

**2006 National Reading Recovery® & K-6 Classroom Literacy Conference  
Implementation, Research, and Administration Strand**

**Outcomes for English Language Learners in Reading Recovery**

Patricia R. Kelly, San Diego State University  
Francisco X. Gómez-Bellengé, National Data Evaluation Center, The Ohio State University

***Purpose***

English language learners' reading achievement has become a critical issue for many school districts as state and federal policies demand success for all subgroups of children. National data from the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (Lutkus & Weiner, 2003) indicated that there was a wide discrepancy between English language learners (ELLs) and Anglo students in terms of success at or above the "basic" level in reading. While many describe the best ways to teach English language learners (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cummins, 2000; Ramírez, Yuen, Ramsay & Pasta, 1991; Slavin & Cheung, 2004), it is apparent that many of these students are slipping through the cracks in terms of acquiring the necessary reading skills. The purpose of this national study was to examine the efficacy of an early intervention, Reading Recovery®, with English language learners in order to determine how ELLs in Reading Recovery compared to their native English-speaking (NS) peers, who were also enrolled in Reading Recovery. Furthermore, we examined the impact of ELLs' initial Oral English Proficiency (OEP) on Reading Recovery outcomes.

***Theoretical Framework***

Children who do not learn to read in the first few grades of school fall further and further behind and catching them up becomes more difficult with each successive year of failure (Juel, 1988). Early intervention has been found to be an important prevention before the downward spiral of reading failure becomes established (Hiebert & Taylor, 1994; Klenk & Kibby, 2000; Wasik & Slavin, 1993). Reading Recovery has been shown to raise the reading achievement of the lowest performing students up to average achievement levels (Pinnell, 1989; Shanahan & Barr, 1995; Wasik & Slavin, 1993), and in some small studies, Reading Recovery was found to be an effective intervention with ELLs (Ashdown & Simic, 2000; Hobsbaum, 1995).

Reading Recovery is an early one-on-one intervention developed by Marie M. Clay (1993) to help the lowest-achieving first grade children learn to read and write. Reading Recovery is different from the 'single or major variable' theoretical approaches often driving intervention instruction. Reading Recovery has a complex constructive model of literacy learning (Clay, 2001), and is based on several theoretical foundations including the following: Reading and writing are complex and reciprocal processes. The role of oral language is central to the task of learning to read (Clay, 1998, 2001). The learner is seen as active and constructive. Clay (2001) draws on the work of Singer (1994) to explain how the child is at first "constructing very simple actions systems, which become more complex." (p.224). The emphasis of instruction, carried out through reading and writing connected texts, is on creating a broad foundation of cognitive competencies which leads to the beginning of a self-extending system through which the learner learns more about reading every time he reads, independent of instruction. Quality interactions are critical; the teacher adjusts her scaffolding to accommodate the growing competencies of the child, much like scaffolding described by Vygotsky (Clay & Cazden, 1990). Acceleration of learning for a short period of time to catch the student up to grade-level performance is the expected outcome of Reading Recovery tutoring.

***Methods***

This study used data collected for the national program evaluation of Reading Recovery. Evaluation participants reported data on 17,792 ELL children but not every school reported all variables for every

child. These were compared to a sample of students served by Reading Recovery who were native speakers (NS). Different data sub-sets were used to answer the various research questions. Data were available on measures of Oral English Proficiency (OEP) in fall of first grade and on two tasks of the *Observation Survey* (Clay, 2002), Text Reading Levels and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words, in both fall and spring. Intervention status outcomes were also recorded.

### **Results**

Research Question 1: Question 1 compared the success rate of ELLs with Native speakers.

- (a) Native Speakers successfully discontinued their series of lessons at a rate of 59.7% and English Language Learners at a rate of 55.7%. A z-test indicated that the difference was statistically significant.<sup>1</sup> However, the effect size as measured by Cohen's  $h$  (Cohen, 1988) was small (0.08).
- (b) A MANOVA was performed to examine differences in spring literacy level for equal-sized samples ( $n=9,571$ ) of ELL and NS students who discontinued their series of lessons successfully on the Text Reading Level and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words literacy measures. At the alpha level of .05, the discontinued ELL and NS groups differed statistically on overall spring literacy level (Wilks' Lambda = .99,  $F(2, 19139) = 77.30, p < .001$ ). However, the effect size as measured by partial  $\eta^2$  was .008, suggesting that this overall difference is not practically meaningful.

