
Preventing Reading Failure for English Language Learners: Interventions for Struggling First-Grade L2 Students

Iliana Alanís
University of Texas at Brownsville

Judith Munter and Josefina Villamil Tinajero
University of Texas at El Paso

Abstract

Student outcomes following the first year of implementation of an early reading intervention project designed to improve L1 literacy in first grade English language learners (ELLs) are described. Two schools in south Texas are the sites for this study. The interventions were delivered in Spanish (L1) through on-going supplemental reading instruction for ELLs at-risk of reading failure. Results indicated a steady improvement in reading levels as measured by the *Tejas Lee*, running records, interviews and classroom observations. Preliminary findings support the practice of providing ELLs with interventions that use an intensive, systematic, culturally responsive approach to reading instruction.

Introduction

Recently the failure of schools to facilitate literacy development for growing numbers of children has led to national concern (Haycock, 2001). Poor reading skills across all levels lead to lower overall academic achievement, and the first grade seems to be a critical developmental period for ensuring optimum literacy learning (Chall, 2000). Multiple factors contribute to persistent low reading achievement outcomes, including a lack of qualified teachers, socioeconomic factors, and non-native proficiency in English (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Students who experience early reading difficulty often continue to experience failure in later grades as well as later in life. Numerous research studies (e.g., Simmons, 2000; Tinajero & Hurley, 2001; Zelasko & Antunez, 2000) indicate that young children who acquire early literacy skills have the tools to exponentially grow in their knowledge and skills while those who do not develop early skills fall further and further behind.

Intervention has increasingly replaced remediation as an effective approach to help students struggling in the process of learning to read (Askew, Fountas, Lyons, Pinnell, & Schmitt, 1998; Berninger, Abbott, Vermeulen, Ogier, Brooksher, Zook, & Lemos, 2002; Bradshaw, 2001). Reading intervention programs are designed to hinder or alter the action of reading failure by preventing it from occurring or stopping it early on if it has already started. Students who participate in intervention programs either attain the

goal of reading or, alternatively, the program is discontinued and other options are considered (Hiebert & Taylor, 1994). Convergent research findings indicate that English monolingual students who struggle with reading benefit from intensive reading instruction (O'Connor, 2000; Torgesen, 2000), using early intervention programs such as Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985), Right Start (Hiebert, Colt, Catto, & Gury, 1992), and Early Intervention in Reading (Taylor, Frye, Short, & Shearer, 1992). These programs have many elements in common (Pikulski, 1994) such as: (1) structured and fast paced format, (2) strong effective program of regular classroom reading instruction, (3) reading for meaning as an overriding consideration, (4) low pupil-to-teacher ratio, (5) fluency as a major goal, and (6) writing as a means to teach and extend word identification skills. These components are consistent with what research recommends for closing the gap for struggling readers (Allington & Walmsley, 1995).

Less is known however, about the effects of supplemental reading instruction for English language learners (ELLs) and about the instructional components that are most critical for the development of reading skills for second-language learners in general. Of particular interest to our study were intervention strategies for ELLs showing early signs of reading failure. While it is clear that early intervention is essential to improving achievement outcomes there is no consensus in the research literature on how to select the most effective procedures for teaching reading to ELL students at risk of reading difficulties as early as the first grade (Gersten & Baker, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to report the effectiveness of focused early intervention for first-grade ELLs with reading difficulties and to identify the key components supporting the learners' gains in performance outcomes. The following descriptions represent two distinct efforts in schools along the Texas-Mexico border. The first (School A) utilizes university-based tutors and the second (School B) taps into classroom teacher expertise. Critical to this project was the design of effective implementation strategies for the intervention that would lead to improvements in achievement levels for students in "at-risk" situations, incorporating sound pedagogical strategies for teaching struggling readers with special attention to the ELL student.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Features of Literacy Development

A careful review of the literature (e.g., Begoray, 2001; Burns, Griffin, Snow, 1999; Homan, King & Hogarty, 2001) on successful intervention for struggling readers points to several important elements (i.e., phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, the use of decoding and word analysis strategies, listening/reading comprehension, and reading/writing fluency) that are crucial for early literacy instruction. In the case of ELLs, additional factors to be considered include contextual factors, such as the school personnel's use of native language, family involvement, understanding and valuing of cultural diversity.

