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K–3 School-Wide Reading Model to Improve Literacy Outcomes for Latino English Learners

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The article focuses on the implementation of a framework (School-Wide Reading Model, SWRM) that helps to structure literacy instruction to a population in need of better literacy outcomes. First, a conceptual framework is discussed regarding SWRM. Second, the SWRM framework is explained and tied to the conceptual framework, with a focus on four core SWRM tenets. Third, the literature is reviewed to state the core features of early reading instruction. Fourth, the benefits of assessing students in literacy at several points in time, while interpreting results are discussed. Fifth, recommendations and further inquiry are discussed.

Keywords: *school-wide reading model; Latino English learners; systems-level support*

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Currently, K–12 public schools in the United States face many challenges regarding literacy progress and high-stakes assessments (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2002). The increased pressure from the federal government has underscored the importance for public schools to provide the best literacy instruction for all students. One group that would benefit from a paradigm shift in literacy instruction is Latino English Learners (ELs). Past literacy achievement scores for students who are Latino ELs demonstrate a lower performance in literacy outcomes when compared to mainstream students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). In part, this may be attributed to several reasons. Latino ELs (a) who are predominantly Spanish speaking are learning a new language while simultaneously learning academic core content (Gersten, 1996), (b) are receiving unsatisfactory evidenced-based targeted instruction to become proficient readers (Vaughn, Mathes, Linan-Thompson, & Francis, 2005), and (c) may not have sufficient prior content knowledge to successfully master academic skills (Hirsch, 2003).

The specific literacy struggles of Latino ELs (e.g., poor understanding of the alphabetic principle in reading, implicit instruction regarding vocabulary acquisition, limited opportunities to practice language skills, and limited comprehension instruction) further support the critical need for systemic implementation such as a K–3 School-Wide Reading Model (SWRM) (Harn, Chard, & Kame'enui, 2011; Kame'enui & Simmons, 1998; Simmons et al., 2002) to achieve desired academic literacy outcomes (D. L. Baker, Baker, Katz, & Otterstedt, 2009; Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Lipson, Chomsky-Higgins, & Kanfer, 2011; Marston, 2005; Shinn, 2007). Although there has long been a call to decrease the achievement gap, educators continue to see a persistent and significant difference between White students' and Latino students' reading outcomes. Latino students in fourth grade continue to perform about 25 points below where their White peers perform on the reading portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (NCES, 2011). Latino students in eighth grade consistently perform about 24 points below their White

peers on the reading section of the NAEP (NCES, 2011). Regrettably, this achievement gap is a consistent trend since 1992.

Current academic achievement literacy outcomes for Latino ELs in K–3 can be improved if educators encompass a more responsive and proactive approach when instructing these students (Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006; McLaughlin, 2012; Reutzel & Clark, 2011). Therefore, this article will focus on systemic practices that hold promise for changing the literacy trajectory of K–3 Latino ELs. Specifically we address the following: (a) conceptual model and critical features of an SWRM; (b) evidence-based literacy practices and implementation for Latino ELs; (c) literacy screener, benchmark assessments and progress monitoring; (d) review of data for instructional decisions; and (e) systems evaluation within an SWRM.

Conceptual Model

Conceptualizing a School-wide Reading Model

For educators, Response to Intervention (RtI) has varied goals (e.g., reducing the students referred to special education, improving literacy programs, implementing a better use of assessments, more professional development for teachers, improving the instruction) even though federal regulations have outlined specific core components of the intent and utilization of RtI (D. Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Justice, 2006; Linan-Thompson et al., 2006). At the heart of RtI is the implementation of evidence-based practices and scientifically based research (SBR) implemented within a series of tiers to offset poor academic and/or social skills performance among students (Justice, 2006; Lenski, 2011/2012; Shepherd & Salembier, 2011; Shinn, 2007; Vaughn & Klingner, 2007; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011). Currently, evidence demonstrates that although regulations and parameters of RtI have special education implications, the RtI framework, logic, and rationale is suitable for general education students (Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Justice, 2006; Linan-Thompson et al., 2006; Marston, 2005; Vaughn &

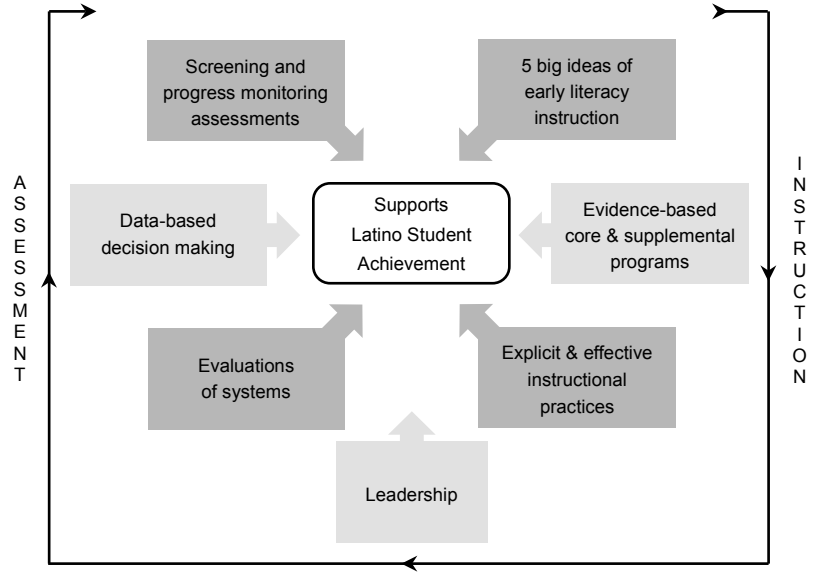
Klingner, 2007). With the inception of NCLB in 2002 (see also Carnine & Granzin, 2001), more schools have shifted their literacy practices to reflect the implementation of SBR practices (D. Fuchs et al., 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011).

