

From the Special Issue Editor
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**Celebrating Linguistically Diverse Learners of St. Louis:
Responsive Research and Practice for Literacy**

Communities across the world struggle with how best to support positive literacy outcomes for all students. The dedication of this special issue stems from my own work with literacy at local St. Louis public schools. The critical fundamentals of reading and writing, for learners of all backgrounds at all ages, need to continue to be addressed so that educational leaders, teachers and researchers can make informed and principled decisions about the ever changing needs of these learners. More empirical research needs to examine the specific factors involved in literacy with students who are simultaneous bilinguals, or those that grow up using two or more languages at home.

A recent practical guide and resource for educators (Valdes, Menken & Castro, 2015) includes critical conversations about reform efforts for linguistically diverse learners and emphasizes the fact that students learn language in different ways and at different rates. These discussions underscore the fact that individual learner differences need to be taken into account by researchers, practitioners and policy makers. It is my hope that the research articles and discussion in this special issue contribute to the knowledge and literacy practices articulated for linguistically diverse learners of all regions, and that collectively we continue to think critically and skeptically about the every changing issues English language learners face in the Midwest and across the globe.

The first article, by Brevik, Olsen & Hellefkjaer, examines the timely and important topic of reading assessment with adolescents at the secondary level. With a very robust sample size of 10,331 participants from 87 different public schools in Norway, the study utilizes data from two national reading tests to examine the effects of L1 and L2 reading. The authors provide a very thorough review of the previous research that discusses differences and similarities with L1 and L2 reading and offers details about the unique Norwegian context. The factors investigated, L2 reading comprehension, L2 reading, gender and study program, are variables that have been examined in the past, but not in one single study with adolescents like the present one. This empirical study provides new information while also confirming old information in new ways. Ultimately, the authors make a strong case for identifying poor readers so that language program design can include corresponding instruction to help all learners attain higher literacy levels. Overall, this investigation provides an excellent rubric for future studies with linguistically diverse populations of adolescents from the Midwest regions and across the USA.

The second article, by Endley, examines proficiency levels and strategy use with 12 Arabic speakers studying English at a university. This study, like the first one in this special issue, reports unique findings for lower-proficiency readers. More specifically, the study reveals that these learners of lower proficiency levels are familiar with the types of strategies to use while reading, but they do not actually use the strategies effectively with L2 academic texts. The study emphasizes early identification of weak readers so that training, that includes instruction and modeling, takes place at the crucial time of early reading.

The last article, by Zhao, Guo, Biales and Olszewski, investigates several factors of individual learner differences, such as L2 proficiency, motivation, anxiety and mastery of reading strategies, as predictors of L2 incidental vocabulary acquisition. With 129 university level Chinese learners of English, the findings reveal that motivation is not a significant predictor of incidental vocabulary acquisition, but all other factors are, thus highlighting the importance of individual learner differences with lexical acquisition. The findings emphasize the fact that while linguistic skills (L2 proficiency) remain important, cognitive and affective factors are also fundamental to L2 incidental vocabulary acquisition. The authors propose that instructional methods include the development of a personal set of effective strategies for each student.

Finally, the discussion by Thorne-Wallington draws attention to the importance of connecting the research on language acquisition to policy decisions, but she specifically contends that more and better data about linguistically diverse learners needs to be collected. The author carefully and thoughtfully provides details about the challenges that researchers and practitioners face with a lack of data in the state of Missouri, while she simultaneously offers plausible suggestions with the use of geographic weighted regression for future directions. The discussion includes examples of correlations between L1 achievement for high school students and socioeconomic status in the state of Missouri, USA, and demonstrates how these maps may enhance the impacts of research with corresponding effects for language policy. With more data banks that include all learners, this type of analysis would help researchers and practitioners understand the relationships between school context and reading attainment with emergent bilinguals throughout Missouri and other regions.

In summary, the research and discussion for the special issue contribute to the growing body of work with students who are learning English literacy in educational systems while simultaneously developing another language at home. I wish to personally thank all of the authors who submitted work to this special issue, and I also want to express my appreciation to the final group of contributors whose work is published here. Understanding literacy among diverse populations and in multicultural societies is important to all of us. Thank you for your passion and dedication to this topic.

Reference:

Valdés, G., Menken, K., & Castro, M. (2015). *Common core, bilingual and English language learners: A reference for educators*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon, Inc.