



Briefing Paper

Reading Recovery® Council of North America

Reading Recovery and English Language Learners (ELLs)

English language learners (ELLs) who struggle with literacy learning in first grade benefit from either of two intervention settings:

1. Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL), the reconstruction of Reading Recovery in Spanish for children who are receiving their classroom literacy instruction in Spanish
2. Reading Recovery in English for children who are receiving classroom literacy instruction in English, and if their English proficiency allows them to understand the tasks on the Observation Survey

An investment in both DLL and Reading Recovery ensures commitment to all children, including those who enter school speaking a language other than English. Here we focus on Reading Recovery as an option for ELLs.

(More information about DLL is available online at www.readingrecovery.org/reading_recovery/descubriendo/index.asp.)

Evidence of Success

Reading Recovery serves approximately 16,000 English language learners in the United States each year, about 15% of all Reading Recovery students. Several studies provide evidence of success for these children in Reading Recovery:

- Neal and Kelly (1999) examined outcomes for 3,992 English language learners in Reading Recovery. They found that the success rate for these children compared favorably with the total population of Reading Recovery children in California. They also found that the children had scores within the average range of a random sample of their grade-level peers.
- Ashdown and Simic (2002) examined outcomes for 25,602 Reading Recovery children, 18% of whom were not native English speakers. They found no significant differences in success rates of ELL students and their native English-speaking peers. They found that Reading Recovery closed the achievement gap between native and non-native speakers, while the gap remained in a comparison group and a random sample.
- Kelly, Gómez-Bellengé, Chen, & Schulz (in press) compared Reading Recovery data for 17,792 ELL children with a sample of native English speakers. They found little practical difference between success rates of ELLs and native speakers and pedagogically small differences in spring literacy outcomes. There was no significant difference in the length of the intervention for the two groups. Researchers concluded that Reading Recovery is appropriate for ELLs, even those with very limited oral English proficiency in the fall of first grade.

Reading Recovery is an appropriate intervention to support language and literacy development for English language learners. Success is likely related to the one-to-one interactions designed for each individual learner and to the quality of the oral language exchanges in Reading Recovery.

A Final Comment

It is important that language proficiency does not inappropriately exclude children from Reading Recovery. Some schools may want to delay admission for ELL children, thinking their English language skills need to improve before literacy tutoring. Research refutes that belief; in fact, the opposite seems to be true. Reading Recovery strengthens English language skills as the children learn to read and write the language.

References

- Ashdown, J., & Simic, O. (2000). Is early literacy intervention effective for English language learners: Evidence from Reading Recovery. *Literacy Teaching and Learning: An International Journal of Early Reading and Writing*, 5(1), 27–42.
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- Kelly, P. R., Gómez-Bellengé, F. X., Chen, J., & Schulz, M. (in press). Learner outcomes for English language learner low readers in an early intervention. *TESOL Quarterly*.
- Neal, J., & Kelly, P. (1999). The success of Reading Recovery for English language learners and Descubriendo la Lectura for bilingual students in California. *Literacy Teaching and Learning: An International Journal of Early Reading and Writing*, 4(2), 81–108.
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