As such, NCLB has created a greater awareness among educators to improve literacy outcomes for all students. Nonetheless, NCLB has also created significant challenges for many educators such as penalizing low-performing schools by restructuring staff and/or closing schools, and mandating that all students read at grade level by 2014 (Justice, 2006; NCLB, 2002; Vaughn, Wanzek, & Fletcher, 2007). In response to these actions by the federal government, school districts have adopted frameworks and systems to shield themselves from these reprimands. Thus, the creation, implementation, and sustainability of an SWRM is logical and necessary, considering that SWRM is anchored to RtI logic and core tenets (e.g., using data to make instructional decisions, SBR practices and systems-level support). In its simplest terms, SWRM implements a series of systems (e.g., RtI core tenets) that when delivered by school personnel effectively and efficiently, holds promise for improving and sustaining reading outcomes for Latino ELs (D. L. Baker et al., 2009; S. K. Baker, Smolkowski, Smith, et al., 2011; Fien, Smith, et al., 2011) (see Figure 1).

Critical Features of an SWRM

Providing quality literacy instruction is the underlining goal of the SWRM. The implementation and delivery of strong systems-level supports (e.g., scientifically relevant research-based interventions, data-driven outcomes, and school-wide implementation) are core tenets of the model (Kame'enui, Simmons, & Coyne, 2000; Lipson et al., 2011; Simmons et al., 2002; Smith, Fien, Basaraba, & Travers, 2009). An effective SWRM allocates literacy support according to students' current literacy instructional needs (Lipson et al., 2011; McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2005; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000). This approach

Figure 1: SWRM Supports Latino Student Achievement



Source: Adapted from Kame'enui and Simmons (1998).

differs from past school models, which often focused on what schools could provide regardless of students' literacy needs. This proactive approach to literacy makes a best faith effort to ensure that all students receive the necessary instructional literacy support required to make progress, meet, and/or exceed grade-level literacy expectations (Foorman, Carlson, & Santi, 2007; Justice, 2006; Shinn, 2007; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011).

The following elements underscore SWRM core systems:

- Evidence-based core curriculum programs to teach literacy programs.
- Systematic, direct and explicit implementation in the five big ideas in literacy.
- District and on-site instructional leadership.
- Data-based instructional decisions for students.
- Screening and progress monitoring assessments.

- Ongoing evaluation of school systems to improve student outcomes. (Smith et al., 2009)

Evidence-based Literacy Practices and Implementation

In 2006, the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (NLPLMCY) published a report regarding best practices in literacy for ELs (August & Shanahan, 2006). In essence, the NLPLMCY stated that more research was needed to confirm what was stated in 2000 with the report of the National Reading Panel (2000) for students who spoke English as their native language. Given the lack of research related to literacy and ELs, the NLPLMCY was optimistic that teaching the five big ideas in early literacy (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) to Latino ELs was a viable option. Additionally, the NLPLMCY emphasized the critical need for effective instructional delivery, considering that the teaching of the five big ideas regarding literacy as presented in core reading programs across the United States is presented in a non-systematic, fragmented, and with little emphasis placed on mastery of content (Dewitz & Jones, 2013).

Moreover, similar to their mainstream counterparts, when teaching early literacy skills to Latino ELs, empirical evidence points to systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills (August & Shanahan, 2006; Fien, Smith, et al., 2011; Goldenberg, 2008). Specifically, K–3 Latino ELs should receive a minimum of 90 minutes of core instruction covering the five big ideas in literacy. Included in those 90 minutes are 30 minutes of small-group instruction that targets several skills including accurate and fluent decoding of words that appear in text (e.g., decodable readers or core reading programs) and practicing reading decodable text or core reading text (S. K. Baker, Smolkowski, Smith, et al., 2011).