Emphasis on Essential Reading Skills

First, letter-sound relationships and word identification strategies should be taught explicitly. In early literacy the three key features are phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, and fluency with connected text (Ehri, 1998; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). An important element of phonological awareness is phonemic awareness (i.e., the ability to manipulate the individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken words). This understanding facilitates acquisition of the alphabetic principle and involves learning the letter-sound correspondences as well as spelling patterns and applying this knowledge in reading text. Lastly, fluency with connected text represents a level of expertise beyond the alphabetic code. In this study, ELL students were given opportunities to read repeated text while reviewing decoding strategies in context.

Listening and Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is influenced by a broad range of factors, such as vocabulary knowledge, appreciation for text structure, thinking and reasoning skills, ability to apply reading comprehension strategies and word reading ability. When children do not acquire good word reading skills early in elementary school, they are denied ready access to the rich knowledge resources available in print. This may be particularly unfortunate for children who are speakers of other languages and are in the process of developing general verbal knowledge and ability in L2 (Torgesen, 2000). Therefore, one of the goals for this research project was to build on students' prior knowledge and word recognition skills.

Vocabulary Development

Language and literacy skills in the primary grades are directly related to later academic success (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). Children's reading comprehension levels are affected by the types of opportunities available to them for building an extensive lexicon, which, in turn, is dependent on exposure to a language-rich environment. As such, learners with extensive vocabularies are likely to achieve reading success (Anderson & Freebody, 1981). During the intervention sessions in this study, students had opportunities to practice language and literacy skills in context and enhance L1 verbal ability through group dialogue.

Emphasis on writing skills

Emergent readers and writers are just beginning to grasp the concept that oral language can be written down and others can then read and derive meaning from the written word. As children engage in shared reading activities and as they develop writing skills, they begin to discover relationships between the sounds of the language and the symbols that represent those sounds. In this study, opportunities were provided for students to analyze new words by saying them slowly and predicting the sequence of sounds. The intervention presented explicit models that provided high-quality instruction and strategies enabling children to achieve high standards in their writing. Through independent writing, students had numerous opportunities to apply newly learned techniques and strategies.

Use of Native Language and Culture for Instruction

Teaching children to read and write first in their mother tongue has long been a cornerstone of effective bilingual instruction programs (Faltis & Hudelson, 1998; Lapp, Fisher, Flood & Cabello, 2001). There is a high correlation between learning to read in the native language and subsequent reading achievement in L2 (August & Hakuta, 1997; Greene, 1998; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Research indicates that literacy strategies learned in one language transfer to reading and writing situations in a second language without having to be relearned. In this study, tutors encouraged students to develop the language and culture they brought from home and build on their prior experiences, challenging the perception in the broader society that these attributes should be viewed as deficits or hindrances to learners' academic progress.

Synthesis of Constructs

Ongoing and thorough review of the literature set the foundation for this study, guiding its direction and development. The researchers paid close attention to the centrality of the roles to be played by the critical factors outlined in the preceding sections: reading skills; listening and reading comprehension; vocabulary development; writing skills, and the use of native language and culture. Each of these has been woven carefully into the intervention as it was designed, implemented and evaluated.

Overview of the Study

The study is conducted in the tradition of action research, an approach that is arguably one of the most powerful approaches to scholarly writing on school improvement today (McLaughlin, Watts, & Beard, 2000). Action research is a vehicle for deepening the knowledge base on education/social issues by linking the words and work of participants (e.g., teachers, students, parents) to the extant theoretical understandings of the research literature. From this perspective, both basic and applied research are viewed as useful tools for developing a balanced inquiry and analysis process that blends the knowledge of teachers as reflective practitioners with the basic knowledge of scholarly works and academic experts.

In this study, veteran teacher-researchers with more than two decades of personal and professional experience as bilingual teachers and learners, program administrators, parents and mentors, actualize the Deweyan (1916) notion of “democratic participation in classrooms and schools” (Campbell, 1998, p. 194). Researchers who adopt this participatory, active view of knowledge generation draw on an epistemology of “insiderness” that sees life and work as intertwined (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993). In order to develop analytical schemes grounded in empirical data, the researchers used a research design that combines quantitative methods (i.e., t-test, chi-square) and qualitative methods (i.e., journals, questionnaires, interviews, running records) collected systematically over a period of 12 months.

As patterns began to emerge in the data collection process, they became the themes of the research and the bases of the analytical framework. This grounded theory process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), like a funnel, allowed the teacher-researchers to

observe many possible themes early on in the study, with a gradual focus on a particular set of themes as the patterns began to emerge.

Research Questions

At the initial stages in the design of the research project, the following preliminary research questions were addressed:

1. What are the effects of supplemental reading instruction for first-grade Spanish-speaking readers in bilingual programs?
2. What are the instructional components critical for developing reading skills in ELLs?

