Phonics. Let me be clear, I am not opposed to phonemic awareness instruction and decoding instruction as part of a comprehensive reading program. But if we have learned anything from reading research it is that there is no easy way and no certain way. It is the knowing, flexible, adaptive teacher that makes the difference. We must not promise what we cannot deliver.

2. *False premises*. What do we do if there are no materials? If there are no materials, then we must start with materials development. The Ithuba books are currently costing around 25 cents each to print. For $6 million we could fully resource all of 5,000 primary schools in Malawi with 5,000 books per school. That's 2.8 million children with at least 6 books per child. Currently the USAID education budget to Malawi is over $35 million per year. Why not quality books? USAID to Mali is $15 million per year in education quality. There are 1.2 million kids in primary schools in Mali. We could provide, or better still support, the development of books for these countries with a reasonable allocation of the budget.

We must, once we do this resourcing, look at teacher preparation to use these materials effectively. We can work with governments to resource. We can train teachers in how to use these books to support literacy learning, writing, and content learning. The total cost for supporting teachers to implementation in the Learning for Living Project was around R48 ($4.80 per child). Staff development can be done at reasonable expense.

Panel: Education for All Fast Track Initiative

Dr. Robert Prouty
Acting Head, Education for All Fast Track Initiative Secretariat

The Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is a partnership that has achieved considerable success in terms of improving access to primary schooling in low-income countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, there has been an increase of more than 50% in enrollments in FTI countries over the past six years as compared with about 20% in non-FTI countries. However, there is growing concern that little progress is being made in terms of whether children are learning, which is the point of the whole exercise, after all.

It is encouraging in this respect to note that over the past several years, there has been an unprecedented amount of attention on reading within the international community. Within the FTI partnership, we have identified a focus on learning, and learning to read, as among our key priorities for the current year. We will shortly add an indicator of reading to our Indicative Framework, the set of indicators for which all FTI countries are expected to establish locally agreed and internationally validated values and targets. The indicator will be straightforward: that children at the end of grade 2 and at the end of the primary cycle read at a rate of words correct per minute sufficient to allow comprehension of grade-appropriate texts. We will provide support to all FTI countries for this purpose, and we will monitor progress.

Speaking of purpose, the purpose of reading is understanding. And understanding is achieved when children make connections between what they read and the knowledge that they already have acquired. Children who have no access to reading materials that build on what they already have acquired, whether language, culture, or geography, are seriously disadvantaged.

Which brings me to my main point today: When it comes to reading, we have gotten one thing right and at least four things wrong. The international community has come to the understanding, somewhat timidly, that the single most important function of primary schooling is to teach children to read. This we have gotten right. But we're getting four things wrong. One, we have supported the wrong kinds of assessment by the wrong people for the wrong purposes. Two, we have done almost nothing to increase instructional time on reading and to improve methods for teaching reading. Three, we have done very little advocacy around reading—certainly nothing compared with what was done in the 1990s around girls' access to school, even though those girls are still not learning to read. And four, we have not made trade books and storybooks or reading books other than the occasional textbook available to all children and their parents as a fundamental right.

I used to ask teachers, when I would visit a school, how many of them had ever read a book for pleasure. I have stopped asking this question because the answer was always the same—none of them had—and the question came to seem almost an accusation that there was something wrong with these teachers, whereas the real problem is simply that with no reading books available in most places, and certainly none geared to the specific circumstances of life

in most of these communities, or in the mother tongue of the community, the idea of reading for pleasure has little meaning.

Here is my modest four-point prescription for righting these wrongs. First, assessment. Donors see an opening and are moving quickly into the assessment business. This is something for which they have expertise available, and it serves their need to demonstrate results in an area on whose importance everyone agrees. But they shouldn't do it. They should get out of the assessment business. Countries can do this and should do it. World Bank experts shouldn't. USAID shouldn't. The Research Triangle Institute shouldn't. The Educational Testing Service shouldn't. Not in developing countries where there are tough choices to be made.

There is, of course, a role for all of these organizations in setting things up, in developing frameworks, tools, instruments. But assessment should be a national process. Reading assessment should be cheap and calibrated to currently existing capacity within countries. International testing such as pre-PIRLS can have a role, but this should be understood as an add-on to provide additional information. The core business of assessment should be the core business of the education sector. Those who make operational choices need access to good data; teachers need to know how their children are doing. This is where evidence-based policy really matters. Donors can help with the policy dialogue to make this happen and can insist that it happen as a condition of funding.

