



The relationship between the oral language proficiency and reading achievement of first grade Crow Indian children  
by Bernadine Rebich Featherly

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Elementary Education Curriculum and Instruction  
Montana State University  
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**Abstract:**

An extensive review of the literature was used to support the thesis that the crux of the problem of educating minority language children from homes of low socioeconomic status lies in the relationship between language and reading. It was argued that the reason why the language of these children does not develop to a sufficient level to learn to read with comprehension is because there is something lacking in their preschool, experiential background and that the resulting language deficiency can either be overcome or confounded depending on the way reading is taught. It was the purpose of this dissertation to identify what is lacking in the social environment of these children and thus determine the cause of their language deficiency.

To provide additional empirical evidence in support of the thesis, an investigation was made to determine the magnitude of the correlation between the level of English oral language proficiency at the onset of reading instruction and reading achievement near the end of the first grade of American Indian children who attended school on the Crow Indian Reservation during the 1982-1983 school year. The results of stepwise canonical correlation analysis between six predictor variables of oral language proficiency and three criterion variables of reading achievement showed that  $R_c = .833$  and  $R_c^2 = .693$ ,  $p < .0002$ . Phonology was deleted at Step 1 of the analysis and S fluency was deleted at Step 2.

It was concluded that for American Indian children attending school on the Crow Indian Reservation there is a statistically and educationally significant positive correlation between level of oral language proficiency at the onset of reading instruction and reading achievement at the end of the first grade. It was also concluded that for these children, level of oral language proficiency is a good predictor of reading achievement. Beyond this, it was claimed that language competency is an important prerequisite for learning to read.

The philosophical argument in defense of the thesis was formulated as a result of an extensive literature review. The fifteen conclusions on which the argument is based were drawn from theoretical constructs and supported by empirical evidence.

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This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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## ABSTRACT

An extensive review of the literature was used to support the thesis that the crux of the problem of educating minority language children from homes of low socioeconomic status lies in the relationship between language and reading. It was argued that the reason why the language of these children does not develop to a sufficient level to learn to read with comprehension is because there is something lacking in their preschool, experiential background and that the resulting language deficiency can either be overcome or confounded depending on the way reading is taught. It was the purpose of this dissertation to identify what is lacking in the social environment of these children and thus determine the cause of their language deficiency.

To provide additional empirical evidence in support of the thesis, an investigation was made to determine the magnitude of the correlation between the level of English oral language proficiency at the onset of reading instruction and reading achievement near the end of the first grade of American Indian children who attended school on the Crow Indian Reservation during the 1982-1983 school year. The results of stepwise canonical correlation analysis between six predictor variables of oral language proficiency and three criterion variables of reading achievement showed that  $R = .833$  and  $R^2 = .693$ ,  $p < .0002$ . Phonology was deleted at Step 1 of the analysis and fluency was deleted at Step 2.

It was concluded that for American Indian children attending school on the Crow Indian Reservation there is a statistically and educationally significant positive correlation between level of oral language proficiency at the onset of reading instruction and reading achievement at the end of the first grade. It was also concluded that for these children, level of oral language proficiency is a good predictor of reading achievement. Beyond this, it was claimed that language competency is an important prerequisite for learning to read.

The philosophical argument in defense of the thesis was formulated as a result of an extensive literature review. The fifteen conclusions on which the argument is based were drawn from theoretical constructs and supported by empirical evidence.

## CHAPTER 1

## THE PROBLEM

Educating children who speak a language other than English and come from homes of low socioeconomic status (low-SES) has been and continues to be a serious, complex, and perplexing problem which defies an answer. In the Newsom Report (1968), issued by the Ministry in Education in England in 1963, it was stated: "The evidence of research increasingly suggests that linguistic inadequacy, disadvantages in social and physical background, and poor attainments in school are closely associated" (p. 151). Accepting this statement as a premise, the problem is to determine a causal relationship between the above mentioned variables and then to alter the primary cause to achieve the desired effect. In this dissertation a proposition for a solution to the problem is advanced which is defended in philosophical argument. The thesis is supported by empirical evidence to include the results of the empirical research which was conducted for this paper.

Although the problem is complex, the solution is not. In fact, as Holdaway (1979) stated, "The simple and obvious preventive solution to the problem has been by-passed and obscured by the hubris of the education profession" (p. 2).

The problem is identified and discussed and the thesis is stated in the first part of this chapter. The literature review which was

made to defend the thesis is presented in Chapter Two. The empirical study which is a part of this dissertation and augments the thesis is described in the latter part of this chapter and in Chapter Three. The findings of the empirical study are reported in Chapter Four.

### Need for a Viable Solution to the Problem

Jerome Bruner (1983) recently stated, "In some way, our life as a nation depends both on cultivating high intelligence to keep our complex social order running, and preventing the formation of a permanently alienated, undereducated, unemployable 'under class'" (p. 196). His concern is echoed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in their report, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (1983). The Commission made the following statement:

Part of what is at risk is the promise first made on this continent: All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost (p.8). . . .

The twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling have profound and practical meaning for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other either in principle or in practice (p. 13).

### Overview of the Problem

In examining the magnitude of the problem it can be seen that the problem affects the lives of millions of children. Counting minority language children alone, it was estimated from the 1980 Census that there were about 10.7 million who either spoke a language other than English as their first and primary language or were living in a house-

hold where a non-English language was spoken as the dominant language. Waggoner (1984) reported that "above five (5) million of these children are estimated to need special educational programs because of their language backgrounds and proficiency in school-related English skills" (p. 4). The number of language minority children increased by nearly 60 percent between the spring of 1976 and the time of the census in 1980. She also noted that this group is growing much faster than school-age children in the general population. The number of school-age children in general actually decreased between 1976 and 1980. According to the calculations of Stein (1984), language minority youngsters currently comprise about fourteen (14) percent of the 39 million U.S. public school children, or one in seven. The seven largest school systems are composed of 10-55 percent language minority children. For instance, the Los Angeles public school population is 50 percent language minority. There is also a large proportion of the school population who come from homes of low socioeconomic status who are affected by the problem. According to the Sustaining Effects Study (Hinckley, 1979) it was estimated that about 4.2 million students were classified as being of low-SES. After two decades and the expenditure of billions of dollars, an effective means of educating minority language, low-SES children has not been found.

#### Historical Solution: Compensatory Education

The Federal government's commitment to provide all children with an equal opportunity to an education began in 1965 with the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The purpose of

ESEA was to strengthen and improve educational opportunities in the nation's elementary and secondary schools. Through ESEA a long, expensive, and thus far unsuccessful campaign of compensatory education was launched. Each of the three principal programs of compensatory education were directed at a different target population. Title I (now known as Chapter I) was initiated to provide special assistance to low-SES children who are underachievers in reading and math. Head Start was originated to provide low-SES, pre-school children with a "head start" through special preschool programs of education. Title VII (commonly referred to as Bilingual Education) was organized to provide minority language children with instruction in the children's two languages.

These compensatory education programs were instigated as a result of an assumption commonly held prior to the Coleman report. Before the publication of James Coleman's Equality of Educational Opportunity (1966), it was thought that socioeconomic and racial inequalities in academic achievement were mainly the result of inequities in school facilities and expenditures. "But the conclusions of the Coleman report were in fact quite the contrary; it was a monumental example of empirical research shattering a popular myth" (Jensen, 1973:3). This survey showed that indeed most children still attended segregated schools and that there were differences in educational resources available to different children but that these factors were not the cause of the differences in academic achievement. Thus, instead of providing the impetus for remedying inequalities, the

survey had the opposite effect which was due mainly to its most extensively published conclusion. In Coleman's words,

The evidence revealed that within broad geographic regions, for each racial and ethnic group, the physical and economic resources going into a school had very little relationship to the achievements coming out of it . . . if it were otherwise we could give simple prescriptions: increase teacher's salaries, lower class size, enlarge libraries, and so on. But the evidence does not allow such simple answers (1966:34).

Other major research studies supported Coleman's finding. Jencks (1972), Bowles and Gintis (1976) also found that the type of education does not make a difference. Meanwhile, the large-scale federally funded programs of compensatory education were under way.

Just a year after the Coleman report, a nationwide survey and evaluation of the large compensatory education programs was conducted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The Commission's conclusions were negative: "The fact remains...that none of the programs appear [sic] to have raised significantly the achievement of participating pupils, as a group, within the period evaluated by the Commission." The negative findings of the Commission were backed by the testimony of school superintendents around the country. New York City's school superintendent voiced his frustration:

We have been spending a great deal of money on solutions which have little relation to the causes. Nobody knows why certain children are not profiting from the educational program. . . . Money is being spent on new gimmicks but nobody knows the cause and effect relationship. . . . We have offered all kinds of solutions but they are not producing results and nobody knows why (New York Times, December 4, 1969).

Dr. Neil Sullivan, then superintendent of schools in Berkeley, California, testified before a U.S. Senate committee (May 21, 1970):

"Berkeley . . . put its first money into compensatory education. . . . The results after two and a half or three years clearly indicated that not only did the child in the inner city not improve, he had retrogressed."

The status of findings from compensatory programs in 1970 was summarized by President Nixon in his Education Message:

We must stop letting wishes color our judgments about the educational effectiveness of many special compensatory programs, when - despite some dramatic and encouraging exceptions - there is growing evidence that most of them are not yet measurably improving the success of poor children in school. . . . The best available evidence indicates that most of the compensatory education programs have not measurably helped poor children catch up.

He commented further.

