The Language and Reading Research Consortium (LARRC) is a multi-university research project focused on understanding and improving oral language, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension development in children enrolled in preschool through third grade. This research project is funded by the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Our project began in 2010 and will end in 2016.

We sincerely appreciate the hundreds of teachers, students, and families from Arizona, Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, and Ohio who have made our research possible, along with funding from the Institute of Education Sciences. We present our research findings at professional scientific meetings and actively publish our work in peer-reviewed journals. This publication provides a brief overview of our findings to date. Please contact us if you would like copies of these papers or more detailed reports.

Longitudinal Study of Children’s Oral Language, Listening Comprehension, and Reading Comprehension

One of the primary goals of LARRC was to better understand oral language, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension development over time. We followed children from the time they started preschool through third grade. Our final group of children are in third grade this year. To date we have research manuscripts addressing the following questions.
Is Language Divisible into Multiple Components in Young Spanish-English Dual-Language Learners?

Traditionally speech-language pathologists and other professionals think of language as being divided into the form of language (grammar), the content of language (meaning), and the use of language (pragmatics). One reason is that children with language impairment may show relatively strong skills in one component and weakness in another. A second reason is that norm-referenced language tests often include subtests for each of these components of language, which encourages practitioners to view language as separable. Another language division of interest to speech-language pathologists is receptive (understanding) versus expressive (saying) language. Recent research suggests, however, that language may not be divisible in these ways, at least in young children (Hoffman, Loeb, Brandel, & Gillam, 2011; Tomblin & Zhang, 2006; Tomblin, Nippold, Fey, & Zhang [in press]).

To determine whether language was separable in preschool-aged children who were Spanish-English dual-language learners, LARRC assessed the receptive and expressive language skills of 286 children from the Phoenix metropolitan area using a variety of norm-referenced and experimental measures in Spanish. Using a structural equation modeling approach, we evaluated different models of language to determine whether it appeared to be uni- or multi-dimensional; that is, whether language could be divided into different components.

Results suggest that the Spanish language in preschool-aged Spanish-English dual-language learners is not separable into content, form, and use; nor was it separable by higher- (e.g., inferencing) and lower-level language domains, processing demands, or receptive and expressive language. Instead, it appears that a single general language factor underlies oral language in these children and that two additional factors account for additional variance in language performance (word knowledge and integrative language knowledge).

These findings raise the interesting question of whether intervention targeting one component of language can improve other components of language and whether language tests need to separately assess the form, content, and use of language. We will know more about this as we analyze results for the same children in later grades.

If you would like to read the published paper that describes this study, the reference is:

References:


How Important Are Decoding, Word Reading Fluency, Listening Comprehension, and Vocabulary for Reading Comprehension in First Through Third Grades?

One of the most influential models of reading comprehension is the Simple View of Reading (Gough, Hoover, & Peterson, 1996; Hoover & Gough, 1990; Snow, 2002). According to this model, reading comprehension is the product of decoding and listening comprehension. That is, without competence in either decoding or listening comprehension, reading comprehension will suffer.

Research suggests, however, that the relative influence of decoding and listening comprehension shifts as children progress through school (Catts et al., 2005; Garcia & Cain, 2014; Gough et al., 1996) and that reading fluency (Florit & Cain, 2011; Garcia & Cain, 2014) and vocabulary knowledge (Braze, Tabor, Shankweiler, & Mencl, 2007; Ransby & Swanson, 2003) may be important additional factors that influence reading comprehension over and above decoding and listening comprehension.

To investigate the importance of decoding, word reading fluency, listening comprehension, and vocabulary to reading comprehension, LARRC completed a cross-sectional study with 123-125 children per grade in first, second, and third grades. The children completed multiple measures of word reading, word reading fluency, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and vocabulary.
Results showed that the influence of decoding skills on reading comprehension decreased as children progressed through the grades and that the influence of listening comprehension on reading comprehension increased. Decoding skills were best measured by word and nonword reading in first and second grades, but by word reading fluency in third grade. Vocabulary skills indirectly affected reading comprehension via their influence on both decoding and listening comprehension. In other words, a strong vocabulary can help a child to decode words better and to understand them. Results of this study show the importance of effective decoding, fluency, listening comprehension, and vocabulary instruction early in school to help children develop strong reading comprehension.

We value your participation in this important project! Please visit larrc.ehe.osu.edu for future research updates.

References:


