

Language, Literacy and Diversity:
Transformative Education in Multicultural
Contexts

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Multilingual Contexts

- The term multilingual refers to centres where there are children from a number of different languages. In many parts of Canada, it is common to find classrooms where 10-12 languages co-exist.

Literacy

- The knowledge-based economy of the 21st century requires a highly literate population. In a world that is becoming increasingly mediated through the written word, those who are not highly literate have limited opportunities. The information age ensures that those who are not proficient in reading, writing, and comprehending text will be on the outside looking in.

Goals of Immigrant Families

- Immigrant parents, like many others, are well aware of the importance of literacy. The expectation that their children will be doing some “academics” is high on their priority list

A re-definition of literacy

- world changes coming from the information age have brought about a re-definition of what a literate person is and how literacy should be taught.
- We do not know what the world will be like in 2020 or 2030 when the children under our care graduate, or what it will mean then to be a literate citizen.

Socio-emotional vs. academic focus

- It is time to move beyond the either/or mentality that we will focus on socio-emotional vs. academic issues.
- The assumption that all children will pick up reading as they play is to be reconsidered.

Literacy for every child

- Every child has the ability to acquire literacy skills given the right conditions. Some of the well-known elements include: print rich environments, an extensive vocabulary, phonemic awareness, an understanding of the written code and so on.

Literacy and linguistic diversity

- But this is not enough, particularly when it comes to children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds who disengage early from schooling and are greatly over-represented in special education and among the number of drop outs. We also need to consider the content used in literacy activities

Effective Literacy Planning

- As Early Childhood centres are transformed into multilingual sites, it is time to give serious consideration to how we can plan literacy programs that will be effective for all children including children who speak languages other than English or French.

Removing Barriers

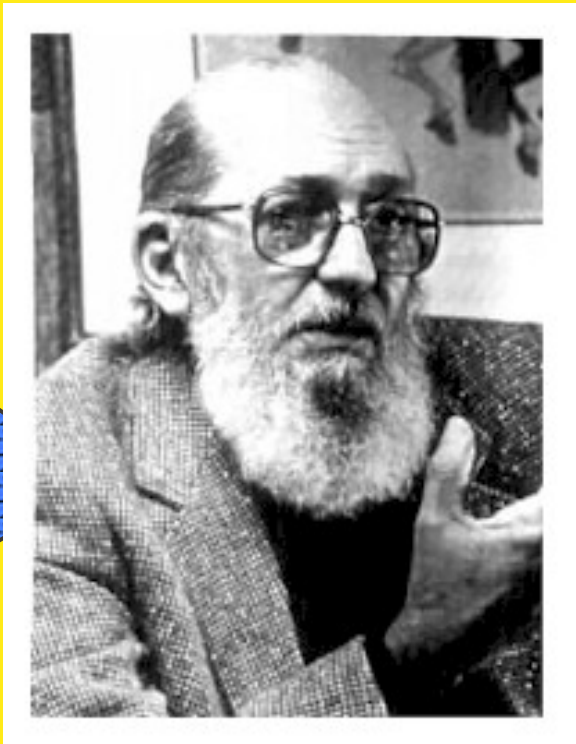
Asking big questions

- To what extent is a student's home language knowledge educationally significant?
- What is the relationship between ability to learn and identity investment?
- How to normalize linguistic diversity and positive attitudes toward home languages?

Improving Outcomes for Language Minority Children

- Meaningful interactions with a variety of print media
- Pride in themselves and their families
- An advocate for every child
- All adults involved have sources of support

Pablo Freire (1921 - 1997)



- Born in Brazil
- Although his family were initially of a middle class background they became destitute after the world economic crisis hit and were forced to move to rural Brazil
- Paulo become exposed to extreme poverty and circumstances that were to inform his future work in education