Recent findings on the two largest such programs are particularly disturbing. We now spend more than \$1 billion a year for educational programs run under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Most of these have stressed the teaching of reading, but before-and-after tests suggest that only 19 percent of the children in such programs improve their reading significantly; 13 percent appear to fall behind more than expected; and more than two-thirds of the children remain unaffected - that is, they continue to fall behind. In our Headstart program, where so much hope is invested, we find that youngsters enrolled only for the summer achieve almost no gains, and the gains of those in the program for a full year are soon matched by their non-Headstart classmates from similarly poor backgrounds (in Jensen, 1973:5).

Following is a more detailed review of the major compensatory education programs.

Title I. A large-scale evaluation of Title I was conducted in 1977-1979. It was the largest evaluation effort of a federal education program up to that time. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of compensatory-education services provided by local

schools under Title I. According to the Sustaining Effects Study (SES) Participant File (Baker and deKanter, 1983:17), in the spring of 1977 eighty-one (81) percent of the children from homes where English was not regularly spoken scored below the 40th percentile in reading achievement. The following additional statistics from the Study of the Sustaining Effects of Compensatory Education on Basic Skills, Report #4 (Hinckley, 1979) further identified those children who are having the most difficulty in school. It was found that more than 50 percent of the students who come from single-adult minority families and lived in a multiple-dwelling unit scored in the lowest quadrant in both reading and math achievement distributions. First graders whose mothers had not completed high school scored almost six-tenths (.6) of a standard deviation below the mean for all first graders tested. A finding which provides a clue to the solution of the problem was that the magnitude of the relationship between maternal education and achievement was found to be greater than the relationship between poverty and achievement. Although race appeared to be related to achievement, the relationship only reduced the gap attributed to maternal education by about one-fourth. The gap attributable to economic status remained the greatest for whites.

In an analysis of the cost effectiveness of compensatory education, Report #7 from the Study of Sustaining Effects of Compensatory Education (Sumner et al., 1979), it was concluded that where program costs were held constant, funding source did not appear to have an independent effect on educational outcome. Though small, the raw regression coefficients that served as indices of cost-effectiveness

frequently exceeded two and three times their standard errors and were often disturbingly negative. Title I students learned about as much during each school year as non-Title I students did, but the differences between them in achievement status that existed at the beginning of the year persisted despite the growth exhibited during the school year. It is evident that Title I assistance was not able to close the gap in academic achievement between low-SES and middle-class children despite the expenditure of billions of dollars.

According to the Congressional Record (October 20, 1983), Chapter I, educational aid to disadvantaged children, was set at \$3.48 billion for fiscal year 1984, an increase of \$280 million over 1983.

Head Start. Since its inception in the summer of 1965, Head Start has served over 7.5 million low income children and their families at a cost of \$6.5 billion. The Head Start budget for 1980 was \$735 million. The Administration's budget request for 1982 was \$950 million (Calhoun, 1982). The first large-scale evaluation of Head Start was also discouraging. Two pertinent findings of the Westinghouse-Ohio National Evaluation of Head Start (Cirirelli, et al., 1969) were: (1) Head Start programs do not produce cognitive or affective gains that persist into the early elementary grades; (2) Head Start children were below national norms on the Stanford Achievement Test and the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities.

The report was immediately controversial. The findings were interpreted by many as supporting Arthur Jensen's (1969) much publicized argument that lower-class, and particularly black children are

of below normal intelligence and thus genetically incapable of learning. Eysenck (1971) and Cronback (1975) both asserted that Head Start was a failure. In most recent attack on the Head Start program Clarke and Clarke (1977) stated that Americans had wasted 10 billion dollars. On the other side of the argument, Zigler (1978), an eminent child development scholar, said that Head Start children definitely manifested greater gains on cognitive and personality measures than did comparison children. According to Smith and Bissell (1970), "Children who participated in pre-school intervention programs scored significantly better than control children on cognitive measures through the end of the third grade, although the participating children as well as the non-participants fell progressively farther behind national norms." Reviews of research studies (Grotberg, 1969; Stearns, 1971) found a pattern of similar results. Although the experimental group in most of the studies showed significant differences in academic achievement in favor of the children who attended Head Start over those who did not, their achievement average was still far below the national norm.

Bilingual Education. Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1967), commonly referred to as Bilingual Education, provides for assistance to educational agencies to develop and carry out new and imaginative programs to meet the special educational needs of children of limited English speaking ability. Although not as costly as Chapter I, \$139.3 million were appropriated for minority language student programs for the fiscal year 1984 which was an

increase of \$1.2 million over 1983 (Congressional Record, October 20, 1983).

Keith Baker and Adriana de Kanter (1981) explored the effectiveness of bilingual education based on a study of the literature. Their conclusion was summarized in the abstract of their report: "The case for the effectiveness of transitional bilingual education is so weak that exclusive reliance on this instruction method is clearly not justified. Too little is known about the problems of educating language minorities to prescribe a specific remedy at the Federal level."

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted a nationwide evaluation of the impact of Title VII Spanish/English bilingual education programs (Danoff, 1978). The results from the full impact study (1975-1976) of Hispanic students who were in the second through the sixth grade showed that in English reading, the Title VII students in the study performed worse than comparable students who were not in Title VII education programs. It also showed that in general, across grades, the Hispanic students performed at about the twentieth percentile in English reading.

Right to Read. The problem of educating the educationally disadvantaged was also attacked by another federally funded education program: James E. Allen, former U.S. Commissioner of Education, launched an effort to eradicate illiteracy that would grow in time into a legislated program with an annual budget of over \$26 million. Right to Read programs were in operation by 1971, having as their goal the elimination of illiteracy throughout the nation by 1980 (Isaacs,

1979). They obviously were not successful in reaching their goal. When Right to Read was initiated it was estimated that twenty-five (25) percent of all American adults was functionally illiterate. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) reported that twenty-three (23) million American adults were functionally illiterate. The Commission estimated that about thirteen (13) percent of all 17-year-olds was functionally illiterate and that as many as 40 percent of minority language youth could be considered functionally illiterate.

It is little wonder that, as Rexford Brown (1980) said, "The trend in recent years has been either to try to show these reseachers 'wrong' by discovering significant school factors or to further clarify the nonschool, structural factors that contribute to inequity" (p. 36).

It is tragic that the conclusions Edmund Gordon (1978) made in the mid-70's should still hold true in the mid-1980's:

In the early 1960's we did not know what needed to be done to make school achievement independent of social class and soical caste. Most of us thought that more money, extra effort, improved technology would solve the problems of educating the minority poor. Here in the mid-1970's most of us agree that to the extent that these things have been tried, they have not solved the problems. . . . We still don't know how to make school achievement and developmental opportunity independent of social position. Our best general predictor of success in school is successful birth into a middle- or upper-class Caucasian family (p. 101).

Follow Through and Head Start Planned Variation. Since there was little doubt that compensatory education had been of little or no help in educating minority language, low-SES children, there was a call from concerned educators and social scientists for innovative programs. The following statements are indicative of a general concern:

Our starting point, then, is that the current situation is unacceptable. It is obvious that drastic reforms must be effected. But what these should entail is not at all clear (Ginsburg, 1972:11).

It appears that considerably more bold and daring educational innovations are called for if we are to improve the outcomes of schooling for the majority of children called disadvantaged. The present large-scale programs of compensatory education, which so far have failed to yield appreciable scholastic gains among the disadvantaged, are psychologically and educationally probably still much too conservative (Jensen, 1973:130).

So far, after several years, nothing has been produced by those who are trying that would arouse great hope. All too often it is found that whatever new instructional technique aids learning for the 'slow learners' usually turns out to do even more for the 'fast learners', thereby increasing the achievement gap (Jensen, 1973:12).

The meager gains in intelligence and scholastic performance made by general enrichment pre-school programs suggests that something more and something different than providing the usual accouterments of middle-class nursery education, even in intensified form, is necessary (Jensen, 1973:155).

Our goal in improving the education of disadvantaged children has been to bring their schools up to the standards of the schools attended by their economic and social 'betters.' We strive to create middle-class schools in the slums. But the middle-class school is not the best of all possible educational worlds. It is in fact, a fortress built mainly of inherited, fixed concepts and practices (Fantini and Weinstein, 1970:222).

The target of programs to improve the education of the disadvantaged has been the learner himself; the educational process itself is off limits. Teachers and school officials attribute the child's lack of response to the inadequacies in the child's background. The prescription, then, is more concentrated doses of the prevailing technology (Fantini and Weinstein, 1970:223).

Most of the large-scale programs have been more intensive versions of standard curriculum and teaching methods (p. 109). . . . Much of what is being done for and to the disadvantaged seems to be guided by the conviction that what is needed is more of those things we feel we know how to do. Despite the fact that much of our knowledge and techniques

of behavioral change have proved to be of dubious value in our work with more disadvantaged populations, these same procedures and services now are being poured into the new programs. If real progress is to be made, we must recognize that it is our role to better understand these problems and to design techniques and measures more appropriate to their solution (Gordan, 1978:102).

This is the problem we cannot avoid facing: if we can gain any general impression of the field, it is that not one program of demonstrated effectiveness has yet been successfully implemented on a large scale. . . . We have found very little that is substantially different from traditional approaches to education. . . . Obviously, then, we are not putting high creative conceptions or the necessary national resources into this task (Gordan, 1978:113).

The call for innovative programs was responded to by a specifically designed program to implement new and different instructional approaches in compensatory education. The result was Follow Through and Head Start Planned Variation. Under these programs local communities were invited to design, carry out, and appraise various approaches to improve the education of economically poor children in the preschool years and in the early elementary grades. Since much less was learned from planned variation than was hoped, the Brookings Panel on Social Experimentation sponsored a conference of experts in April, 1973, to try and find out what went wrong. The general consensus of the panel of experts was summarized by Rivlin and Timpane (1975) as follows: "The fact remains that definitive answers to questions about how best to improve the education of young children from deprived homes have not emerged from these programs, nor do they seem likely to do so" (p. 11). Mosteller (1975) suggested that carefully planned and highly organized field trials of the more promising innovative educational programs would probably bring some answers (pp. 169-72).

