The National Early Learning Literacy Panel (NELP) Predictors of Later Success - Overview

An excerpt from Developing Early Literacy, Report of the National Early Literacy Panel (2008).

Six variables representing early literacy skills or precursor literacy skills had medium to large predictive relationships with later measures of literacy development. These six variables not only correlated with later literacy as shown by data drawn from multiple studies with large numbers of children but also maintained their predictive power even when the role of other variables, such as IQ or socioeconomic status (SES), were accounted for. These six variables include:

- alphabet knowledge (AK): knowledge of the names and sounds associated with printed letters
- phonological awareness (PA): the ability to detect, manipulate, or analyze the auditory aspects of spoken language (including the ability to distinguish or segment words, syllables, or phonemes), independent of meaning;
- rapid automatic naming (RAN) of letters or digits: the ability to rapidly name a sequence of random letters or digits;
- RAN of objects or colors: the ability to rapidly name a sequence of repeating random sets of pictures of objects (e.g., "car," "tree," "house," "man") or colors;
- writing or writing name: the ability to write letters in isolation on request or to write one's own name; and
- phonological memory: the ability to remember spoken information for a short period of time.

An additional five early literacy skills were also moderately correlated with at least one measure of later literacy achievement but either did not maintain this predictive power when other important contextual variables were accounted for or have not yet been evaluated by researchers in this way. These additionally potentially important variables include:

- concepts about print: knowledge of print conventions (e.g., left–right, front–back) and concepts (book cover, author, text);
- print knowledge: a combination of elements of AK, concepts about print, and early decoding;
- reading readiness: usually a combination of AK, concepts of print, vocabulary, memory, and PA;
- oral language: the ability to produce or comprehend spoken language, including vocabulary and grammar; and
- visual processing: the ability to match or discriminate visually presented symbols.

These 11 variables consistently predicted later literacy achievement for both preschoolers and kindergartners.