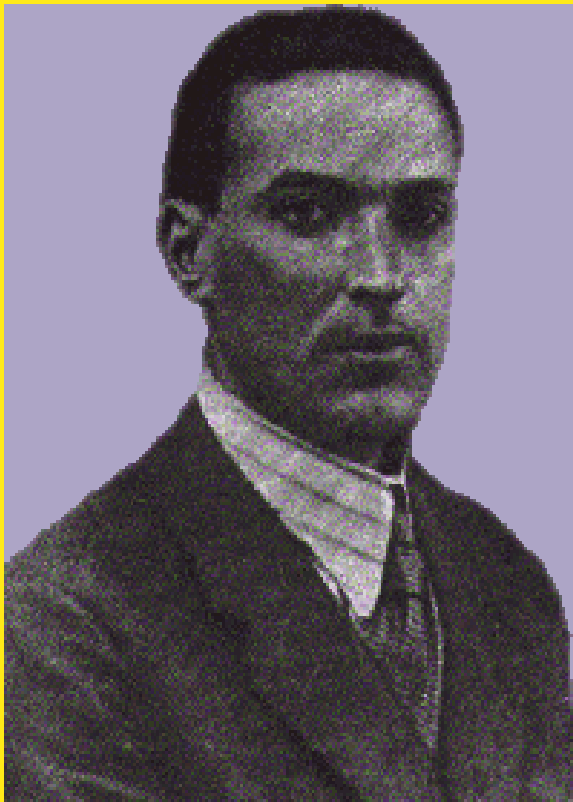
Conscientization (Naming the World)

- Was informed by his work with people who were poor and did not have a voice
- Refers to the process by which consciousness is developed through the process of dialogue and praxis
- This consciousness is understood to have the power to transform reality

“The educator and the people together conscientize themselves, thanks to the dialectical movement that relates critical reflection on past action to the continuing struggle.

--Paulo Freire (The Politics of Education)

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)



- Russian psychologist and philosopher in the 1930's
- emphasized the influences of cultural and social contexts in learning
- supported a discovery model of learning where the teacher plays an active role and the students' mental abilities develop naturally through various paths of discovery

Vygotsky's Principal Assumptions

1. Making Meaning

2. Tools for Cognitive Development

3. The Zone of Proximal Development

Problem solving skills of tasks can be placed into three categories.

(a) those performed independently by the student;

(b) those that cannot be performed even with help; and

(c) those that fall between the two extremes, the tasks that can be performed with help from others.

Jim Cummins

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

- BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency)
- Strong L1 facilitates L2 learning
- Bilingualism has cognitive benefits
- Additive vs. subtractive
- Learning to read happens once

Goal

Find practical, effective, research-based strategies to support young children in multilingual contexts

- Canadian Parenting Circles
- The Early Authors Program

Project 1: Canadian Parenting Workshops

<http://www.ryerson.ca/~bernhard/bilingual3.html>

What topics did the workshops address?

- Impacts of migration on parenting
- Promoting children's social development
- Supporting readiness for school
- Building relationships with child care and schools
- Overview of school systems
- School behaviour policies
- Children's rights and child protection
- Special education

What were the outcomes

- Full report of evaluation

http://www.ryerson.ca/~bernhard/pdf/hoen_fullreport.pdf

- Executive summary

http://www.ryerson.ca/~bernhard/pdf/hoen_reportexec.pdf

What did we learn?

Participants had limited support for their parenting.

- Extended families left behind
- $\frac{1}{4}$ were single parents
- Nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ reported no help with their children
- Few opportunities to talk about parenting issues

How can we enhance our relationships with newcomers?

- Learn more about the history, geography, and cultures of the world
- Recognize the difficulties experienced by all newcomers
- Adapt teaching methods to suit individual children
- Reach out to newcomer parents

Project 2: Parenting Circles

- Funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education
- Ryerson Masters students are paired with groups of parents who meet to write books for and about their children
- Two groups of African-Canadian and Spanish speaking parents meet once a week to talk about their role in supporting children.

Identity texts

- The books are based on family histories, the children's lives, and the children's interests. The main characters in the stories are the children, their friends, relatives, and pets.

Funds of Knowledge

- The cultural transmission of literacy practices from one generation to another assures that children will enter school with a wealth of prior experience.
- Lullabies, fairy tales, riddles, word games, rhymes

Parental Engagement

- When parents' expertise is re-positioned as valued and needed knowledge. Parents, along with educators, become part of a community of learners who can advocate for the children and contribute to their literacy progress.