Thus, the frustration of not knowing what caused the problem and therefore not knowing what to do became widespread. There was a desperate call for more research, for research based on a closer analysis of the problem and/or a theoretical framework. There were suggestions for improving research and concern for the problems associated with educational research. There was criticism of past research and evaluation reports. The problem of educating children from low-SES homes is not just a problem in the United States and so from all parts of the world educators are trying to understand the problem in their search for a solution.

#### Discussion of the Problem

At this point, it is necessary to gather together the comments and ideas from educators and researchers in the various fields of endeavor to help analyze the problem and point to the direction of a solution. Input from authorities in the fields of language and literacy, bilingual education, and educational research is included in this discussion of the problem.

#### Educational Leaders in the Fields of Language and Literacy

The following comments which have been made by authorities in relevant fields were gleaned from the literature and thus ideas from around the world have been brought together in a discussion of the problem. From the areas of language and literacy, educational leaders have made the following comments:

Kenneth Goodman (1980) starts the discussion with the following statement. "The legal barriers are gone. Now we must actualize the promise: We must truly equalize educational opportunity. That's the challenge of the 80's" (p. 3).

A note of encouragement was given by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in their otherwise discouraging report. "On the positive side is the significant movement by political and educational leaders to search for solutions. . . . We believe this movement must be broadened and directed toward reform and excellence throughout education" (p. 12). It is imperative that "we dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all - old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority" (p. 7).

From Australia we hear from Don Holdaway (1979) who would ask for open-mindedness in the search for a solution of the problem.

What is called for is an extremely open-minded inquiry which takes nothing for granted from the vast accumulation of habits, assumptions, experience and research which surround the subject like an impenetrable jungle. If we continue to make literacy a criterion for basic human dignity in our society, we cannot tolerate the failure with its poignantly modern forms of misery and maladjustment. Instead of setting up expensive and wasteful remedial programmes with a whole new establishment to support them in their inescapable effects of grinding the indignity deeper, we should either find a preventive solution or excuse a large proportion of children from school attendance. The present status of the problem, as already endlessly researched and largely unsolved, suggests that no assumption should be sacrosanct in our attempt to understand the matter (p. 12).

Holdaway (1979) emphasized the fact that we are dealing with a complex problem. "The processes of literacy are complex; the acquisition of literacy skills entails the most complex forms of learning.") He realized that underlying the surface problem is where the heart of

the problem lies. "The institution of schooling presents complex impediments to learning and the cultural determinants of literacy in school and community are complex" (p. 18).

Frank Smith (1983) stated, "I . . . think there is a greater need at the moment to understand the factors that get in the way of children becoming literate than to expect some great theoretical break through to make a difference in the way children should be taught" (p. 140).

Jerome Bruner (1984) expresses his feelings as follows: "The problem of reading seems more and more to be a function not of the difficulty of reading per se but of the difficulties created by the way in which we teach reading. Education is the problem, not the solution" (p. 200).

Jeanne Chall (1983a) in her recommendations for research and practice stated, "It would seem that investigation is needed into why some people's reading lags behind while the general educational and reading level of the population improves. In all probability, this is a source of despair and hopelessness, particularly because reading gaps are found more often among the less privileged - among minorities, among ethnic Americans, and among those of lower socio-economic status" (p. 170).

Rexford Brown (1980) expressed a need to "address fundamental questions about how literacy is acquired or how it should be taught." He commented on the perplexity of the problem. "Research into the acquisition of reading and writing skills has served to generate as many questions as answers." He emphasized the importance of understanding the interaction with the surrounding variables. "Clearly,

the family, the society and the schools play important roles in the acquisition of literacy skills. But exactly what those roles are and how they interact for different individuals or groups we do not yet know" (p. 30).

MacGinitie (1976) identified, organized and discussed research suggestions for the improvement of reading. He hit on the crux of the problem with the following conclusion: "The similarities, differences, and relationships between expressive competence and receptive competence and between oral and written language are research problems of fundamental importance but are seldom even acknowledged." Noting the necessity for understanding the nature of reading first, he commented further, "The potential contribution of most studies of language development to our understanding of reading can scarcely be realized until these questions are recognized and studied" (p. 17).

Entwisle (1971) recognizes that the relationship between oral language development and reading becomes very pronounced when the wide variance in these skills between different groups of children is considered. She emphasizes the importance of oral language as a prerequisite for learning to read and the foundation for later growth and development in reading. She noted, "Almost no work exists on the relationship between oral language and reading achievement, although it is known that there is considerable variability in oral language across social or ethnic groups or both" (p. 132).