Prescription point two: Donors should focus on making trade books, reading books available to schools. These are books developed locally, in a language the child understands. Donors can also support language of instruction policies that make it more likely that the child will be learning in a language he or she understands. (And an aside here: Classrooms aren't the unit of intervention—schools are. Reading is the business of the entire school—a classroom here and there, an enlightened teacher here and there is good, but it's not enough.) This, by the way, means local procurement, school-level budgets for buying books, development of local publishing industries. Trade books, not textbooks, are the first step to developing such industries. Authors will emerge and support will be needed to help it happen. Procurement rules will need to change. Donors can do this. FTI will support it.

Three, there should be a concerted effort at the country level to support teaching of reading—better methods, more hours of instruction. This should not be in the form of pilot projects. Pilot projects often are planned around the assumption that there is one best way that can be tested and then taken to scale. But there are many best ways, and enough is known that efforts should be national in scope and refined in the course of going forward. Nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and those donors with intimate country knowledge can provide support.

There is a risk here of aiming too low. Because learning levels are so depressed, we may think that mere letter recognition is a sign of progress. And perhaps it is, but surely the fact that 50% of children rather than 2% of children can cite 21 of 27 letters of the alphabet is no cause for rejoicing. And we must already plan for the children for whom no thought is given at present—children with learning disabilities, for instance.

And four, there needs to be a strong advocacy push. The NGO community is too focused on finances and not sufficiently focused on learning and reading. And we should stop talking about education in the abstract as a human right and start talking concretely about reading as a fundamental human right. The focus on access in the 1990s, and in particular the focus on getting girls into school, was highly successful, as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough because it didn't focus on getting girls reading. And that is where the big payoff will come.

Summary of Morning Plenary Open Discussion

When the panelists finished their remarks, participants were invited to participate in an open discussion around the issues raised. Questions and comments centered on two broad themes: (1) the availability of quality and culturally relevant reading material to children in the project countries and (2) the role of media in literacy projects for children.

Dr. Hoffman began the discussion by responding to a question about the difficulties he has encountered in trying to make books accessible to children. He said that one of the biggest challenges is helping education ministries that struggle to meet the high demand for school textbooks to understand the importance of resourcing children's books. Hoffman noted that the concern about book security in many schools means books are less accessible to the children who need them. After books are read, they tend to be packed up and put into a central library. Teachers don't know how to set them out for children to self-select for independent reading time; instead, they're kept under close control.

In spite of these challenges, Dr. Hoffman stated that in Zambia, excellent libraries are being built for children who are out of school. This is being done in a coordinated way with community schools, which will have access to these libraries. Four thousand volumes in a well-balanced collection including trade books in local languages are planned for the libraries.

In response to a question about the extent to which folklore, legends, and stories that have been passed on orally have been turned into print books, the keynote speaker and panelists gave the following replies.

Dr. Lipson said there have been attempts to do this, as in the children's book project from Canada working in Zambia. In this project, excellent materials have been produced, though problems remain with helping teachers and others learn how to use the book resources even when provided.

Dr. Prouty suggested that these types of books are important, but projects that supply books for children should be more ambitious. There is a need for many more books of a variety of genres and topics for students to access. Millions of books should be made available, according to Dr. Prouty, since they only cost about $1 each.

Dr. Hoffman said the project he has been a part of in South Africa has focused on folklore, and that he anticipated more of those stories being used as the source material for children's literacy development. Dr. Hoffman stressed the importance of developing books from local writers to help children find texts that are interesting and enjoyable to read. To nurture local authors and illustrators, there will be workshops on writing and illustrating children's books.

Mr. Alfari commented that in Niger, there are many books but not necessarily in a language the children can understand.

Another important conversation focused on the role media can play in literacy projects in the developing world. Dr. Carney commented that USAID has put millions into Sesame Street programs and is evaluating their effect on children in the first four years. Carney said he finds real value in all types of media, especially interactive, digital media. Dr. Hoffman indicated that some projects in Africa are using interactive radio programs to supplement print resources. Mr. Sakil Malik (International Reading Association) said there are major professional development efforts underway for teachers to learn to use telecommunications

technology to span vast spaces. Dr. Gove stressed the need for digital infrastructure and hardware/software to take full advantage of media. Dr. Prouty urged caution with respect to large infusions of funds for technology when so many students need critical print exposures first.