Project 3:

The Early Authors Program

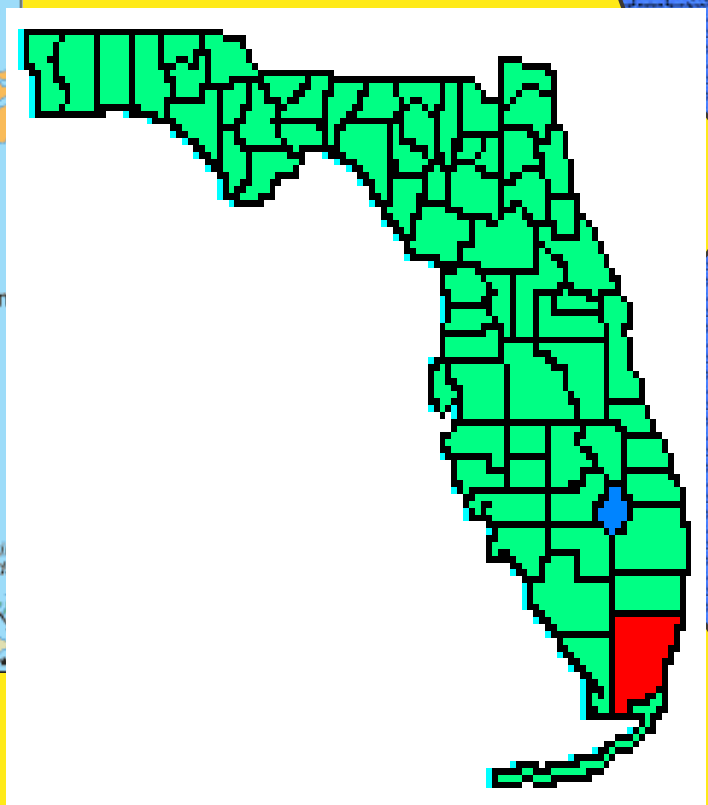
Transformation through the creation
of identity texts

[http://www.ryerson.ca/~bernhard/
bilingual1.html](http://www.ryerson.ca/~bernhard/bilingual1.html)