Five Big Ideas in Literacy

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is a stepping-stone toward developing an understanding of the alphabetic principle. Teachers who understand the purpose and need for phonemic awareness skills provide their students with a better opportunity to accurately decode words (Lyon, 1998; Shankweiler & Fowler, 2004). Phonemic awareness skills focus attention to speech, since speech consists of a sequential series of sounds called phonemes that when placed together, leads to meaning (e.g., communication). Phonemes form the smallest unit of a sound and are critical for communication, meaning, and the development of the sound structure in language. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers have a sound understanding of the relevance of phonemic awareness in an alphabetic orthography (Blachman, 1991; Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

As stated, a body of research supports the importance of teaching phonemic awareness skills to developing readers (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001; Morrow, Tracey, & Del Nero, 2011; Shankweiler & Fowler, 2004; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) since the ability to isolate, blend, and segment individual sounds in words is a necessary skill for all beginning readers. Ultimately, the goal of phonemic awareness is to have students manipulate phonemes in spoken words, for example blending sounds to form a word (/s/ /a/ /t/ = sat) or to segment words into phonemes (camp = /c/ /a/ /m/ /p/). The earlier students master this skill, the higher the probability that students will begin to decode words in isolation and/or text.

Latino ELs are not exempt from the growing body of research supporting phonemic awareness skills; however, a lack of language skills for any student may require provisions that are more language-based, before engaging in isolating, blending, and segmenting of phonemes (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Thus, Latino ELs benefit from chants,

rhymes, and word play activities as a precursor to phonemic awareness to build language skills and a conceptual understanding of hearing and isolating phonemes in words.

Yopp and Yopp (2000) recommend the following activities when engaging students in sound manipulation activities: word plays (songs, poems, chants), matching, isolation, substitution, blending, segmentation, and deletion. The purpose of these skills is to focus students on the relationship between letters and their respective sounds.

Alphabetic Principle

Since readers use various processes to read words, students are at an advantage when instruction focuses on the visual manipulation of sounds to decode words. In other words, mastery of the alphabetic principle includes converting graphemes into phonemes and blending these sounds to form words (Ehri et al., 2001). Phonics in context teaches children to use letter-sound correspondences to identify unfamiliar words that they encounter. Thus, effective teachers teach phonics to children in a systematic, explicit and sequential manner to facilitate the correspondences between graphemes and phonemes (symbols and sounds) of the language and to apply the aforementioned strategy to decode unfamiliar words (e.g., sounding out the phonemes and then blending the phonemes) (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, & Tarver, 2010; Ehri et al., 2001).

However, the English language is an alphabetic language with a deep orthography and does not always share the one-to-one phoneme/grapheme (e.g., sound and symbol) correspondence like other alphabetic languages (i.e., Spanish, Italian) who display a more transparent orthography. English contains irregular words that require students to master the English orthography and morphology in order to effectively decode words (Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011). Of importance for teachers who teach literacy in the early grades is the fact that language is composed of units and these units include phonemes, morphemes, words, sentences, and discourse. Thus, teachers should

explicitly teach these domains to all students in the early grades (Linan-Thompson et al., 2006; Washburn et al., 2011).

Decoding words is a critical step toward becoming a proficient reader for all students. Gunn, Smolkowski, Biglan, Black, and Blair (2005) successfully fostered decoding skills for struggling K–2 Latino ELs by increasing instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics skills. Vaughn, Mathes, et al. (2005) used a multi-faceted intervention (an example of this intervention is provided in the fluency section below) to increase reading outcomes for Latino ELs with a focus on phonemic awareness and phonics to increase accurate and fluent decoding of text.

Additionally, research suggests that students who are not able to decode words accurately and fluently, even though increased time is devoted to other skills (e.g., vocabulary, academic language, and comprehension skill), may not adequately compensate for poor decoding skills (S. K. Baker, Smolkowski, Katz, et al., 2008; Torgesen, 2002). Thus, the ability to accurately and efficiently decode words in the early grades is paramount for acquiring higher-level reading skills (August & Shanahan, 2006; D. L. Baker et al., 2009; S. K. Baker, Smolkowski, Katz, et al., 2008; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Morrow et al., 2011).

Fluency Instruction

The earlier students learn to decode words accurately, the greater the odds increase that they will be able to read at grade level with each consecutive year (Fien, Baker, et al., 2008; Juel, 1988; Park, Preciado, Chaparro, & Cummings, 2013). Good decoding skills coupled with fluency mastery maximize reading outcomes (Carnine et al., 2010; Ehri, 1995; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). When maximizing fluency practice for students, teachers should be cognizant of providing effect opportunities for practice. Allington (2012) provides recommendations of fluency interventions that have been proven successful in classroom settings, including: paired readings, choral readings, repeated readings, and readers' theater.

Gunn et al. (2005) found that Latino students who practice reading fluency daily in structured classroom settings read more words independently at the end of the year than peers who do not. Earlier, Logan (1997) reported that students who re-read connected text on a daily basis outperformed peers in the area of decoding and words read per minute. Vaughn, Mathes, et al. (2005) developed multiple interventions for Latino first-grade students in which fluency was a core component. Vaughn and colleagues increased reading fluency scores for Latino ELs by implementing the following. Students in the intervention practiced connected text daily by using decodable books, read each decodable story multiple times before choosing a new story, worked with a peer during accuracy and fluency practice, and teachers established a fluency criterion to ensure that students met benchmark goals (e.g., end-of-the-year goal of 50 words correct per minute).