Similar concern is heard from England. Denis Lawton (1968) commented,

The main drawback of Project Head Start from a British point of view would be its lack of theoretical orientation; the impression is given in these reports that a great deal of time, money and energy is being expended without a clear analysis on the problem having been made and without clear objectives being defined (p. 150).

Recognition of a similar problem in England was made official when the following recommendation was made in the Newsom Report:

"There is an urgent need for research into the problems of environmental and linguistic handicaps, and the experiment in teaching techniques for overcoming the learning difficulties they create" (in Lawton, 1968:151.).

#### Educational Leaders in the Field of Bilingual Education

From educational leaders who are concerned with bilingual education the following comments are reported.

Muriel Saville-Troike (1979) stated: "Those concerned with improving equal educational opportunity for minority-group students" must find "an analytic device for guiding research on one of the major unresolved problems in their education, the lack of consonance between the culture of lower socio-economic groups and that of the school or that which is taught in the school, no matter what the language of instruction." She expresses the need to identify the specific cultural impediments to learning because as she said,

Whether students are from a lower-class Spanish-speaking background, from the inner city, or from the "hollers" of Appalachia, it is well known that they are likely to have greater difficulty in school than if they are from a middle class urban background. This complex factor, frequently labeled "low SES background" currently lacks explanatory power and needs to be explored more fully in order to identify the specific cultural variables that lead to inequality in educational achievement (Saville-Troike, 1979).

Dubois (1982) contended that analytic questions in the areas of language assessment, language and cognitive development, and bilingual education "have presented serious intellectual challenges to researchers and educators.... There are many unanswered basic research questions in the three areas mentioned above."

Merrill Swain (1979), a leading figure in the Canadian French Immersion programs, commented that the results of large national studies are of little or no value in setting educational policy because the research results are averaged across communities and across the many different kinds of bilingual programs, thus making it impossible to make similar situation comparisons. Swain added, "To determine what kinds of programs work best with what kinds of children, under what circumstances, one needs to look at the effects of individual programs and community variables as they interact with initial student characteristics over a long enough period that cumulative effects of the program can be observed."

In an executive summary of Research Evidence for the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education, Rudolph Troike (1978) called attention to the fact that not only was instructional approach of bilingual education not based on research, but also that in its first ten years of operation there had been little research.

Bilingual education is in critical need of research, both basic and operational, and unless it receives this support, this great experiment could become just another passing effort in the history of American education which failed to achieve its goals -- to the detriment of millions of school children and of our whole society. . . . Although over half a billion dollars has [sic] been spent on bilingual education since 1968, less than one-half of one percent has been spent for research. . . . Such a situation would not be conceivable

in the military or medical fields, and should not be tolerated in education (p. 2).

In conclusion, Troike stated, "The success of bilingual education in providing equal educational opportunity for subordinated minorities may rest on matters far deeper and more fundamental than providing a 'warm, accepting environment' or attempting to enhance the student's self-concept" (p. 15). Troike reviewed and observed many programs which did both but which still did not show any improvement in the children's academic achievement which is the problem of national concern. In his final plea, he stated "The whole issue, as with many others, is one which can be resolved only by much more basic - not just operational - research than we have at present" (p. 15)

James Cummins (1979), a leading theorist in the field of bilingual education who resides in Canada, pointed out the central problem in bilingual education. "The lack of concern for the developmental interrelationships between language and thought in the bilingual child is one of the major reasons why evaluations and research have provided so little data on the dynamics of the bilingual child's interaction with (his or her) educational environment."

George Miller (1973) made a statement that is well worth considering. "In science, as least half the battle is won when we start to ask the right questions" (p. 160).

Tucker (1979) of the Center for Applied Linguistics seems to have asked the right question: "Does there exist some necessary (measurable) threshold of target language proficiency which must be attained before one is able to profit from instruction in that language?"

Educational Leaders Concerned With Research

The following comments have been made by educational leaders concerned with the special problems of research and with a way of improving research:

Compensatory education for minority language, low-SES children, because it is federally funded, has become a very political issue. Thus, as Rexford Brown (1980) has said, "Unlike pure research driven by the curiosity of the researcher, equity research has been driven primarily by institutional policy needs and major social policy questions" (p.36).

It is the belief of this author that it is the responsibility of the researcher to at least tentatively identify cause, because if the researcher does not the practitioner will. This is one of the reasons why Ellett and Ericson (1982) stated, "There are compelling arguments for holding that scientific analysis and policy formation must be concerned with causation."

Cooley (1981) noted that researchers have realized that the necessary conditions for experimental design are just not possible in school settings and have thus turned to quasi-experimental design. However, according to Cooley (1981) they do not seem to realize that "it is essential to substitute good theory and adequately specified causal models for the abandoned experimental controls." He pointed out that "the other major problem with the quasi-experimenters is that they have tended to consider a federal dollar as an educational treatment. Schools do lots of different things with Title I dollars. Some of them facilitate learning and some of them do not." He contended

that we know far too little about "the major factors that determine student achievement or successful implementation of a program, and one would expect a federal program that serves 90 percent of the school districts to have that as its primary focus" (p. 300). He also explained why compensatory education programs have not tended to improve over the years.