The interventions used in both studies were based on the researchers' ongoing review of the research-based evidence that identifies critical elements of reading instruction for monolingual English speakers at-risk of reading failure (Allington & Walmsley, 1995; National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow et al., 1998) in combination with reflective analysis on the experiential context of the schools and classrooms in question. While specific interventions that benefit ELLs have yet to be more fully investigated, this study explores the notion that elements known to prevent reading difficulties among monolingual (L1) students have much in common with the cognitive development of ELLs. As the data was analyzed over time, the researchers' inquiry focused increasingly on the role of systematic intervention, applied in a culturally responsive context, for children from non English-speaking homes and communities.

Preliminary research findings drawn from the two schools in this study indicate that the instructional components most critical for the development of reading skills for monolingual children lead to effective development of literacy for language minority children as well, while critical attention to the role of native language, context and culture must not be dismissed in the case of children who are second-language learners.

Method

Research Design

This study uses an eclectic combination of scientifically based research methods to provide a fuller understanding of the range and complexity of issues faced by the teacher of L2 children in reading classrooms today. Although qualitative research has gained currency in the field of educational research, many school districts and research reports are still bound to quantitative measures in describing and assessing the work they do. This study attempts to combine methods by using t-tests and statistical measures in one school site, while viewing the ethnographic methods used in the second school as equally valid scientific research, grounded in the processes of professional inquiry and reflection. The synthesis of the procedures, conducted in two distinct sites with distinct approaches to the research process puts a human face on the numbers, providing the reader with a deeper knowledge of the problem under study.

Participants

Tutors

Participants for School A included 5 pre-service teachers in their junior year of college enrolled in an instructional methods course that served as tutors for 25 first-grade Spanish-speaking students on one elementary campus. Participation in the project was voluntary. In January 2002, 2 tutors dropped from the project due to other course work and matriculation. The remaining 3 tutors worked with 13 of the original 25 first-grade students. All three were female, of Mexican American descent and bilingual speakers with varying levels of English proficiency. All were in the first year of their teacher preparation program enrolled in an instructional planning and curriculum development course.

In School B, a fully certified bilingual classroom teacher with over 20 years of experience participated as teacher/tutor. This teacher had extensive preparation in the use of the Reading Recovery Program.

Students

Two tutors dropped from School A in January 2002, consequently 13 of the original 25 students received the year-long intervention. All 13 students identified themselves as Mexican American and indicated Spanish as their native language. The 13 students included 10 males and three females. Their classroom teachers identified all 13 as considerably below level readers through scores on the first-grade assessment, *Tejas Lee* (assessment described in Student Data Sources section). The 13 students who participated in School B were all native language Spanish speakers, identified by their teacher as at risk of reading failure.

The neighborhood schools are Title I campuses where all students qualify for free and reduced lunch. In these border community schools, the student ethnic distribution is more than 80% Mexican American and over 50% of the student population is designated as limited English proficient by state standards.

Measures

Formative evaluation data was gathered throughout the year to evaluate and refine the project efforts. Information was gathered regarding student progress, tutor participation and teacher reflections. Standardized test scores, running records, and informal classroom observations were collected to monitor student progress.

Students' early reading skills were assessed using a variety of evaluation procedures, such as Reading Recovery instruments (i.e., pre- and post-testing, observations, and survey instruments). Students' early reading skills were assessed using the *Tejas Lee*, the Spanish version of the Texas Primary Reading Inventory. The *Tejas Lee* (see Appendix A) is an informal, individually administered assessment that provides teachers with an additional tool for determining how well students are progressing as readers in Spanish. The *Tejas Lee* consists of a diagnostic screening and an inventory. The reading inventory section includes tasks that ask children to demonstrate their understanding of book and print awareness, phonemic awareness, graphophonemic

knowledge, oral reading ability, and comprehension development (TEA, 1998). The screen is used as a second grade benchmark for the state's high stakes assessment given in third grade and is a predictor of reading difficulties. The *Tejas Lee* was used as pre- and post measures for the study. The pre-testing occurred within the first four weeks of school and the post testing took place during the last three weeks of May 2002. Students were also administered the *Tejas Lee* during December for mid-year benchmarks. The classroom teacher conducted assessments that included pre- and post-tests using the *Tejas Lee* Inventory, interviews, weekly logs, running records and classroom observations.

Procedures

Based on the common elements of successful early intervention programs for monolingual children (Gaskins, 1999; Gullatt & Lofton, 1998; Zelasko & Antunez, 2000) the intervention model was designed to consist of structured, fast-paced lessons delivered in addition to the classroom instruction as a small-group tutoring program with 3-4 students (see Appendices B and C for lesson plan guides). The intervention was done as a pullout in addition to classroom instruction. The intervention was conducted in classrooms or occasionally in the library. The interventions took place during the 2001-2002 academic year.

Intervention for School A consisted of 66 sessions three times a week implemented over 23 weeks due to campus and university holidays. A one-three teacher-student ratio was utilized based on research that investigated the effect of group size during supplemental reading instruction (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Bryant, Kouzekanani, & Dickson, 2001) indicating minimal difference between a one-to-one and one-to-three ratio. In both studies each session was approximately 20 minutes in length and conducted in the students' primary language, Spanish.

Procedures in School B consisted of a one-to-one teacher-student ratio, intensive tutoring implemented over a period of 15 weeks. School B classroom teachers used 'Descrubriendo la Lectura' (Escamilla & Andrade, 1992) as a framework for developing procedures and principles of the intervention. Some of the important principles of this program included teaching for independent strategic processing within the zone of proximal development, providing frequent and intensive opportunities to read, exposure to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships, and using reading to obtain meaning from print (Clay, 1993; Sensenbaugh, 1995). Follow-up procedures were implemented after 4 months.

A systematic, structured intervention plan was developed around the critical features of reading for both school sites (see Appendices B and C). Much of the time was spent on explicit skill instruction coordinated with opportunities to practice skills in context. Students were provided with many opportunities to practice skills, with assistance from the tutor as well as independently. Project participants kept a record of the number of days taught and results of on-going assessments. Tutors in School A consulted with their University Supervisor on a weekly basis for support, feedback, and guidance. Classroom teachers consulted and received regular visits from project directors to receive ongoing supervision and feedback.

Results

Student Outcomes

Data from School A were analyzed using raw scores on the *Tejas Lee* subtests. Scores were analyzed using a compared means paired *t*-test. Presented in Table 1 are the paired *t*-test results for the *Tejas Lee* (pre-and-post-test scores). Subtests for the *Tejas Lee* included *Reconocimiento de Palabras* (Word recognition, see Table 2), *Comprensión de Oraciones* (Sentence Comprehension), *Conocimiento de Sonidos, Difícil Y Fácil* (Sound Recognition, Difficult and Easy), and *Conocimiento de Fonológico* (Phoneme Awareness, see Table 3) which includes *Unión de Silabas, Unión de Sonidos y Omisión de Sonidos* (Blending of Syllables and Sounds and Omitting Sounds).

Table 1
Paired t-test Results for Tejas Lee Subtests Mean Percent Correct

Subtest Name	PreTest		Post Test		<i>t</i> (12)
	M	SD	M	SD	
<i>Reconocimiento de Palabras</i>	28	.32	91	.10	7.3***
<i>Comprensión de Oraciones</i>	11	.29	85	.25	7.7***
<i>Conocimiento de Sonidos</i>					
<i>Difícil</i>	50	.33	90	.17	4.7***
<i>Fácil</i>	74	.27	99	.03	3.2*
<i>Conocimiento de Fonológico</i>					
<i>Unión de Silabas</i>	63	.44	100	.00	2.9*
<i>Sonidos</i>	40	.34	100	.00	6.2***
<i>Omisión de Sonidos</i>	26	.38	94	.10	6.7

****p<.05. ***p<.001.

Pre-tests were administered in September with post-tests administered in May. Students showed varying levels of achievement for each area, with all 13 students exhibiting gains on pre-post test comparison at the minimum statistical significance level of .05. Based on student results it was concluded the tutoring model should be tested more carefully to see if similar gains would be obtained in a more controlled situation.

Table 2

Tejas Lee Results: Word Recognition and Sentence Comprehension
(Reconocimiento de Palabras y Comprensión de Oraciones)

Name	Word Recognition		Sentence Comprehension	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Child A	11/15	15/15	0/6	6/6
Child B	3/15	15/15	3/6	6/6
Child C	0/15	11/15	0/6	2/6
Child D	2/15	15/15	0/6	6/6
Child E	0/15	13/15	0/6	4/6
Child F	0/15	15/15	0/6	6/6
Child G	0/15	14/15	0/6	2/6
Child H	0/15	15/15	0/6	6/6
Child I	6/15	13/15	0/6	6/6
Child J	11/15	15/15	0/6	6/6
Child K	9/15	12/15	0/6	5/6
Child L	12/15	15/15	6/6	6/6
Child M	1/15	11/15	0/6	6/6