In essence, the goal of fluency instruction is to have all students, including Latino ELs, become grade-level fluent readers. Samuels (1976) found that fluent readers read text with automaticity. Automaticity is a standard that is reached and attained once time, effort, and activities have been devoted toward mastery of a skill (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Rasinski, 2012). In fact, reading text with automaticity implies that a student reads all words effortlessly, accurately, and fluently. Reading fluency is one key component toward reading mastery and classroom conditions need to provide for increased reading practice (Rasinski, 2012; Vaughn, Mathes, et al., 2005).

In addition, teachers should also be cognizant of incorporating prosody instruction when teaching fluency. As stated, fluency instruction is a vehicle toward comprehension and by including prosody instruction, teachers can further guide reading to encompass a more natural way of reading. This approach is a stark contrast from emphasizing speed and turning fluency instruction into an isolated skill with little meaning, with a heavy focus on reading quickly, with disregard for grammar conventions and more importantly comprehension skills (Rasinski, 2012). Of note, some Latino ELs may be able to decode words accurately; however, this same group may not be able

to read words with prosody since Latino ELs may not initially have the vocabulary and comprehension skills to match their decoding skills.

Vocabulary

For Latino ELs, mastering vocabulary skills in grades K–3 can be a formidable task (Gersten, 1996). Nonetheless, if Latino ELs are to compete academically with non-minority students, the aforementioned skill is imperative (Gersten et al., 2007). When teaching vocabulary skills, practitioners have to be cognizant of several key and vital evidence-based practices. Practitioners should consider that all students benefit from vocabulary instruction that is taught intentionally, daily, explicitly, systematically, across academic domains, and throughout the day (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Gersten et al., 2007; Goldenberg, 2008; Kucan, 2012; Scott, Skobel, & Wells, 2008). Understanding that many Latino ELs face a double demand in school (e.g., acquiring content knowledge and learning a new language) necessitates a formidable approach (e.g., intentional, systematic, explicit, and direct approach) when teaching vocabulary (Gersten, 1996).

Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) stated that vocabulary instruction can be broken down into three tiers of words. For Tier 1 vocabulary instruction, the focus is on functional words, that is, providing students with labels to common words (e.g., desk, restroom, auditorium). The premise is to provide labels to words that Latino students require when interacting in school, home, and community settings. Tier 2 vocabulary instruction focuses on teaching words that are meaningful to the story/text, that are unfamiliar, that cannot be taught by only demonstrating an illustration, and that Latino students will likely use in the future (e.g., astonished, impressed, hibernate). Tier 3 vocabulary instruction is teaching words related to a specific field/domain (e.g., medicine, astronomy, engineering). Tier 3 words are words not often discussed or seen in narrative text, but more likely appear in expository text. Tier 3 vocabulary instruction involves words

pertinent to a specific field or profession (e.g., medical and engineering fields).

Although Latino ELs will benefit from Tier 1 words (e.g., computer, classroom, church, park), ultimately they require the formal academic language possessed by non-minority students (August & Shanahan, 2006; Gersten, 1996; Gersten et al., 2007; Goldenberg, 2008). In this case, explicitly and systematically teaching Tier 2 words is an excellent approach when learning, understanding and teaching vocabulary words from the core curriculum. For example, when teaching Tier 2 words, practitioners should consider a format that (a) explicitly states the word(s) to students, (b) provides a child-friendly definition, (c) provides multiple examples of what the word means and does not mean, and (d) provides students with an opportunity to use the new word in a sentence or context (see Table 1).

To further complement and enhance the teaching of vocabulary and language skills, practitioners should teach vocabulary words across different subject matters, provide multiple opportunities for Latino ELs to use words during academic instruction and across curriculum, and strategically use cognates to further support academic progress (S. K. Baker & Baker, 2008; Gersten et al., 2007; Gersten & Geva, 2003; Kucan, 2012). The extra practice and review are necessary components for building mastery of new words and content knowledge (Gersten et al., 2007; Hirsch, 2003). One such practice as described by Carlo et al. (2004) is to teach ELs to infer meaning from texts. During interactive reading, teachers read aloud, discuss what was read with students, and use think-aloud procedures to show how context could be used to infer meaning of unknown words.

Lastly, having knowledge of morphology, semantics, and syntax affects the quality of word knowledge. Morphology enables students to generalize the meaning of root words to their morphological derivation (e.g., cat + s = cats, camp + ground = campground, and electric + ity = electricity) (Kucan, 2012). Additionally, understanding that the prefixes (un, in) means *not* in words such as *unreliable* and *incomplete* and that (re) means *again* such as *review* and *recharge* allows students to know

that the aforementioned words mean not reliable, not complete, again view and again charge. Understanding prefix can be another vehicle toward vocabulary learning.