An unfortunate aspect of the evaluations of Title I is the focus on justifying the federal funding program by seeking an overall Title I effect, instead of focusing on ways in which Title I practices might be improved. . . . Unfortunately, the evaluators did not help. Instead of looking for ways to improve the education of children who were somehow disadvantaged, they tended to look for evidence to support the continuation (or discontinuation) of a federally funded program. . . . Fortunately, the futility of that type of effort is now becoming more widely recognized. By turning to improvement-oriented evaluation reports we can surely find the processes necessary to ensure that every child learns the fundamentals which are so clearly essential in American society. It won't be easy, but it is possible (p.301).

As an example of how lax evaluation of compensatory education programs has been, in an overall review of 426 ERIC citations on Right to Read programs, O'Connor (1978) did not find one program report that assessed itself in a strict sense and thus was able to claim scientific proof of merit.

Coleman (1975) pointed to implementation as the crux of the problem. "It is necessary to measure implementation to determine effectiveness. To answer the question, 'Does this program, as conceived, have an impact of a certain kind upon children?' it is important to ask as well, 'Is this program, as conceived, implemented in the field?'" (p. 175).

Levin (1976) contended that "because of the inherent inadequacy of our present tools, there is no social science consensus on the appropriate educational strategies for improving the life chances of children from low-income and minority backgrounds" (p. 76). Is the reason really because of an inadequacy of our present tools?

Calhoun (1981) urged, "This is the time to invest public funds strategically so that future generations will have an even more secure knowledge base on which to formulate social policy for children. Possible research themes could include. . . studies that emphasize the influence of family ecology on children's learning and development" (p. 140).

David Cohen (1975) in reviewing applied researchers' criticism of nonexperimental policy research found several persistent criticisms: "Social interventions are vaguely conceived and weakly specified. It is hard to tell whether, or how well they are implemented. Criterion measures are generally of dubious relevance or solidity. Evidence about the effects of such interventions is typically so uncertain that its value for policy is nil" (p. 169). He added that experimental research has similar problems with roughly the same results. Cohen (1975) seems to have found the key to an explanation of why an answer to the problem of educating minority language, low-SES children has to date not been found and accepted by the educational community. He argues, "The nature of social services tends to defeat experimental learning. The character of knowledge in education makes it difficult to devise solid measures of success or failure." But most importantly, "Learning about social policy generally seems to involve a movement

from practice to theory - a backward progression from what appears to be self-evident ideas about social problems and remedies." Thus, the progression of starting with the practice, evaluating the practice through experimental research, and then trying to devise theoretical constructs to fit questionable empirical evidence "tended to increase complexity rather than clarifying action alternatives" and so "the experiments multiplied questions instead of producing answers" (p. 169). In scientific pursuit of answers to social problems, it is necessary to go from theory to practice and then research the practice to see if it confirms the theory. It should also be remembered that observing educational practice, all of which is in a sense experimental, is not the same as observing natural phenomena.

Descriptive research is valuable, however, if it includes the following criterion: "Not only should research be clearly descriptive of what actually happens under real world circumstances but it should also cohere with a strong body of related insights" (Holdaway, 1984 p. 6).

#### Lack of Awareness of Existing Knowledge

The following question is posed: Is the reason that a solution to the problem has not been found because this knowledge does not exist or is it that the knowledge exists but far too many practitioners are not aware of or are willing to accept it? An extensive review of the literature reveals that it is the latter. The following educators seem to corroborate this contention as well. (Note, one of the

purposes of this dissertation was to bring together that which is presently known concerning the language reading relationship.)

Holdaway (1979) stated: "Modern knowledge about the nature of language and language acquisition has much to offer in clarifying the reasons for instructional failure" (p. 12). However, as Yetta Goodman (1981) pointed out, "Knowledge is of no use if it is not applied. And there is much new knowledge to apply to the teaching and learning of oral and written language" (p. 11).

Stacy E. Palmer (1984) reported on a research project concerning the dissemination of research information: "Although the federal government has spent about \$560-million over the past 20 years on research designed to improve the quality of the nation's schools, few of the results are actually reaching teachers or policymakers.... It was found that educational research was being carried out, but that most of its results appear in educational journals read mainly by other scholars." Palmer quoted the president of the company who conducted the study in saying, "We found that most of the material in these reports has never been disseminated to the people who have the power to change the schools - teachers, parents, and legislators. . . . If more of the research were applied in the classroom, the nation's elementary and secondary schools would be doing a much better job" (p. 17).

Adams et al (1978) realized that there was still much more to learn. It is encouraging to know that much more is known now than at the time they wrote. "Anyone who knows the literature on beginning reading is forced to conclude that much still needs to be learned

about what it is and how it should be taught. Even descriptions of the very nature of the reading process continue to be characterized by diversity rather than agreement. What is known with certainty is meager." His statement could be questioned. However, there is little doubt that practice backed behind what was known. "Those who know the literature and are also aware of what goes on in classrooms must face up to another inevitable conclusion; namely, the failure of classroom practices to reflect what is known" (p. 19).