Table 3

Tejas Lee Results: Phonological Awareness
(Conocimiento de Fonológico)

Student	Union of Syllables		Union of Sounds		Omission of Sounds	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Child A	0/4	4/4	3/4	4/4	0/4	4/4
Child B	4/4	4/4	3/4	4/4	2/4	4/4
Child C	0/4	4/4	0/4	4/4	0/4	4/4
Child D	4/4	4/4	2/4	4/4	2/4	4/4
Child E	0/4	4/4	0/4	4/4	0/4	4/4
Child F	1/4	4/4	3/4	4/4	0/4	3/4
Child G	4/4	4/4	1/4	4/4	0/4	3/4
Child H	2/4	4/4	2/4	4/4	0/4	4/4
Child I	4/4	4/4	0/4	4/4	4/4	4/4
Child J	2/4	4/4	2/4	4/4	0/4	4/4
Child K	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4
Child L	4/4	4/4	1/4	4/4	2/4	4/4
Child M	4/4	4/4	0/4	4/4	0/4	3/4

The results from School B, reported through running records, weekly logs, interviews and observation field notes indicated similar gains in student performance (see Tables 4 and 5). However, the greater reliance on qualitative methodology at this school site created sets of data that provide information about the impacts of the intervention on other central stakeholders in the reading intervention process, including teachers, tutors, and program policy makers (i.e., administrators and supervisors). The combined results are summarized in the section that follows.

Table 4
*Tejas Lee Results: Sound Recognition
 (Reconocimiento de Sonidos)*

Name	Difficult		Easy	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Child A	0/13	13/13	8/14	14/14
Child B	12/13	13/13	14/14	14/14
Child C	0/15	5/13	3/14	14/14
Child D	7/13	13/13	12/14	14/14
Child E	12/13	12/13	12/14	14/14
Child F	13/13	13/13	14/14	14/14
Child G	1/13	11/13	4/14	14/14
Child H	5/13	12/13	8/14	14/14
Child I	10/13	13/13	14/14	14/14
Child J	7/13	13/13	14/14	14/14
Child K	7/13	9/13	14/14	14/14
Child L	7/13	13/13	10/14	14/14
Child M	5/13	12/13	8/14	12/14

Table 5
*Reading Recovery Results: Observation Survey in Spanish
 (Examen de Observación en Español)*

	Child A (pre-test)	Child A (post- test)	Child B (pre-test)	Child B (post-test)
Letter ID	60	61	59	61
Word Test	18	25	9	20
Concepts	20	20	16	25
Vocabulary	24	27	6	6
Dictation	37	39	21	39
Total Level	-----	3	-----	1

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to document the implementation of early reading intervention for ELL students and to examine the student outcomes following 23 weeks of implementation. The classroom teachers, tutors and university supervisor throughout this study made reflective observations through weekly journal writing. Four merit discussion at this time: teacher-student relationships, vocabulary development, student motivation, and training.

Teacher-Student Relationships

The interactions that took place between students and tutors were central to student success. Authentic trust and communication between teachers and students frequently can transcend the economic and social disadvantages that afflict communities and schools alike in inner city and rural areas (Cummins, 2000). These interactions are fundamental to the academic success of culturally diverse students. Through the intervention sessions students' sense of self was affirmed. The affirmation of identity established respect and trust between tutors and students that was crucial for the development of students' reading skills. The positive development of students' identities as readers played out in the interactions between instructors and students. Consequently they were more likely to participate actively in instruction and apply themselves to academic effort.

Vocabulary Development

Tutors created a vocabulary-rich environment by sharing authentic literature and developing literacy both in context and through content areas. Vocabulary words were taught and extended through oral language activities prior to reading them. Students were encouraged to use varied words in sessions that included a large selection of vocabulary. Interestingly, what mattered was not just the variety of words that the tutors used, but also the variety of words that the children used as they spoke with the tutors and listened to others (Dickinson & Tabors, 2002). During book reading, conversations encouraged students to think about each story and how it connected to their experiences.

Student Motivation

Tutors at both schools indicated student motivation remained high throughout the study based on student reactions, contributions, comments, and progress. Instructors were concerned at the beginning of the study with the low levels of reading achievement for each student. Both teachers and tutors were concerned that the interventions not become boring for the students with the repetition of the lessons. The repetition and fast pace of the lessons appeared to keep the students on task and excited. The instructors felt that the students were reading successfully for the first time and progressing in reading development. This also resulted in many positive notes and responses from parents and classroom teachers.

