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Investigating Oral Language within Reading Recovery

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March 4, 2016

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Masters of Arts in Education degree.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the connection between oral language development and successful discontinuation from Reading Recovery. Previous studies have confirmed the relationship between oral language and early reading success but have failed to examine if there is a relationship between improving oral language and Reading Recovery outcomes. The study will take place by examining Record of Oral Language scores at the beginning and end of a child's Reading Recovery program along with a child's end of program status of discontinued, recommended, incomplete, or none of the above. Participants include Reading Recovery students in a suburban central Ohio school district during the 2015-2016 school year. Based on the results of this study, determining a relationship will help refine the selection process for Reading Recovery and the determine the amount of time and focus that Reading Recovery teachers put on oral language within Reading Recovery lessons.

SECTION ONE

Introduction

Oral language has been well documented as a contributing factor to literacy success (Hill & Launder, 2010; Kirkland & Patterson, 2005; Gambrell, 2004; Spira, Braken, & Fischel, 2005; Cooper, Roth, Speece, & Schatschneider, 2002; Pathways to Reading, 2004). According to Kirkland and Patterson (2005), oral language is an important part of developing early literacy skills in the areas listening, speaking, reading and writing. Oral language components of “listening and speaking provide children with a sense of words and sentences, build sensitivity to the sound system so that children can acquire phonological awareness and phonics, and are the means by which children demonstrate their understanding of words and written materials” (Strickland, p. 87). These skills will allow students to develop new concepts about language and print that will help them to become better readers. Relatedly, Kirkland and Patterson (2005) found that oral language helps to develop multiple areas of early literacy including: print principles, phonological awareness, and emergent writing. These early literacy skills are the foundation on which reading success is built. Through this project I seek to explore and understand any relationship that exists between oral language and literacy success within the specific reading intervention program of Reading Recovery.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this Capstone project is to investigate the relationship between a child’s oral language and his/her discontinuation from Reading Recovery. A large suburban district where I work, with 10.4%, has one of the highest percentages of English Language Learners (ELL) in the state (About Our District, 2015). Many of these students

qualify for our Reading Recovery program, a short-term intervention with a maximum of 20 weeks, which services struggling first grade students in reading and writing. Along with the ELL students, many other students who qualify for this program have a low level of language according to the Record of Oral Language Assessment (ROL). Through this instructional inquiry project, I hope to gain an understanding of how oral language skills relate to a student's ability to successfully exit the Reading Recovery program. Although Reading Recovery has many opportunities to develop oral language through its components, the results of this study could significantly impact the amount of focus that Reading Recovery teachers put on these oral language skills. The results may also be used to inform the selection process for Reading Recovery students. If findings show that Reading Recovery is not benefiting English Language Learners or language-delayed students, perhaps a more effective intervention can be found.

Research Questions

The question that will guide this instructional inquiry project is: Is there a relationship between a child's scores on the ROL and his/her end of program status in Reading Recovery? A related secondary question is: How does a child's score on the ROL relate to his/her outcome in Reading Recovery?

SECTION TWO

Review of the Literature

The connection between oral language and reading development is well documented and widely accepted (Hill & Launder, 2010; Kirkland & Patterson, 2005; Gambrell, 2004; Spira, Braken, & Fischel, 2005; Cooper, Roth, Speece, & Schatschneider, 2002; Pathways to Reading, 2004). Students with a low level of oral language may struggle with gaining an understanding of how oral language relates to written language when it is time for them to begin to read. For first grade students who struggle with emergent literacy, Clay (2005) developed a program called Reading Recovery. Some students in Reading Recovery lack knowledge of oral language, which contributes to their literacy struggles. In order to fully understand the importance of oral language in Reading Recovery, there are several aspects of oral language development and the relationship to literacy development to explore. These include: the development and components of oral language, ways to increase oral language, the role of oral language in literacy development, Reading Recovery and the role that oral language plays within that specific program.