Summary of Breakout Sessions

ASSESSMENT

Led by Dr. Amber Gove

After brief introductions, Dr. Gove set the theme for the discussion by asking participants to consider problems she and others have with current broad-scale reading assessments, such as PISA and PIRLS, and how the development of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) was a response to these problems.

Questions immediately arose about EGRA. In response, Gove described the work being done in Haiti and Africa. She said EGRA is based on National Reading Panel's 5 pillars and that it is used as a policy dialogue tool, that is, a system diagnostic. EGRA includes a battery of 6 or 7 test components used at 3 grades. Dr. Gove said EGRA revealed that children in Gambia were reading below 10 words correct per minute. Similar to DIBELS, a widely used though controversial primary-level reading assessment in the United States, EGRA comprises commonly used words similar to Dolch words in the country, which children are asked to identify. These word lists are developed locally. EGRA also includes nonsense words to determine children's abilities to apply graphophonetic principles. External enumerators are trained to assess children with the EGRA.

Participants commented on the difficulty of working on reading comprehension for children who haven't acquired very basic reading skills. Participants also asked about oral language development and whether EGRA-related assessments might be developed to determine children's listening comprehension. This could be done, it was suggested, with a narrative story with a limited number of words and follow-up comprehension questions. This led to discussion about whether children in the project countries have strong oral traditions and what kinds of stories they hear in their everyday life. These stories could comprise the texts for listening comprehension.

Other comments focused on EGRA's emphasis on graphophonics and decoding. It was stated that children may be able to decode words but may not enjoy language nor develop comprehension skills. The nature of this concern was how assessment, even if it is not high stakes, has a way of controlling curriculum. If decoding and oral reading fluency is the focus of assessment, then instructional modules will target these skills at the expense of reading comprehension.

Another participant wondered why EGRA was developed as a full-battery reading assessment, which necessitates a great deal of time for training enumerators and administering to children. Perhaps a single dimension measure for children with limited literacy ability would be better, given the limited resources and the obvious fact that the literacy needs of children in the project countries are serious and immediate.

Dr. Gove asserted that EGRA is based on the perspective that reading is a set of component skills and that when teachers learn how to teach these component skills they are teaching reading.

Dr. Gove summarized the breakout discussion in the final plenary by offering four points:

1. There is a need for more oral language development and oral practice to increase speaking and listening vocabularies of children.
2. Assessments can be misused if there is a lack of clarity between assessment and purpose. Foundational skills of reading are at the very basic level, and though they may be necessary they are not sufficient for competent reading. EGRA emphasizes those foundation skills, yet they may require different emphasis in different countries.
3. It is difficult to develop early reading assessments that adequately measure oral reading fluency and comprehension, especially when these need to be developed in multiple languages.
4. Be careful about the consequences of assessment. It is important to communicate clearly the purpose of assessment, such as whether it is formative or summative, through effective teacher professional development so teachers will see the value of early reading assessments for helping children and not see them as extra work or punishment.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Led by Dr. James Hoffman

Dr. Hoffman began by stressing that "training" local teachers in global literacy project work is not enough. The training needs to be cemented by follow-up visits and support. He went on to express dissatisfaction with the notion of training teachers. Instead, Dr. Hoffman asserted, we need to support teachers to become informed, flexible decision makers and not merely consumers and enactors of a rigid set of instructional routines. The process is to educate the teachers so they are able to teach wisely. This perspective on teachers has grown out of Dr. Hoffman's vast experiences in literacy projects in Africa, where he has found teachers to be smart, enthusiastic, and eager to learn. He has also found that the teachers fail to receive the kind of support they need the most.

Dr. Hoffman has learned from experience that there needs to be school-based intervention in addition to formal professional development activity that occurs outside of schools. To this end, he stressed the need for commitment from the school, the community, and the teachers themselves, as well as the students and their parents.

Time is a critical factor when establishing meaningful teacher professional development programs. Dr. Hoffman feels at least a five-year commitment should be made for professional development projects. With this commitment there must be constant assessment and evaluation to ensure that the overall goal of students engaged in active learning and teachers engaged in active teaching is achieved.