Training

A final observation made by instructors indicated that ongoing reflection, feedback and training were essential in helping them learn to follow the lesson model, create interesting learning situations, and use assessment to inform practice. The structured lessons were part of the training process. It was observed that as tutors taught the lessons, they improved as instructional leaders and needed guidance from supervisors less and less. Finally, on-going coaching was important in helping tutors make the strategies their own and in reinforcing tutors responsibility for their students.

Tutors also need to be trained to have a basic understanding of the reading process. The tutors in this project were in the process of developing that understanding. Their university reading courses taken in concurrence with this project focused on a basic understanding of concepts of print, decoding, sight-word learning, and common problems that new and inexperienced readers share. This information was essential for tutors to understand in order to be effective.

Implications for Practice

Both pre-service teachers (i.e., university students) and classroom teachers as reading tutors can provide children with a valued mentor and friend. To have an intervention result in true gains however, structure, training, supervision and planning are needed. Schools and teacher preparation programs must make a strong commitment to ensure that tutors are given the training and assistance they need.

School-based preventive efforts should be developed to maintain growth in critical reading skills. Culturally responsive materials and instructional techniques should be developed that are well integrated with ongoing classroom instruction. Adequate development of these skills in first grade does not guarantee that children will continue to maintain growth in second grade without extra help; however, if we allow children to fail at any point during early schooling experience we are moving to a “remedial” rather than a “preventive” model of intervention.

The results of this study demonstrate that it is possible to facilitate the literacy development of struggling L1 first graders in a relatively short amount of time. The intervention however, must meet the following criteria:

- a. Intervention is frequent and of sufficient duration to make a difference;
- b. Pupil-to-teacher ratio is kept small (1-4);
- c. Texts are carefully selected and sequenced to ensure student success;
- d. Word learning activities are used to help children become familiar with print;
- e. Writing is used to teach and extend word identification skills;
- f. Assessment is meaningful, practical, and ongoing;
- g. Pupils build confidence and see themselves as readers.
- h. Culturally responsive principles of instruction must be embedded in the model.
- i. Use of the mother tongue (L1) must be incorporated into the reading intervention in the case of ELLs.

Training and coaching are essential components in helping tutors learn to adjust to the model utilized in the project. The general principles of good reading instruction (Weiler, 1998) should be used in intervention programs with focus on culture and language as assets to enrich ELLs participation in all levels of literacy learning. Teachers and tutors with appropriate cultural and linguistic “funds of knowledge” (Grisham, 2000; Gutierrez, 2002) develop an increased sense of responsibility for teaching students in at-risk situations. It is important to keep in mind that although the students who participated in this study have made gains in their reading ability, their classroom peers have also continued to make academic gains. Further research should be conducted to collect longitudinal data and further substantiate these initial results.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it does not control for all student background variables (i.e., home intellectual climate and motivation) that are likely to have an influence on student achievement. Second, there were no comparable control groups to compare students who received and did not receive the intervention. Third, teacher effect was not taken into account when measuring intervention effectiveness. Fourth, the short-term nature of the study was an additional limitation, taken into consideration when the data were elaborated and analyzed. However, changes in attitude and self-esteem, are ultimately measured by the achievements of an individual over a lifetime; as is quite common in the literature that studies such as this one use short-term predictors of long-term changes. Although the results cannot be generalized, the findings obtained from this preliminary study serve as a basis for further investigation and provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the problem facing the teachers of non English-speaking children in reading classrooms today.

Suggestions for Further Research

The results of this preliminary study invite further reflection and inquiry on the many unanswered questions about successful reading intervention strategies for ELL students. The students from this study should be followed for the next several years to determine whether the gains made were maintained and transferred to other areas. Studies should be conducted to determine which elements of the project plan are most important. In addition to continuing to refine our knowledge about specific instructional techniques and elements we must examine the intensity and duration of intervention required to eliminate reading failure. Finally, further attention must be given to the potential for studies that incorporate multiple research methods to illuminate our understanding of the problem of overall school improvement to benefit all children.