Miami-Dade Munroe County 3,282 books authored



Miami-Dade



Miami Dade Poverty

- Miami-Dade County is the most populated county in the state of Florida (2.2 million).

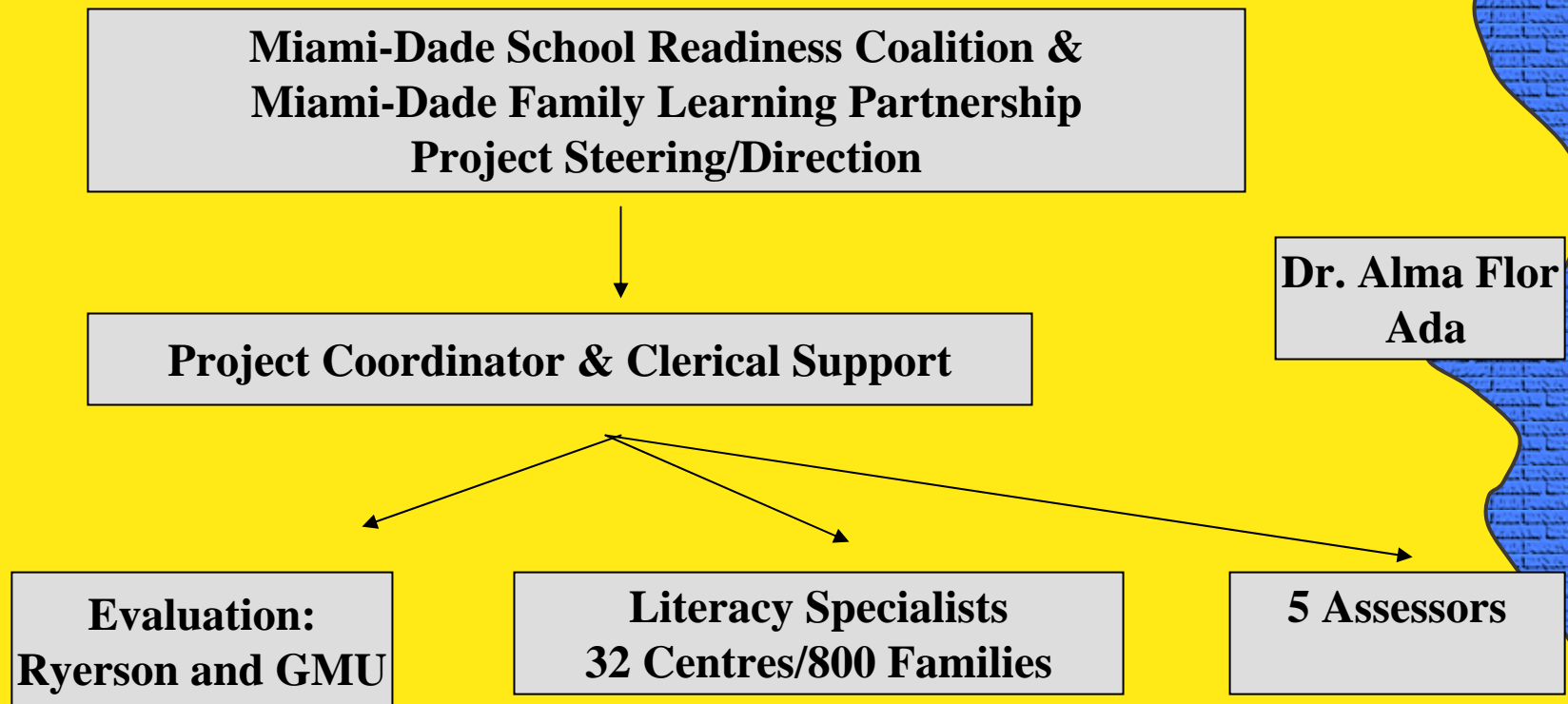
Represents 13% of Florida's total population.