Dr. Hoffman believes professional development around early literacy should help, with teachers focused on three overarching guidelines as they teach: (1) keeping students' eyes on print, (2) keeping students' hands on print, and (3) keeping students writing. According to Dr. Hoffman, these are guidelines of instruction that easily transfer from culture to culture.

Dr. Hoffman's strong belief in these three guidelines can be traced to his years of literacy project work. For example, in South African schools, Dr. Hoffman found it curious that the classroom walls were bare. There were no posters, no alphabet, and no pictures. To change these circumstances, Dr. Hoffman would like to see writing centers in each school and the display of student compositions throughout the building. Furthermore, Dr. Hoffman encour-

aged taking advantage of local resources for developing and producing more print material for children. As he has discovered, the local cultures have some wonderful stories and folk tales that are handed down through generations, and little books about cultural life and history can be printed there at very small expense.

In the final plenary, Dr. Hoffman summarized the breakout discussion by reiterating his discomfort with language about "training" when talking about teachers as opposed to genuine professional development. We need to promote professionalism so teachers adapt rather than mimic. Hoffman went on to say that communities and schools need to work together and not in isolation to bring about sustainable reforms. It is important, he stated, to develop coaching tools for professional development so teachers can support each other. This should be done through training and school/classroom visits. He further recommended that teachers create observation tools that can be used to reform their own staff development programs. Dr. Hoffman concluded by asserting that meaningful assessments will lead to participants thinking of ways to change the training model to make it more effective for themselves as teachers and more responsive to students.

LANGUAGE CONTEXTS

Led by Dr. Marjorie Lipson and Mr. Djibo Alfari

The discussion began with Dr. Lipson and Mr. Alfari asking for questions and comments from participants related to language contexts in different regions. They noted that language contexts vary widely and thus are important to consider when designing programs.

The first audience comment related to the need for excellent oral language instruction in addition to reading instruction. Mr. Alfari noted that in Niger, students learn French from the first day of school. Dr. Lipson noted that there are many instructional issues related to the number of languages spoken in a country—for example, in Ghana there are 79 languages, with 8 official languages used in schools in addition to English. Other discussion related to the use of mother-tongue instruction in the Philippines, Singapore, and Ghana. Some nations have had schools for children speaking different languages for many years.

The second area of discussion related to differences between languages and how these differences affect the type of instruction and assessment that is necessary. For example, one participant noted that Swahili has very regular sound–symbol relationships and thus is fairly easy to learn to pronounce. However, children have to be taught word meanings and strategies for comprehension. It may appear that children can read well, when in fact they may be struggling with understanding vocabulary and comprehending the meaning of what was read. Dr. Lipson noted that studies have found that having discussions in the children's home language can be very helpful for their comprehension, even when reading instruction is in English (or a different target language). She also noted that it is important to engage children in conversation on a variety of topics, as this provides background knowledge for reading comprehension and future learning.

Another question asked was how people can advocate for resources to teach in mother tongue. Often few materials are available and teachers do not have appropriate preparation. Also, some mother-tongue text developed in one country would not be appropriate in another country, due to differences in background knowledge and culture. Dr. Lipson noted that in some regions teaching all children in mother tongue is not possible due to the number of languages. She said that in the state of Vermont (USA) there are schools with 17 home languages. Another issue relates to the print environment in the community. In some countries or regions there may be little environmental print. However, in other countries print is very

available—for example, one participant mentioned that newspapers are readily available in Tanzania, but not in some other countries in Africa.

Participants also made comments about assessment. It was noted that measures of fluency related to the number of words children can read per minute are used in some regions, but that there has not been enough research to establish standards in most languages. It also is very important to measure comprehension, the most important element of reading. The number of words per minute children read would relate to a variety of textual factors such as difficulty of vocabulary and features of the language of the text. She noted that in a study in Washington state (USA), the researcher (Valencia) identified six distinct profiles of students related to their reading; this type of study illustrates that reading is a very complex construct that should be assessed with multiple measures. There are subgroups of readers who show difficulty in comprehension even though they can read with oral fluency. Lipson stated, "We have no fluency standards for any language other than English—and those are not strong. Some students have a high reading rate (speed) without strong accuracy, and vice versa."