References

- Allington, R. L., & Walmsley, S. A. (Eds.). (1995). No quick fix: Rethinking literacy programs in America's elementary schools. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Anderson, R. C. & Freebody, P. (1981). Vocabulary knowledge. In Comprehension and teaching: Research reviews. J. T. Guthrie (Ed.), (pp. 77-116). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Askew, B., Fountas, I., Lyons, C., Pinnell, G., & Schmitt, M. (1998). Reading Recovery Review: Understanding outcomes and implications. Columbus, OH: Reading Recovery Council of North America, Inc. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 434320)
- August, A. & Hakuta, K. (1997). Improving schooling for language-minority children: A research agenda. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Begoray, D. (2001). The literacy groups project: investigating the use of Reading Recovery techniques with small groups of grade 2 students. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 47(2), 141 – 55.
- Berninger, V., Abbott, R., Vermeulen, K., Ogier, S., Brooksher, R., Zook, D., & Lemos, Z. (2002). Comparison of faster and slower responders to early intervention in reading: Differentiating features of their language profiles. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 25(1), 59 – 76.
- Bogdan, R. & Kiklen, S. (1998). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods. Boston: Allyn & Bacon
- Bradshaw, P. (2001). At-risk in first grade. Dominican University of California, Master of Science Thesis. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 456430)
- Burns, S., Griffin, P., Snow, C. (Eds.), 1999. Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's reading success. Specific recommendations from America's leading researchers on how to help children become successful readers. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 439781)
- Campbell, D. (1998). Choosing democracy: A practical guide to multicultural education, (2nd ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Chall, J. S. (2000). Socioeconomic and learning difference effects. The academic achievement challenge: What really works in the classroom? New York: The Guilford Press.
- Clay, M. M. (1985). The early detection of reading difficulties (3rd ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Heinemann Education.
- Cummins, J. (2000). Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire. Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Cunningham, A. E. & Stanovich K. E. (1997). Early reading acquisition and its relation to reading experience and ability 10 years later. *Developmental Psychology*, 33 (6), 943-945.
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1993). Researching change and changing the researcher. *Harvard Educational Review*, 63(4), 389 – 411.

- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: The Free Press.
- Dickinson, D. K. & Tabors, P. O. (2002). Fostering language and literacy in classrooms and homes. *Young Children*, 57(2), 10-19.
- Ehri, L. C. (1998). Grapheme-phoneme knowledge is essential for learning to read words in English. In J. Metsala & L. Ehri (Eds.), *Word recognition in beginning reading* (pp. 3-40). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Escamilla, K., & Andrade, A. (1992). Descubriendo la lectura: An application of Reading Recovery in Spanish. *Education and Urban Society*, 24(2), 212 – 26.
- Faltis, C. & Hudelson, S. (1998). *Bilingual education in elementary and secondary school communities: Toward understanding and caring*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gersten, R., & Baker, S. (2000). What we know about effective instructional practice for English language learners. *Exceptional Children*, 66(4), 454-470.
- Gaskins, I., (1999). A multidimensional reading program. *Reading Teacher*, 53(2), 162 – 64.
- Greene, J. (1998). A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of bilingual education. Unpublished manuscript, University of Texas at Austin.
- Grisham, D. (2000). Connecting theoretical conceptions of reading to practice: A longitudinal study of elementary school teachers. *Reading Psychology*, 21(1), 145 – 70.
- Gullatt, D., & Lofton, B. (1998). Helping at-risk learners succeed: A whole-school approach to success. Window with a view. *Schools in the Middle*, 7(4), 11 – 14, 42 – 43.
- Gutierrez, P. (2002). In search of bedrock: Organizing for success with diverse needs children in the classroom. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1(1), 49 – 64.
- Haycock, K. (2001). Closing the achievement gap. *Educational Leadership*, 58(6), 6 – 11.
- Hiebert, E.H., Colt, J. M., Catto, S. L., & Gurry, E. C. (1992). Reading and writing of first-grade students in a restructured Chapter I program. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29, 545-572.
- Hiebert, E. & Taylor, B. (Eds.) (1994). *Getting reading right from the start: Effective early literacy interventions*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Homan, S., King, J., & Hogarty, K. (2001). A small group model for early intervention in literacy: Group size and program effects. Florida: Reading Recovery Projects. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 461095)
- Lapp, D., Fisher, D. Flood, J. & Cabello, A. (2001). An integrated approach to the teaching and assessment of language arts. In S. Hurley & J. Tinajero (Eds.), *Literacy assessment of second-language learners* (pp.1 – 26). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- McLaughlin, J., Watts, C. & Beard, M. (2000). Just because it's happening doesn't mean it's working: Using action research to improve practice in middle schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(4), 284 – 290.