- 20% of all Florida's children under six years of age live in poverty.

- 50% of Florida's adults with incomes below poverty

- levels cannot read at an 8th grade level.

The EAP in Miami



✓ Personnel

✓ Equipment for each home/center

-Computer



-Printer

-Digital camera



-Laminating machine



✓ Training

✓ Assessment and documentation of results



And also...

- Singing songs in children's home language
- Using children's oral folklore
- Promoting children's interaction
 - with print materials
- Reading to and with the children

Miami project

- **19 child care centres**
- **13 family child care homes**
- **57 Teachers**
- **13 Literacy Specialists**
- **1179 Children**
- **800 Families**



Evaluation

- Pre-test: February - March 2003
- Post-test: March - April 2004
- Random assignment of children to experimental and control groups
- Experimental, 325 children: 151, Female; 174, Male. Range: 8 to 76 months
- Control, 103 children: 51 Female; 52 male. Range: 8 to 76 months
- 113 caregivers, 525 parents, 13 literacy specialists.

Instruments

Children:

- Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic Edition (LAPD)
- Early Learning Accomplishment Profile (ELAP)
- Preschool Language Scale-Revised Fourth Edition (PLS-R)
- Interaction With Books Survey

Educators:

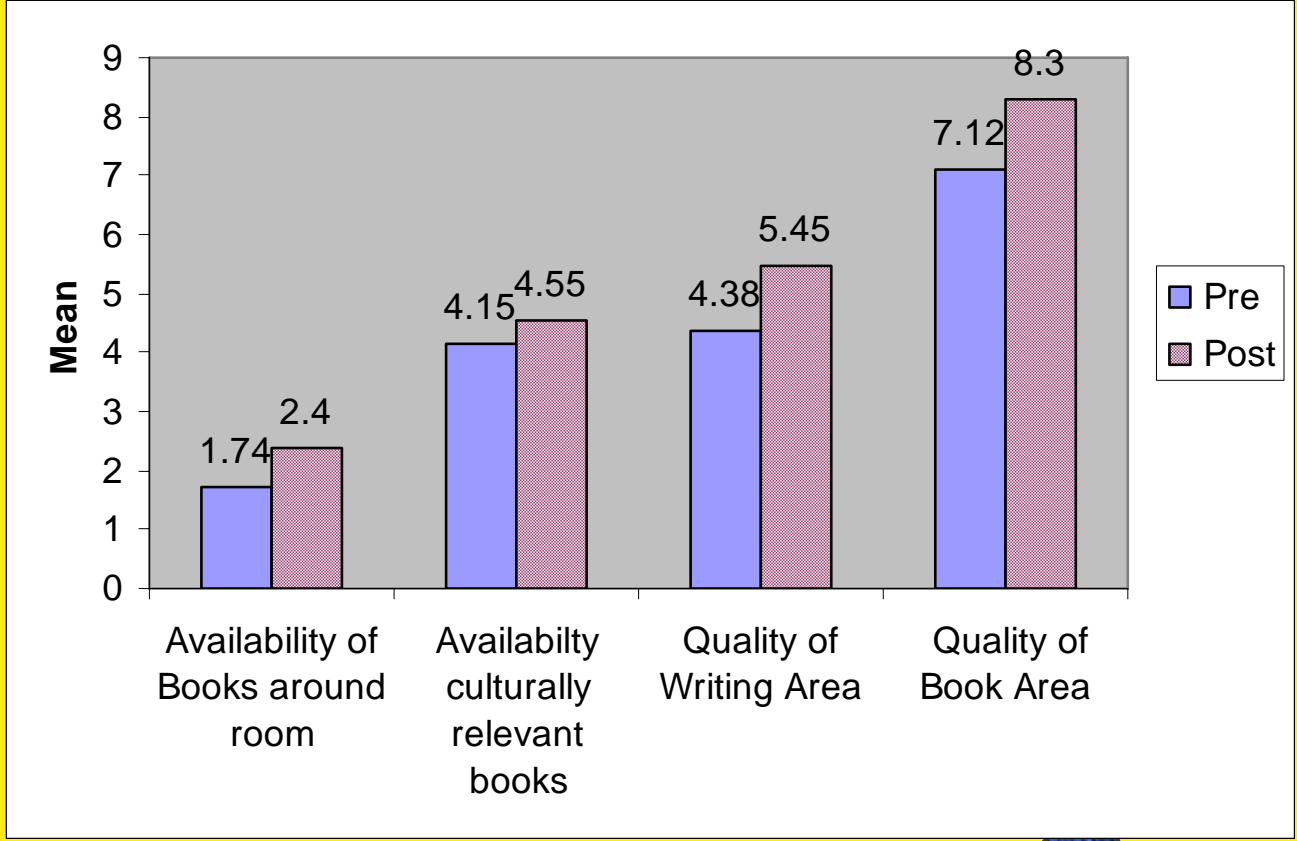
- Early Steps to Reading Success (ESRS)
- Fidelity of Implementation Survey
- Literacy Specialist Interviews

Families:

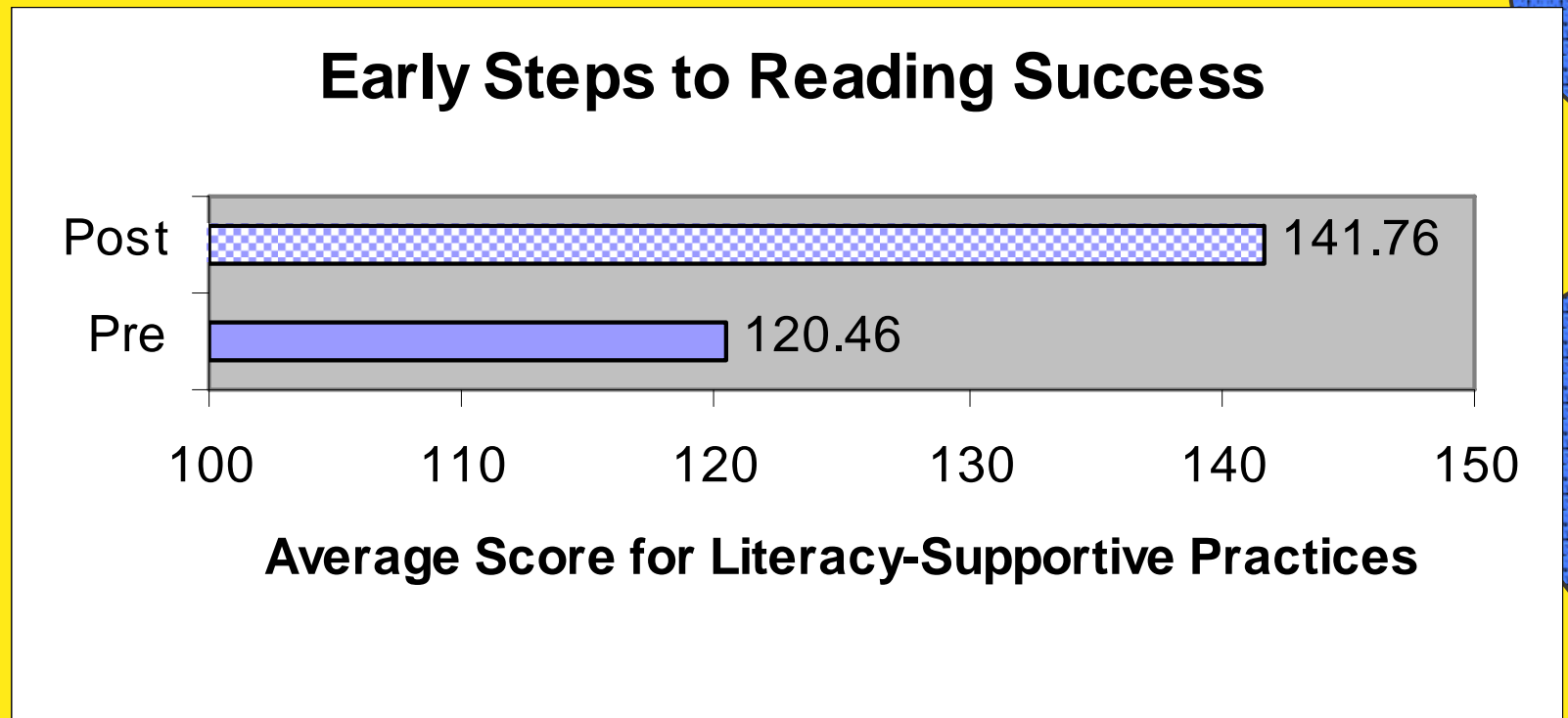
- Family Survey



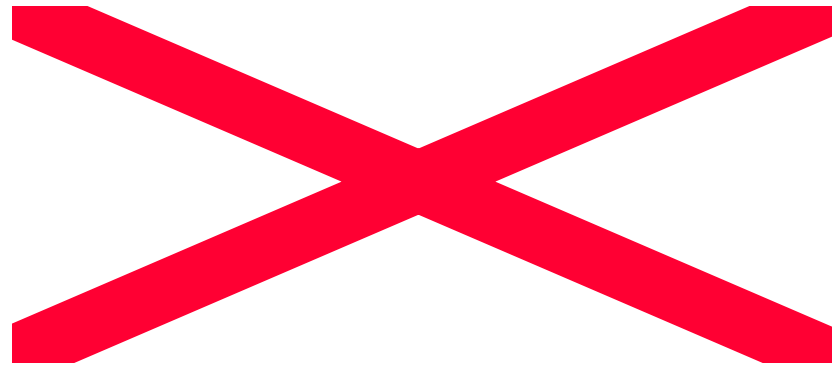
Finding 1: Improvement in EAP classroom literacy environment from pre to post