Beyond Access: Challenges and Possibilities

Elizabeth G. Sturtevant and William G. Brozo
Professors, George Mason University

The keynote speaker and expert panel offered many thought-provoking ideas as well as realistic suggestions for creating effective literacy for all. Their firsthand experiences and knowledge of projects in developing countries made them ideal contributors to this important symposium. Discussion around the three major themes of the symposium made it clear that in spite of the effectiveness of several literacy initiatives, many challenges remain.

One theme that permeated discussion was the understanding that any efforts at improving literacy require knowledge of the *language context* in a particular country or region. Children within a classroom are likely to speak a variety of home languages, which makes it difficult to choose a language for initial reading instruction even when the intent is to teach children first in the language with which they are most familiar. In its position statement on *Second-Language Literacy Instruction*, the International Reading Association (2001) notes that worldwide, bilingual and multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers. This position statement also indicates that learning to read is easiest when instruction occurs in a child's home language, and that parents should be able to choose this option. Developing countries (as well as more prosperous countries) face many difficulties related to providing effective literacy instruction given their particular language contexts. For example, teachers may not speak the home language of the children, and books may not be available. Furthermore, content assessment in the primary and/or secondary grades may occur in a national language or in the language of a former colonizer (e.g., English or French). Organizations that seek to provide assistance to developing countries must be aware of the importance of the language context and should seek assistance from educators with knowledge literacy and second-language acquisition as well as the local culture and history.

Regarding *assessment* in global literacy contexts, there is a lack of consensus among the panelists as to what to assess, how to assess it, and who should be responsible for assessment. Some favor approaches that resemble those in common use in some areas of the United States for determining the beginning reading skills of children. These approaches tend to emphasize knowledge of letters and their sounds within a synthetic view of reading development. The goal of these early literacy measures is to increase children's speed in recognizing and saying words. Others urge caution about assessments of this nature because of the risk of tests dictating instructional practice, instead of the other way around. An alternative approach expressed by other panelists is to build word recognition and vocabulary through intense and frequent print experiences. The goal of literacy assessment in this case would be to increase children's ability to read with understanding. Still others have found in their project work that there is no single best approach to assessment. As to who should be responsible for literacy assessment, some feel policy analysts need to play a more direct role, while others believe that outside governments, nongovernment organizations, and educational developers should allow literacy assessments to be crafted by individuals within each country so that assessment remains sensitive to the local reform context.

Several of the panelists discussed issues related to *professional development* for teachers, which is a concern in all countries. Countries with limited resources face especially difficult challenges in providing adequate initial teacher preparation as well as continuing education for teachers. It was noted during the discussions that there are differences in how professional development is approached. Some programs implement what has been called a "top-down" approach—taking a model developed in North America or Europe and attempting to put it into place in a developing country. This method fails to take into account the need to include teachers and other local educators in substantive decision making about their practice and the needs of their own children. Dr. Hoffman noted a difference between the concepts of "teacher training" and "professional development," emphasizing that teachers need to be prepared as informed decision makers. Teachers and local school leaders who understand how reading, writing, and oral proficiency develop and who are informed about a variety of types of effective instructional strategies are in the best position to create programs to help children develop to their fullest potential.

In spite of various perspectives on the best ways of providing professional development, assessing literacy ability and growth, and contextualizing the work of helping children increase their language competencies, the panelists and keynote speaker are united in their efforts to expand the reading abilities of all children. Building on this consensus may require supporters and developers of global literacy projects to establish a common core of principles (refer to Sturtevant et al., 2006). Principles are not prescriptions for instant success, but evidence-based guidelines for effective teaching and professional development with an enormous variety of permutations applicable in virtually any learning context. Global literacy projects guided by principles such as "building new understandings by connecting prior knowledge and experience" and "motivating and sustaining effort in reading and learning" (Sturtevant et al., 2006, p. 4) seem more likely to provide effective literacy assessments, professional development programs, and instructional curricula that are sensitive to the unique circumstances and available resources of different communities, schools, and classrooms.

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To learn more about IRA's International Development Division
e-mail us at intldev@reading.org or contact our office:

444 North Capitol St., NW
Suite 523
Washington, DC 20001, USA
Tel: (202) 624-8800
Fax: (202) 624-8826

Headquarters Office
800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139, USA
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