Development of Oral Language

The development of oral language is comprised of two phases: pre-linguistic and linguistic. According to Williamson (2014) and Schirmer, Fontoura, and Nunes (2004), the pre-linguistic stage of development occurs from birth to around 12 to 13 months. During this stage of development, a child is playing with sounds, learning sequences and developing necessary motor skills that will be needed to form actual, understandable words (Williamson, 2014). The pre-linguistic phase is

compartmentalized into four subsections organized by the age of the child and what children are typically able to do at each of these ages. From zero to two months old, an infant makes typical baby sounds including crying, coughing and burping. Williamson (2014) refers to these sounds as vegetative sounds. The next stage in the pre-linguistic phase is comprised of vowel and consonant sounds. This stage occurs from two to five months old and sounds include cooing and laughing. Vocal play is the next stage and is most likely to be observed between four and eight months of age. Children will continue to make vowel and consonant sounds but will continue for a longer period of time. The final pre-linguistic stage of babbling is noticed between six to thirteen months. This last phase of pre-linguistic development has two subsections. The first, Williamson (2014) refers to as reduplicated babbling. This is described as a reproduction of the same consonant vowel pattern, such as ma-ma, da-da, etc. The second section of babbling is called non-reduplicated babbling. This is either consonant-vowel-consonant words or vowel-consonant-vowel vocalizations. What seems like mere ‘baby talk’ to many is an important phase of oral language development.

Children progress to the linguistic phase of oral language development when they begin to say single words that have meaning (Schirmer, Fontoura, & Nunes, 2004). Over time, their communication becomes much more complex. The table below from Schirmer, Fontoura, and Nunes (2004) shows the receptive and expressive ability of children at different ages.

Table 1 - Language development

Receptive	Age	Expressive
Gets scared easily. Calms down when hears the sound of a voice.	0-6 weeks	Differentiated crying and primitive sounds. Appearing of vowel sounds (V).
Turns to the source of the voice. Attentively observes objects and facts of the environment.	3 months	First heard consonants (C) are p/b and k/g. Starts babbling.
Answers with emotive tones to the maternal voice.	6 months	Babbling (sequences of CVCV without changing the consonant). E.g.: "dudada".
Understands simple requests through gesture tips. Understands "no" and "bye."	9 months	Reproduces sounds. Jargon. Non-reduplicative babbling (sequence of CVC or VCV).
Understands many familiar words and simple orders associated to gestures. E.g.: "Come with daddy."	12 months	Starts to produce the first words, like "duck", "papa" or "teddy".
Recognizes some parts of the body. Finds objects when asked to do it. Symbolic playing with miniatures.	18 months	May have from 30 to 40 words. Begins to use two word combinations "Ken water" (for "Ken is drinking water").
Follows instructions involving two verbal concepts (which are substantives). E.g.: "put the glass in the box."	24 months	Presents a vocabulary with approximately 150 words. Uses combination of two or three.
Understands first verbs. Understands instructions involving up to three concepts. E.g.: "put the big doll on the chair."	30 months	Often uses telegraphic language ("Pig say oink", "Daddy go?").
Recognizes several colors. Recognizes plurals, pronouns that differentiate gender, adjectives.	36 months	Begins to use articles, plurals, prepositions and auxiliaries verbs.
Begins to learn abstract concepts (hard, soft, smooth). Language used for reasoning. Understands "if", "why", "how much." Comprehends 1,500 to 2,000 words.	48 months	Builds correct sentences, ask questions, uses negative forms, talks about events of the past or anticipates happenings.

Figure 1. The Receptive and Expressive Ability of Children. Adapted from “Language and learning disorders” by C. Schirmer, D. Fontoura, and M. Nunes, 2004, *Jornal De Pediatria*, 80(2). Copyright 2004 by the Jornal De Pediatria.

Williamson (2014) expanded upon the development of the linguistic phase of oral language development by further explaining the acquisition at each age. The first stage of linguistic development is referred to as the Early One Word Stage. During this stage, children start to communicate wants and need but not using conventional vocabulary. Adults close to the child will begin to understand what the child wants based on their communication, but the words they are using are not part of the standard vocabulary. However, by 14 to 24 months children will start to use correct one-word utterances to communicate their wants and needs. They will begin to name objects and people in their environment.