Table 1: Vocabulary Teaching Format

1. Teacher pre-selects words that are meaningful and important to the story/content, and words that students will likely use in the future.	Grades K–1: *The Tortoise and the Hare* (McAllister, 2001) • Boastful • Amazed • Wise • Trudged • Champions Grades 2–3: *Henry and Ribsy* (Cleary, 1954) • Interesting • Nuisance • Anxiously • Reluctant • Demand
2. Teacher provides a child-friendly definition.	Grades K–1 example: ***Boastful*** means to tell people that you are good or the best at something (e.g., running, reading, throwing a football). Grades 2–3 example: ***Reluctant*** means to not feel ready to try or to do something different.
3. Teacher provides examples and non-examples of the word.	Teacher says: Put your thumb up if the following are examples of being **boastful**: a. Johnny told his classmates that he is great at spelling. b. Mr. Smith got an award and told his friends that Mr. Johnson should have gotten the award. c. Melissa told everyone at the park that she was the smartest person in the world. Teacher says: Put your thumb up if the following are examples of being **reluctant**: a. I always like to try new clothes in the store. b. I would like to visit a different city this summer. c. I do not know the new neighbors so I will not ask them to water my plants.
4. Teacher provides opportunities for students to use the word in a sentence or context.	Teacher says: Now I want you to tell your partner a time when you or someone else was boastful. Teacher says: Now I want you to tell your partner a time when you felt reluctant.

Semantics is important because students need to know how words relate to each other. For example, students benefit from knowing multiple meanings of words, words linked by context, and the understanding of words and concepts. In theory, semantics awareness facilitates comprehension through context and how related words convey meaning. Syntax is the structure of language and its relation to how words are constructed and appear in text. As such, words are constructed to add meaning and for understanding derivations of words that are necessary for enhancing the meaning of text (e.g., interest, interested, interesting, and interestingly) (Kucan, 2012).

Academic English

Although a repository of known vocabulary is critical for all students, the knowledge of vocabulary plus how to use that vocabulary in academic settings is critical for Latino ELs (Gersten et al., 2007). Academic English has in the past been referred to as the "register of schooling" (Cummins, 2000) and academic language (Anstrom et al., 2010). Though the definition of academic English has been widely debated (Anstrom et al., 2010), generally speaking this construct can be referred to as critical language that is required to succeed in academic settings. Besides identifying a consistent definition of academic English, a challenge has been the lack of teacher training. Schleppegrell (2012) stated that a focus on academic language reveals the role of language in schooling and suggests that every teacher is a language teacher. This means that all teachers should have some familiarity and ability to teach what language skills are needed to teach their targeted-content area. There is a lack of scientifically based evidence to guide what teachers should know and teach about academic English (Anstrom et al., 2010). There is however a general agreement that academic English is important and that teachers should receive some professional development about how to teach academic English in their content-area (Gersten et al., 2007; Schleppegrell, 2012).

Comprehension

Comprehension instruction consisting of asking questions before, during and after reading is common practice in many classrooms. In fact many practitioners teach comprehension skills based on this format. Although asking students questions before, during and after reading supports reading comprehension for students (Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008), the notion of entirely or substantially using this format to teach comprehension should be reevaluated. Of value to the field are common core tenets that significantly improve reading comprehension outcomes for students: (a) reading fluency, (b) vocabulary, (c) prior knowledge of content, and (d) skills to access information.

As previously stated, practitioners may view comprehension as the easiest reading component to teach; however, comprehension skill acquisition requires explicit, direct, and systematic teaching of vocabulary words to optimize student gains (August et al., 2005; Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982; Gersten & Geva, 2003). For Latino ELs, practitioners must review and preview key vocabulary words that are meaningful to the text (August et al., 2005; Gersten et al., 2007; Gersten & Geva, 2003; Goldenberg, 2008; Preciado, Horner, & Baker, 2009) given that Latino students will benefit from prior knowledge information and multiple opportunities to hear, practice, and review key vocabulary terms (Scott et al., 2008). Gersten (1996) summarized that gains in literacy occur when Latinos are provided with multiple opportunities to practice a skill since Latinos are simultaneously grasping new content and in some cases learning a new language.

Santoro et al. (2008) found that teaching comprehension skills through read-alouds is an effective way of supporting comprehension skills for Latino students. Santoro and colleagues found that an effective way to teach comprehension skills was by using the following format: (a) teaching text structure, (b) developing text-focused questions, and (c) teaching Tier 2 vocabulary words. During the structure of text instruction, students were taught to distinguish between narrative and expository text. If the text were narrative, students were taught to

implement the use of *who, what, where, when, and why* type of questions. If the text were expository, students were taught *compare and contrast*, *cause and effect*, and *Know What and Learn* strategies. Results from teaching these strategies have demonstrated increases in comprehension skills (Santoro et al., 2008).

Although vocabulary is a critical variable for comprehension instruction, another important component is content knowledge (Hirsch, 2003). Content knowledge can be defined as the level of understanding regarding a given topic. Simply stated, students who have acquired content knowledge can more easily make sense of words and have an easier time giving meaning to text inferences (Scott et al., 2008). This phenomenon is further underscored during text reading since good readers make inferences based on prior knowledge. To substantiate this point, reading comprehension depends on a reader having knowledge of words, knowledge of content, and the ability to make inferences to make sense of what is being read (Hirsch, 2003). Thus, when Latino ELs lack decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension skills, the reading task becomes irrelevant, without meaning, and in some cases aversive (Preciado et al., 2009).

