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A culturally responsive framework for enhancing phonological awareness development in children with speech and language impairment

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In this article an example of a culturally responsive approach to working with children with speech–language impairment is discussed. The approach is centered on the premise that early literacy success is critical to these children’s academic achievement and that multiple variables will contribute to children’s literacy development. The example is novel in that it integrates a science-based model, the Component Model of Reading, with indigenous writings related to indicators for academic success, namely the importance of cultural identity, resilience, a sense of place, bicultural education, and the importance of family. This framework is termed ‘A Braided Rivers Approach’ and is used in this article to discuss how speech–language therapists and teachers can advance children’s phonological awareness development in ways that maximize the benefits for their early reading and spelling development and that values and respects children’s cultural identity and background, particularly for children with speech–language impairment who are at risk of experiencing written language difficulties.

Keywords: Phonological awareness, Reading, Culturally responsive, Speech-language impairment, Indigenous, Early literacy, Speech-language pathology, Māori

Introduction

At a global level we are challenged with raising literacy achievement for all children. Despite significant investment in literacy initiatives, the gains realized in raising literacy achievement for some children remain modest at best and for some ethnic groups the gap is widening (Nina et al., 2012; The Education Trust, 2014). For example, in the USA the significant gap between the lower reading performance of children who identify as American Indian and Native Alaska and their peers in 2015, was similar to the achievement gap reported in 2003 (US Department of Education, 2015). In Australia’s Northern Territory only 43% of Indigenous¹ children reach the minimum standard for Grade 3 reading ability compared to 92% of non-

indigenous children (ACARA, 2015). In New Zealand, Maori, and Pacific children consistently underachieve in reading achievement compared to European and Asian children (Ministry of Education, 2014). It is important, therefore, to critically evaluate practices and frameworks for interventions focused on improving literacy outcomes, including those aimed at facilitating the oral language foundations for literacy. This article provides an example of a culturally responsive framework for young school-aged children with speech–language impairment aimed at facilitating their early phonological awareness knowledge as part of an integrated program to

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¹There is not a universal definition of Indigenous Peoples as there is a fundamental criterion of self-identification. A common understanding is the term indigenous refers to those who are descendants from people who inhabited a geographical region or country at the time when people from a different ethnic background arrived (United Nations, 2013). In Australia the term indigenous is used to refer to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In New Zealand the term is used to refer to people who identify as Māori.

resolving spoken language impairments. The early school years can set a child's trajectory of well-being in later life. Meta-analyses from longitudinal studies indicate early math, reading, and attention-related skills at age 5- and 6-years are the strongest predictors of later academic achievement (Duncan et al., 2007). Other studies highlight the importance of early successful reading development, for later academic outcomes (Juel, 1988; Neuman and Dickinson, 2011)

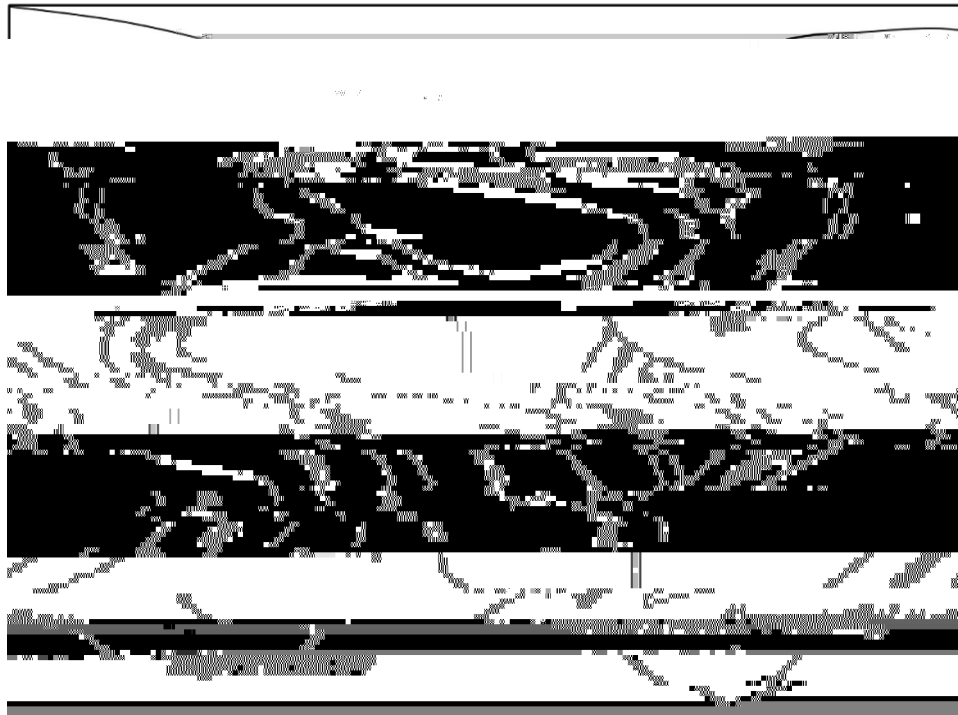


Figure 1 A Braided Rivers Approach to the integration of knowledge to facilitate children's early reading success.

(Champion et al., 1999; de Schonewise and Klingner, 2012). Culturally responsive intervention within this model may include the following: the intervention is based on relevant evidence from indigenous writings as well as western science perspectives; the importance of family and community engagement in the child's learning is clearly evident; the young child's growing sense of cultural identity is supported; the intervention

Table 1 Examples of activities to facilitate early reading success within a 'Braided Rivers Approach' integrating influences on reading with indicators of academic success for indigenous populations

Influences on reading development			
Indicators of academic success for indigenous students	Ecological influences		
	Ecological influences	Cognitive influences	Psychological influences
Strong cultural identity	Encourage family or caregivers to share culturally relevant stories (both oral and written stories) with their child. Learn about the cultural values, myths, or legends cultural stories reflect	Develop skills for early reading such as phonological awareness and letter	

damage and associated academic underachievement (Yiengprugsawan et al., 2013). Some indigenous populations are much more likely to be diagnosed with severe ear infections and have multiple episodes of otitis media compared to nonindigenous peers (e.g. see incidence in Aboriginal children in Australia (Yiengprugsawan et al., 2013) and Inuit, American Indian (Moore, 1999). Hearing difficulties will obviously impede children's phonological awareness development and may be compounded for the child if their literacy and phonological awareness is being taught in classrooms or teaching spaces with poor acoustic properties (Berg et al., 1996). Good and Gillon (2014) recently examined whether phonological awareness, in addition to enhanced acoustic signal of the teacher's voice via sound field system, led to significant improvement over and above sound field system alone. If 234

structure of words at the syllable and rhyme level. The

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