Williamson (2014) labels the next stage as the Two Word Stage. This stage occurs between 20 and 30 months, and as its name suggests, children begin to utter two-word phrases. A majority of these combinations include two nouns but the presence of

verbs start to emerge. During the Three Word Stage, occurring between 28 and 42 months of age, children use three to four words to communicate. In this stage, children begin to use a larger number of pronouns in their communication. Between the ages of 34 and 48 months children enter the Four Word Stage and begins to use four to six words at a time. Children use more prepositions and adjectives in this stage. Finally, children progress to the Complex Utterance Stage around 48 to 60 months. This stage is the most complex and children use six or more words to communicate. They use words to indicate past and future tenses and also begin to use contractions in their communication. The complete progression, including pre-linguistic and linguistic phases, of oral language development is shown in Williamson’s (2014) table below:

Precursors to Language (Pre-linguistic)					
0-2 months	2-5 months	4-8 months	6-13 months		
reflexive crying and vegetative sounds	cooing and laughter	vocal play	babbling – reduplicated – non-reduplicated		
(Symbolic) Language					
12-19 months	14-24 months	20-30 months	28-42 months	34-48 months	48-60 months
Early One Word Stage (protowords)	Later One Word Stage	Two Word Stage	Three Word Stage	Four Word Stage	Complex Utterance Stage

Figure 2. Precursors to language. Adapted from “Language Development” by G. Williamson, 2014, *Speech and Language Therapy Information*. Copyright 2014 by SLTinfo.

Of course not all children progress at the same rate and some children, between three and fifteen percent, do not begin to talk until much later than the above table suggests (Schirmer, Fontoura, & Nunes, 2004). For these children, research has shown the importance of early intervention. A study conducted by Rescorla (2009) showed that without intervention, children are at risk of consistently performing below, although still

average, their typically developing peers on language measures in the future. This study followed 26 late talkers and a comparison group of 23. These children were screened multiple times during their childhood using multiple standardized tests. Results showed that late talkers scored below their average peers in all areas of assessment. Results were statistically significant in the areas of vocabulary, grammar, and working memory (Rescorla, 2009).

Although it appears that late talkers are at a disadvantage in their academic success, it does not have to remain this way. Bernhardt and Major (2005) followed 12 children with speech and language delays over three years. Their study found that with early language intervention, only two out of the 12 children were below average in their reading ability at the three-year check in. The results from this study should encourage parents and teacher to invest in early language intervention to reduce ongoing risks for later academic struggles.

Components of Oral Language

As children develop the ability to produce oral language, they are also practicing and developing an understanding of the different components of oral language. These components all contribute to the overall development of oral language and later academic literacy achievement (Genishi, 1998; Foorman, Anthony, Seals & Mouzaki, 2002; Lundberg, 2006; Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002). Oral language is comprised of: phonological awareness, semantics, syntax, pragmatics and vocabulary. Phonological Awareness is a component of oral language that focuses on combining sounds (Genishi, 1998). This includes the ability to produce rhyming words, count syllables and knowing and manipulating phonemes. Semantics and syntax are closely related. These skills help

children to understand that print contains a message and helps them to use sentence structure information to help predict unknown words based on their knowledge of grammatical structures (Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002).

Although not the focus for developing language, another important component of oral language is the pragmatic component. This area helps children to adhere to accepted social conventions of speaking appropriately. “Pragmatic rules are part of our communicative competence, our ability to speak appropriately in different situations, for example, in a conversational way at home and in a more formal way at a job interview. Young children need to learn the ways of speaking in the day care center or school where, for example, teachers often ask rhetorical questions. Learning pragmatic rules is as important as learning the rules of the other components of language, since people are perceived and judged based on both what they say and when they say it” (Genishi, 1998). Vocabulary, which is the number of words that a child knows, is an important part of oral language development. Most people underestimate a child’s ability to understand words. However, the average 10-month-old can understand about 40 words. By the age of 16 months, a child’s vocabulary has increased to approximately 169 words (Foorman, Anthony, Seals & Mouzaki, 2002; Lundberg, 2006). For students who have a limited vocabulary or lack experience with the other components of oral language, there are ways to help students improve.