For Latino ELs to develop increased content knowledge, practitioners need to provide substantial background knowledge of content and words (e.g., morphology, syntax, and semantics) to ensure that students are talking and accurately using targeted words related to text throughout the day (August et al., 2005). In summary, it is vital that practitioners know and understand the critical role of comprehension, and to provide Latino ELs with the necessary schema and opportunities to practice language-related skills to improve comprehension skills (S. K. Baker & Baker, 2008; Goldenberg, 2008).

In sum, SWRM is grounded to an RtI foundation, which utilizes a systemic framework to effectively support the literacy needs of Latino ELs. Embedded within the SWRM framework is the importance for teachers to provide evidence-based practices in literacy to meet the ongoing literacy struggles of Latino ELs. As such, in the following sections we describe the remaining core systemic domains within an RtI

framework: (a) benchmark and progress monitoring, (b) data-based decision making, and (c) on-going evaluation of systems.

Benchmark and Progress Monitoring Assessments

Benchmark Assessments

Although assessments are not a new practice, the manner in which assessments are utilized and interpreted has new implications (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Within an SWRM, practitioners are expected to use assessments to measure students' progress and to determine if students are making the necessary literacy growth to reach end-of-the-year literacy proficiency benchmarks (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Creating systems that utilize universal (e.g., benchmark assessments) and progress monitoring assessments to support and improve literacy outcomes for Latino students are critical features of an SWRM (D. L. Baker et al., 2009).

Benchmark assessments are a necessary component of an SWRM for the purpose of establishing a universal screener to determine the level of support required by students. Benchmark scores are used as indicators to determine if students are on track to reach grade-level literacy expectations at the end of the year (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Providing literacy benchmark goal assessments for students at three or four points in time during a school year allows practitioners to determine which students require more intensive instruction and/or an increase of instructional literacy time to meet grade-level expectations (S. K. Baker, Smolkowski, Katz, et al., 2008).

The purpose of benchmark assessments is twofold: (a) providing universal literacy screening for all students, and (b) comparing student progress with established norms that when met, result in students meeting and/or surpassing the end-of-the-year literacy grade-level expectations (S. K. Baker, Smolkowski, Katz, et al., 2008; Park et al., 2013). Of course, the big question for practitioners is: what do we assess when determining benchmark goals? While much debate has surfaced in the

educational community regarding this point, consideration should be given to phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, oral language development, writing and oral reading fluency skills at grades K–1, and oral reading fluency, vocabulary, oral language development, writing, and comprehension skills at grades 2–3 (D. L. Baker et al., 2009).

Progress Monitoring

Although maintaining persistent use of benchmark assessments is a pivotal component of an SWRM, the implementation of progress monitoring assessments is just as important when measuring student progress within the classroom curriculum (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Justice, 2006). In the big picture, schools should provide Latino ELs with instruction that matches the level of academic support required to offset low literacy achievement (S. K. Baker & Baker, 2008; Preciado et al., 2009). For this reason, progress monitoring is imperative for all students, especially for students who are not meeting benchmark indicators (Marston, 1989, 2005).

In short, progress monitoring assessments evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of instruction by comparing progress monitoring results to scores attained during the benchmark period. Progress monitoring evaluates whether students are making sufficient and necessary literacy progress to meet the end-of-the-year benchmark expectations (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Marston, 1989, 2005; Shinn, 2007). If student scores remain the same or demonstrate minimal change, practitioners can increase the amount of time targeted for reading instruction, improve the instruction, and/or determine if the core program is the best placement for students.

De Ramirez and Shapiro (2006) used one-minute fluency measures (e.g., curriculum-based measurement) with Latino students to measure literacy growth. The results of their study demonstrated that curriculum-based measurements were sensitive when measuring literacy skills over time and reiterated the need for practitioners to monitor progress

in literacy rates for students. A good source for determining valid and reliable benchmark and progress monitoring assessments can be found at the National Center on Response to Intervention Website (http://www.rti4success.org/).

Data Review

Since schools are evolving and changing organisms, a similar perspective should prevail when practitioners review student progress (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). To underscore this point, school administrators and practitioners should allocate time for weekly or bi-weekly meetings to review data results (e.g., benchmark and/or progress monitoring assessments) (L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). For Latino ELs in each grade level, school teams must think about the quality of the literacy instruction and determine if the instruction is sufficient to support students with below-benchmark instructional levels. Sometimes it is necessary to look at data for all students and then disaggregate the data to answer the following types of questions for Latino ELs:

1. Are Latino ELs equally represented in the percentage of students reaching grade-level goals?
2. If Latino ELs are over-represented in intervention groups and below-grade level performance, what can be changed in the instructional environment to improve these outcomes?
3. Are Latino ELs receiving adequate vocabulary and language practice throughout the day?

Table 2 provides more detailed questions that Grade-level Teams can ask and answer when looking at different types of data.