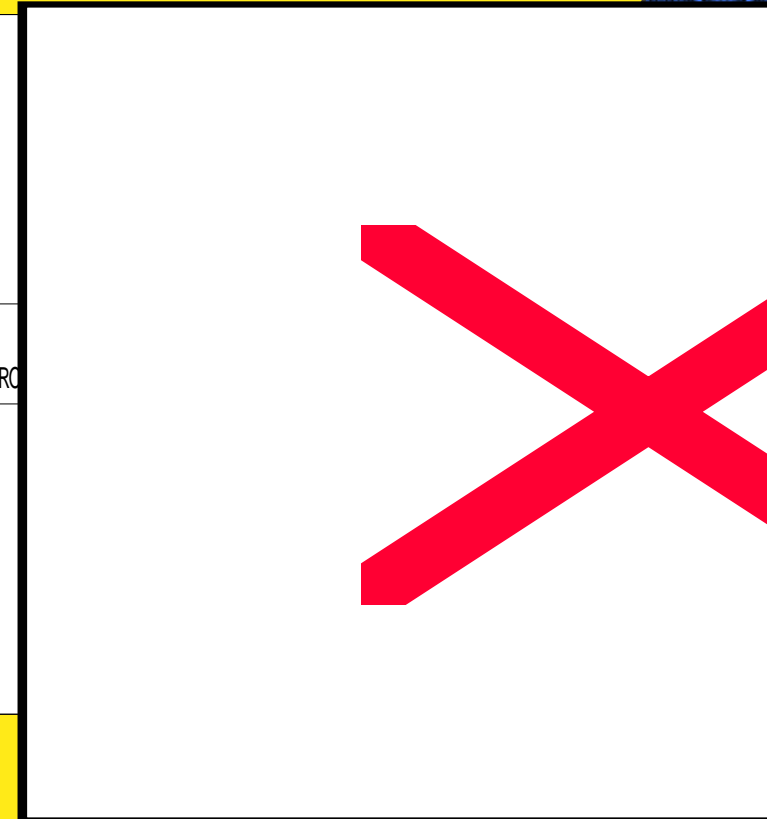
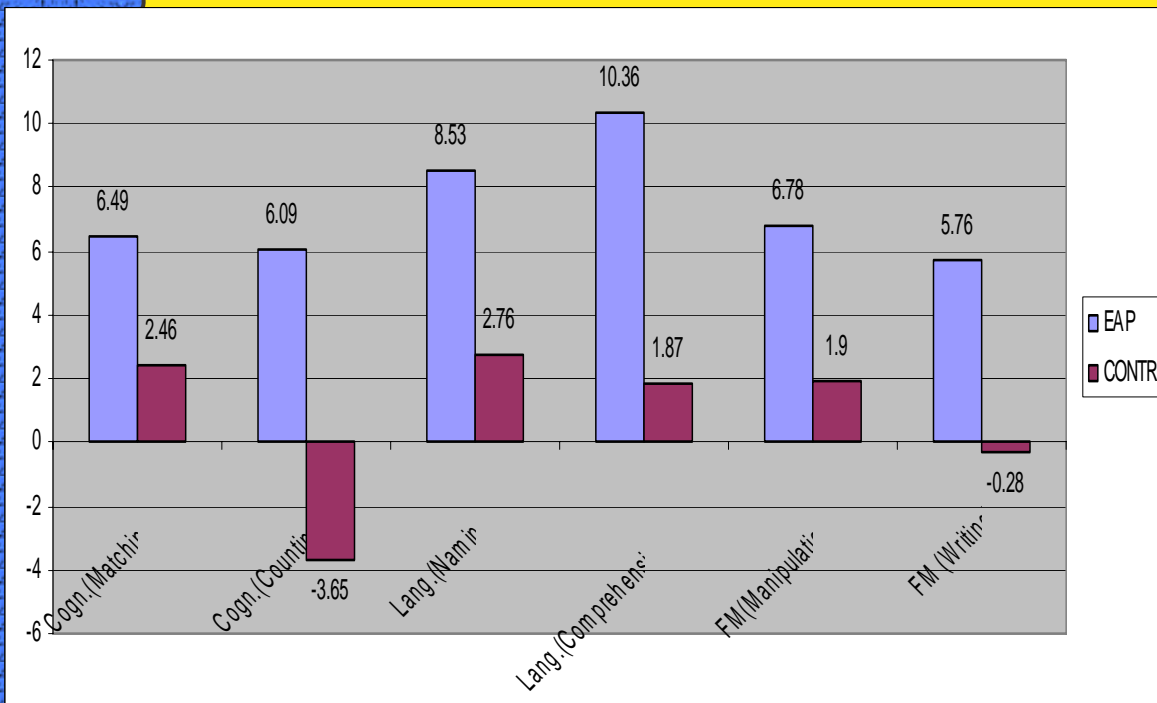
Finding 2: Use of Literacy-Supportive Teaching Strategies/Practices



Finding 3: Gain scores (in months) in LAPD
age from pre to post for EAP and Control



Finding 3, continued: PLS-R age equivalent scores from pre to post for the 3-4 year olds in the EAP and control groups (Expressive Language and Language Comprehension Skills)



Conclusion

Even in multilingual contexts, educators can create an environments that acknowledges, communicates respect for, and promotes linguistic diversity

Thank you
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