Gordan (1978) also commented on the situation. "Having recently reviewed much of the research and most of the current programs concerned with the disadvantaged, I am impressed by the pitifully small though growing body of knowledge available as a guide to work in this area. The paucity of serious research attention to these problems has left us with little hard data, many impressions and a few firm leads." He then reiterates what Adams et al said above. "What is distressing, however, is the slight representation of even this research in the rapidly proliferating programs" (p. 102).

Kenneth Goodman, (1978) who wrote in the same year, presented a more optimistic view regarding existing knowledge.

There is an irony about the current state of knowledge in reading and reading instruction which may yet prove to be tragic. Theory and research have broken through in a number of fronts. Developments in language theory, in perception and cognition, in understanding language development, in relating language and learning, in building productive theories of reading, in relating oral and written language, in developing theories of teaching and learning and reading are all happening at an accelerating pace. Finally we begin to see research and theory building on each other. It's all beginning to come together and make sense. Most important

we're breaking through the barrier between theory and practice. We know enough to know why things work and why they don't (p. 919).

He also noted that even though a solution to the problem of educating language minority, low-SES children is found, the larger educational community may forever remain ignorant of it.

Logically, we should be gearing our schools and preparing our teachers for grand innovations. . . . But, in fact, in our very zeal to make literacy universal, in many school systems we are locking out knowledge. The battle cry is 'Back to the Basics': truth is to be found by closing our minds to new knowledge, facing to the rear and glorifying ignorance. This know-nothing movement is institutionalized by state law, board policy, federal guidelines, even court order. It is set in the concrete of minimal competencies, management by objectives, arbitrary skill hierarchies, mandated testing. Schools are ordered to teach all children to read quickly and well, but they are then cut off from new knowledge and the possibility of using it in creative innovations (p. 919).

Kenneth Goodman is supported in his observation of the back-to-basics movement by Margaret Smith/Burke (1982) in her testimony at the public hearing of the National Commission on Excellence in Education on Language and Literacy: Skills for Academic Learning. In discussing the problems associated with the implementation of the back-to-basics movement, she stated: "The first problem, during the early phase of the back-to-basics movement, was that few reading programs were conceptually grounded in theory and research on the total reading process. The focus of instruction generally tended to be on word recognition skills, only part of reading" (p. 58).

The strongest assertion comes from Holdaway's following statement: "Only our prejudices, our precedents, and our false assumptions about

the nature of language processes stand in the way of general amelioration of the literacy scandal" (p. 31)?

### Suggested Solutions to the Problem

There are many people who seem to have a real understanding of the problem of educating minority language, low-SES children, who have insightful ideas on how to deal with the problem, or who have clues to an answer. Following are just a few of the comments from some of these people.

Margaret Donaldson (1978) posed the question: "What can be done to give all children a good start in the kind of learning that takes place in school?" (p. 98). She noted further, "It is universally recognized that when children come to school there is a wide gap between those who are best prepared and those who are least prepared for school learning. The question then is how to close the gap early, for if it is not soon closed it will widen" (p. 98). Jerome Bruner (1984) specifies the prerequisite to reading in which there is such a wide variance among children. "Children at the time they are required to learn to read are unequal in their habitual competence with the spoken language, at least in respect to their ability to operate at the textual level of metapragmatics" (p. 195).

Irving Lazar (1981) attributed any success that Head Start has had to a change in parent's values and anticipations for their children's education. He wondered, "when the professionalization of education drove parents out of their children's learning [if] an essential condition for learning may have been severely damaged."

Cecelia Genishi (1981) made a critical realization. "We have learned that we need a working knowledge of contexts outside the school in order to be effective teachers and researchers. . . . We have realized that the home experience can have a greater cumulative impact than the few hours spent in a classroom" (p. 112).

Gauthier (1984) builds on this point. "Learning begins at a very early age within the family. The children of non-English speaking mothers miss out on the vocabulary, stories, nursery rhymes and other common frames of reference that English-speaking kindergarten children already know. Consequently, the children from non-English speaking homes begin school at a disadvantage" (p. 5).

And from the past there is a reminder from Huey (1918). "The reading of real literature should begin in the home and in the very first days of school, and should continue uninterruptedly" (p. 345).

Holdaway (1984) expressed the following important consideration. "It is unquestionable that the most efficient learning environments we know are those controlled on the conditions of the healthy home, and recent research has been reminding us of that fact with an almost cruel clarity" (p. 9).

### Thesis Statement

It could hardly be questioned that on a large-scale basis our society has been unable to effectively educate minority language, low-SES children in a formal in-school setting. It is argued by this researcher that there must be something in these children's out-of-school experience that prevents them from receiving full benefit from





















































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































