In retrospect, when practitioners organize data meetings to answer the aforementioned questions, meetings are more productive, focused, and attentive to variables that directly impact literacy outcomes (Kame'enui et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2009). As a rule, the logic is to have all students meeting benchmark goals since meeting current

Table 2: Grade-level Data Review Meetings

Data source	Guiding questions
Benchmark data	• Is our school-wide reading system working for the majority of students? • What percentage of students is on track to be performing at grade level at the end of the school year? • What percentage of students is reading below grade level? • Can our system meet students at their instructional levels and keep them on grade level or accelerate their learning so they reach grade-level performance?
Progress monitoring data	• Which students will need additional or different instruction? • Is our intervention plan working? • If our intervention plan is not working, what can we do to make it more effective (i.e., group size, correct placement, teacher delivery)? • Have the intervention teachers had sufficient professional development?

benchmark goals is indicative of reaching future benchmark goals (S. K. Baker, Smolkowski, Katz, et al., 2008). Incorporating data meetings to review data, and to judiciously make instructional and/or program(s) modifications are instructional tenets that when implemented efficiently and with fidelity, lead to improved student outcomes (Kame'enui et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2009).

Instructional Groups

Effectively organizing and monitoring instructional groups are key academic components for improving literacy outcomes (Foorman et al., 2007). Moreover, modification and differentiation of instruction are required for students who are not meeting benchmark indicators, and/or experiencing floor effects during progress monitoring (S. K. Baker & Baker, 2008; L. S. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Kame'enui et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2009). Practitioners are responsible for placing students in appropriate academic literacy groups based on students' present level of academic performance. Moreover, they are discouraged from grouping students based on what is easier for teachers to teach (e.g., providing whole-group literacy grade-level instruction to all students) regardless of students' present level of academic performance (L. S. Fuchs &

Fuchs, 2007). Having several literacy groups may be challenging at first for practitioners, but the benefits far outweigh negative outcomes (O'Connor, 2007).

When organizing literacy groups, practitioners should use the following recommendations:

- Review data to place students in literacy groups according to students' instructional skills.
- Organize students into one of the three literacy groups for those (a) meeting benchmark, (b) below benchmark, and (c) critically below benchmark.
- Utilize the core program for students at benchmark and below benchmark, but consider placing students at the critically below benchmark in an intervention program.
- Differentiate and scaffold activities from the core program for students in the below-benchmark range (e.g., use more explicit instruction when teaching skills and increase the time to have students practice connected text reading).
- Ensure that individuals (e.g., teachers and/or instructional assistants) teaching literacy groups have been properly trained.
- Ensure that extra time (e.g., double dosage of literacy) can be provided for students in the below- and critically below-benchmark range.
- Review data frequently (e.g., minimum twice a week) and adjust groups accordingly after a minimum of three to four progress monitoring scores have been graphed and reviewed by grade-level personnel (D. L. Baker et al., 2009).

As stated, placing students in appropriate literacy groups is important if students are to make substantial progress and reach benchmark goals (Foorman et al., 2007). Practitioners should consider the need to accelerate academic growth for all students, especially accelerating the growth of Latinos ELs who are below benchmark or critically below benchmark. When accelerating students' growth, practitioners should consider core variables of SBR: (a) improve literacy

instruction; (b) increase instructional time (e.g., 105–120 minutes of daily reading instruction); (c) provide more small-group instruction; (d) provide instruction at the students' instructional level; and (e) progress monitor student performance. In sum, practitioners should know that improving instruction (e.g., appropriate placement and effectively teaching the five big ideas in literacy) and increasing the time spent on reading are variables that increase and can improve Latino students' literacy outcomes (D. L. Baker et al., 2009; S. K. Baker & Baker, 2008).

Evaluating and Sustaining SWRM Systems

Although an integrated system of instruction, assessment, and data-based decision making is complex, it can be successfully implemented and sustained, and can benefit all students including Latino students (Gersten et al., 2007). Another step toward this final outcome of improved academic achievement for Latino students includes the use of fidelity measures by district and school leaders. Education leaders should know about school-wide implementation, self-evaluation, and sustainability practices. Leaders must learn how to recognize when a system is working and when change is needed. To support this process, various tools are available for school leaders.

Currently, there is little research to demonstrate the effectiveness of any one systems-level self-assessment tool. Anecdotally it has been established that having a system plan and checklist can be helpful to determine the strengths and weaknesses within each district and school. The general areas that every healthy system should revisit with frequency are (a) leadership, (b) instruction, (c) assessment, (d) intervention, (e) professional development, and (g) community visibility and involvement (Simmons et al., 2002).