- National Reading Panel. (2000). Teaching children to read: Summary report. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
- O'Connor, R. E. (2000). Increasing the intensity of intervention in kindergarten and first grade. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 15 (1), 43-54.
- Pikulski, J. J. (1994). Preventing reading failure: A review of five effective programs. *The Reading Teacher*, 48 (1), 30-39.
- Sensenbaugh, R. (1995). Reading recovery. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 386713)
- Simmons, J. (2000). You never asked me to read: Useful assessment of reading and writing problems. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Snow, C.E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Taylor, B. M., Frye, B. J., Short, R., & Shearer, B. (1992). Classroom teachers prevent reading failure among low-achieving first grade students. *Reading Teacher*, 45, 592-597.
- Texas Education Agency (1998). Tejas Lee. Austin, Texas. Author.
- Thomas, W. & Collier, V. (1997). School effectiveness for language minority students. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Tinajero, J. & Hurley, S. (2001). Assessing progress in second-language acquisition. In S. Hurley & J. Tinajero (Eds.), *Literacy assessment of second-language learners*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Torgesen, J. (2000). Individual differences in response to early intervention in reading: The lingering problem of treatment resisters. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 15 (1) 55-64.
- Vaughn, S., Linan-Thompson, S., Bryant, D. P., Kouzekanani, K., & Dickson, S. (in press). Grouping for reading instruction: Students with reading difficulties who are monolingual English speakers or English language learners.
- Weiler, J. (1998). Success for all: A summary of evaluations. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers' College. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 425250)
- Zelasko, N. & Antunez, B. (2000). If your child learns in two languages: A parent's guide for improving educational opportunities for children acquiring English as a second language. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 337713).

Appendix A

The Tejas Lee Reading Inventory

The *Tejas Lee* consists of a diagnostic screening and an inventory. The reading inventory section includes tasks that ask children to demonstrate their understanding of book and print awareness, phonemic awareness, graphophonemic knowledge, oral reading ability, and comprehension development (TEA, 1998). The screen is used as a second grade benchmark for the state's high stakes assessment given in third grade and is a predictor of reading difficulties. The *Tejas Lee* was used to develop pre- and post measures for the study. The pre-testing occurred within the first four weeks of school and the post testing took place during the last three weeks of May 2002. Students were also administered the *Tejas Lee* during December for mid-year benchmarks. The classroom teacher also conducted ongoing informal assessments.

Appendix B

Lesson Plan Guide Used by University Tutors in School A

Shared Reading (2 minutes)	Song, listen to a story read by the teacher	Building relationships
Phonological Awareness (10 minutes) -Syllables -Onset/rime -Rhymes	Review initial sounds Blend, segment, phonemes Identifying Create new patterns Creating/Identifying	Students have opportunities to both blend and segment. All Activities are oral Count syllables/use children's names Provide non-examples Opportunities to practice
Word Study (3 minutes) Alphabetic Principle	Make a word/ word building	Opportunities to practice
Writing (3 minutes)	Write letters/words/sentences	Dictation
Closing Activity (2 minutes)	Talk about something that was learned	Summarize/praise

I. Alanis University of Texas at Brownsville October 2001

Each lesson should follow a predictable sequence that uses what works to help struggling readers develop independent reading strategies. Each component of the lesson has a specific purpose and procedure, which will be described here.

Shared Reading (2 minutes): the first two minutes should be used to acquaint your students to the activities and to allow students to share personal experiences related to the text you will be reading.

Phonemic Awareness Activities (10 minutes): PA activities include playing with the language, identifying rhymes, counting syllables, and working with onset/rime.

Word Study/Alphabetic Principle(3 minutes): Hands-on, manipulative, every-pupil response activity designed to help children learn how letters go together to make words and how small changes make different words (Cunningham).

Writing (3 minutes): Writing helps children move along in their reading development. As they write and are coached by the tutor, they develop the PA and letter-sound patterns essential to continued progress in reading. You will also use sound boxes to develop PA.

Closing Activity (2 minutes). Review key sounds/words from lesson. Have children summarize their learning. Praise students for their approximations and successes.

Appendix C

*Parts of a Lesson/Timing Guide Used by Reading Recovery
School B Classroom Teachers*

Minutes	Activity	Examples
2 minutes	Fluent writing/Reading	Flash cards, frequency words, dry erase.
10 minutes	Familiar Reading	Re-reading of at least 2 familiar books
10 minutes	Running Record (once each week)	Use results to plan instruction and regroup students
3 minutes	Letter Work/Making and Breaking	Letter names, letter sounds, formation, beginning sounds, embedded
7 minutes	Writing a story	Compose a message that carries meaning
2 minutes	Cut-up story/Sentence	Construct sentences.
3 minutes	Orientation to new book	Use title, illustrations, etc
3 minutes	New book attempted	Encourage children to use reading strategies
2 minutes	Closing	Ask students what they have learned today, praise good behavior, etc.