Research Question 2: Question 2 focused on the length of Reading Recovery interventions.

- (a) On average, NS students whose series of lessons were discontinued successfully spent 15.58 weeks (SD = 4.90) in Reading Recovery, and their ELL counterparts spent 15.68 weeks (SD = 5.03). The length difference was very small, corresponding to a tenth of a week or less than one instructional session. A t-test revealed that this difference was not statistically significant ( $t = 1.37, p = .17$ ).
- (b) Further, the lengths of interventions were compared across the six fall Oral English Proficiencies (OEPs) for ELL students whose series of lessons were discontinued successfully. An ANOVA revealed that ELL children of various fall English proficiency levels whose series of lessons were discontinued successfully did not differ statistically in their lengths of interventions ( $F = 2.19, p = .053$ ).

Research Question 3 : Question 3 explored how Fall Oral English Proficiency levels of ELL children whose series of lessons were discontinued successfully related to their spring literacy level as measured by the text level and phonemic awareness tasks. A MANOVA was performed on equal-sized samples. It showed a relationship between fall Oral English Proficiency and spring literacy levels. However, follow-up univariate ANOVAs revealed that only Text Level varied in spring and that children with the lowest (level = 0) and highest (level =5) fall Oral English Proficiency appeared to have comparatively better performance on Text Reading and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words at the end of the Reading Recovery intervention in spring.

Research Question 4: Question 4 used a Pearson Chi-square test to determine the relationship between End-of-Program Status and fall Oral English Proficiency. The differences were found to be statistically significant. However, it was the children with medium levels of fall Oral English Proficiency who were least likely to successfully discontinue their series of lessons.

### **Interpretation and Discussion**

Children served in Reading Recovery who reached average reading levels relative to their classroom peers discontinued (completed) the intervention successfully. There was little practical difference between the status outcome success rates of ELL and Native Speakers and pedagogically small

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, a p value of .05 is the criterion threshold for statistical significance. Actual p values are reported.

differences in spring literacy outcomes. Additionally, the lengths of interventions were not related to fall Oral English Proficiency. Further, there was a curvilinear relationship between fall Oral English Proficiency and spring text level for ELL children whose series of lessons were discontinued successfully and a similar curvilinear relationship between fall Oral English Proficiency and status outcomes. Overall, the results of this study suggest that the Reading Recovery intervention is appropriate for English Language Learners, even those with very limited Oral English Proficiency in fall of first grade. Differences in their outcomes are not meaningful either in the pedagogical sense or for practical administrative purposes. We think this is because Reading Recovery instruction is one-to-one and is designed to meet the needs of individual learners. Also, the intervention follows best practices for literacy instruction.

### ***Educational Importance***

This study is important in pointing out the efficacy of Reading Recovery for ELLs so that administrators and other stakeholders understand that the similar success rates of both groups warrant Reading Recovery service to ELLs as well as to native speakers of English. By year-end, ELLs who discontinued successfully from Reading Recovery fell within an average range of performance relative to the general grade 1 population. It is this raising of student performance to average levels that is most important. Klenk & Kibby (2000) noted that the influence of Clay and Reading Recovery operationalized the notion that reading development in young children can be accelerated to prevent reading failure and that success should be defined as reading at grade level. English Language Learners who acquire grade-level performance in reading by the end of first grade have a much greater chance for academic success than those who remain behind their peers.

### ***Interest to NRC Audience***

This research is of significant interest to the NRC audience because it addresses the concerns about preventing reading failure among growing numbers of English language learners in our schools. Early intervention, using the complex model of highly scaffolded instruction offered via Reading Recovery, has promising results for English language learners who struggle to learn to read when they begin school.

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