There are tools available for leaders to guide the development, implementation, and sustainability of their school-wide literacy plans. In many cases these tools are freely accessed from the Internet. There are two tools in particular that have been developed and utilized in Oregon's attempts to improve student achievement. The first is the Planning and

Evaluation Tool for Effective School-wide Reading Programs – Revised (also known as the PET-R) (Kame'enui & Simmons, 2003). This document is to be completed by individual members of a school building's instructional staff. The scores from each member are added together and averaged to determine the average score for each PET-R element. After this form is completed, school building teams can develop action plans to improve their areas of weakness and maintain their areas of strength. The PET-R should always be analyzed along with student performance data from multiple sources. The PET-R can also be used by an external evaluation team if a district chooses to go into each building with a team of district representatives. The PET-R has seven elements: (a) goals, (b) assessment, (c) instructional practices, (d) instructional time, (e) grouping, (f) administration, and (g) professional development. Using a school-wide fidelity tool like the PET-R on an annual basis is an important part of the implementation plan that can support sustainability of practices.

The Healthy System Checklist (HSC) is an abbreviated form of the PET-R developed by the Oregon Reading First Center (http://oregonreadingfirst.uoregon.edu/). The HSC also has the seven elements as listed above and simply calls for the person or group of people completing the checklist to note whether or not each item is in place or not in place. The PET-R requires the user to provide evidence for each completed item while the HSC simply asks if the item is present or not present. The HSC is a simplified view of the SWRM, but it can be helpful as a quick check to keep the building leadership focused on implementation areas that may need attention. While a school may complete the PET-R on an annual basis, the HSC can be used more frequently, as often as two or three times a year. If the implementation goal is to sustain practices, an easy-to-use tool like the HSC can be an efficient solution.

Although neither of these tools has a specific section dedicated to the education of Latino students, the instructional recommendations when implemented with fidelity show promise when improving literacy outcomes for Latino students (S. K. Baker, Gersten, Haager, & Dingle,

2006). Table 3 lists additional questions that can be added or adapted when evaluating your school's system and how well Latino students are being served. There are many more questions that district-level administrators and schools can and should ask of themselves. Keeping Latino ELs and all minority students at the forefront of our self-evaluation will benefit the country for generations to come (see Table 3).

Table 3: Examples of System Questions Pertaining to Latino Students

Element	Additional questions for a healthy system
Assessment	• Do we have a valid and reliable reading assessment system for minority students? • When we review our data, do we look at aggregated data (i.e., all students together) as well as disaggregated data (i.e., African American, Asian, Latino, and White students)?
Professional development	• Have all of our teachers received training on effective and explicit vocabulary and comprehension instruction? • Is on-site coaching available for teachers struggling to make literacy gains with their Latino students? • Are teachers and para-professionals allowed time to collaborate with English language development teachers as well as other teachers in their grade level?
Instructional time	• Is the English Language Development pull-out instruction using scientifically based instructional delivery methods? • Do students have enough time dedicated to literacy and language instruction? • Are language instruction and literacy instruction aligned with each other?

Limitations

There are limitations when considering adopting the SWRM in an effort to improve outcomes for all students especially Latino ELs. A dominant drawback is the lack of sufficient training for teachers and administrators. Researchers recently observed that it is still too early to tell if RtI can make a positive impact on EL students because there are an overwhelming number of challenges in implementation (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). One of the implementation challenges noted is the lack of training for teachers and the amount of training required in order for teachers to successfully and effectively teach Latino ELs and use data to

make instructional decisions (Gersten et al., 2007; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). There is also the issue of resources and schools not having enough resources to support the level of training needed to sufficiently support teachers in their new learning. Others also make the point that teacher training should be ongoing and not just a one-time workshop on instructional strategies (Chaparro, Smolkowski, Baker, Hanson, & Ryan-Jackson, 2012).

Conclusion and Implications

Currently, empirical evidence exists to effectively provide and improve literacy practices for Latino students (August & Shanahan, 2006; S. K. Baker & Baker, 2008; Gersten et al., 2007; Goldenberg, 2008). Although this is encouraging, a formidable knowledge base regarding evidence-based literacy practices and consistent and efficient implementation of system-level supports is still not fully implemented in schools (Kame'enui et al., 2000; Simmons et al., 2002). Schools need to be cognizant that good literacy instruction requires practitioners to have a strong understanding of how to effectively teach literacy effectively to Latino students (Gersten et al., 2007; Goldenberg, 2008).

Moreover, school personnel need a better understanding of how to organize and implement a systems-level approach in which good literacy instruction and an SBR core literacy curriculum are the core features. In addition, the implementation of the following domains help to improve literacy outcomes for K–3 Latino students: (a) valid and reliable assessments to measure and monitor Latino students' literacy growth; (b) effective and periodic review of data to make instructional decisions for students; (c) systematic, explicit, and direct instruction in the five big ideas in literacy; and (d) evaluation of systems to ensure quality and efficiency.

In sum, the literature on Latino ELs is clear regarding past and present literacy outcomes for Latino ELs. Successful implementation of a systems-level approach is a logical and efficient approach toward improving literacy outcomes for Latino ELs (D. L. Baker et al., 2009;

Fien, Smith, et al., 2011). At best, school-district administrators should invest in high-quality professional development resources for all practitioners. This way, knowing about evidence-based practices can, at the least, encourage school reform to provide underperforming groups (e.g., Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, and students in special education) with a plausible landscape toward improved and sustainable literacy instruction.

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