Increasing Oral Language

The results of many studies linking a child’s literacy achievement to his or her oral language should encourage teachers to help foster development in this area. One important area of enriching a child’s oral language is to foster vocabulary development

(Genishi, 1998; Silverman & Harnranft, 2015). One way that this can be done is by providing explicit vocabulary instruction with multiple opportunities to practice the vocabulary. Children undoubtedly acquire many words through everyday encounters with words but this exposure may not expose them to the academic vocabulary that they will need to be successful in school (Silverman & Harnranft, 2015). Another way that teachers can help a child to develop oral language skills is to provide many opportunities to use language. Genishi (1998) provides the following list of suggestions:

- Treat children as if they are conversationalists, even if they are not yet talking. Children learn very early about how conversations work (taking turns, looking attentively, using facial experiences with conversing adults).
- Encourage interaction among children. Peer learning is an important part of language development, especially in mixed-age groups. Activities involving a wide range of materials should promote talk. There should be a balance between individual activities and those that nurture collaboration and discussion, such as dramatic play, block-building, book-sharing, or carpentry.
- Remember that parents, caregivers, teachers, and guardians are the chief resources in language development. Children learn much from each other, but adults are the main conversationalists, questioners, listeners, responders, and sustainers of language development and growth in the child-care center or classroom.
- Continue to encourage interaction as children come to understand written language. Children in the primary grades can keep developing oral abilities and skills by consulting with each other, raising questions, and providing information in varied situations. Every area of the curriculum is enhanced through language, so that classrooms full of active learners are hardly ever silent.

The Role of Oral Language in Literacy Development

Developing and increasing oral language skills is crucial because of the role that oral language plays when it comes to fostering literacy development. The positive correlation between these two is important because, not only does oral language development play a critical role in a child's speaking ability but also in the development of listening, reading and writing (Kirkland & Patterson, 2005). Many studies have been

conducted that report a correlation between oral language and literacy development. Beginning reading is dependent on oral language as the interaction between the teacher and students is pivotal for students to learn about how books work. These conversations about how oral language and written language differ are especially important for children who depend on formal education to learn to read (Hill & Launder, 2010).

Kendeou, Broek, White, and Lynch (2009) implemented a study to explore the impact of a child's preschool oral language and beginning reading skills on later elementary reading ability. The study also collected evidence of a correlation between early language development and subsequent reading comprehension skills. Participants in this study included 297 children. There were two categories of children (four and six year olds) and data was collected at two different times, with a span of two year between testing points. At each of the assessment sessions, children were asked to complete tasks that examined their oral language, decoding and comprehension skills. Results showed that oral language is positively linked to reading achievement, including the ability to decode and comprehend the story. Findings of this study also indicated that a child's decoding skills could be predicted by their oral language skills, both within the year and across time (Kendeou, Broek, White, & Lynch, 2009).

A previous study on oral language and literacy achievement conducted by Roth, Speece, and Cooper (2002) also showed the importance of this relationship. This study observed 39 typically developing students in many areas of a child's oral language, background and reading ability. The study observed these children from kindergarten through second grade. Results show that reading ability is determined by more than one aspect of oral language development. Previous studies have shown the importance of

phonological awareness and while this skill was helpful in decoding words, it was not a significant factor in predicting reading comprehension. However, other aspects of oral language did contribute significantly to this area of reading. Overall lessons from this study show that teachers must focus on more than just phonological awareness when encouraging development of oral language skills due to the multifaceted ways in which oral language impacts reading ability.

Not only does having strong oral language skills allow children to read the text, these skills also help children to understand what they are reading (Gambrell, 2004; Spira, Braken, & Fischel, 2005; Cooper, Roth, Speece, & Schatschneider, 2002; Pathways to Reading, 2004). Studies have shown that a child's vocabulary knowledge at four years old was positively related to his or her ability to decode words and the student's reading comprehension three years later (Cooper, Roth, Speece, & Schatschneider, 2002). The correlation between the oral language and reading comprehension strengthens when children progress into later grade levels and they better understand decoding skills (Spira, Braken, & Fischel, 2005, Pathways to Reading, 2004).

Reading Recovery

Students, who struggle with beginning literacy skills, whether due to low language skills or other literacy factors, are eligible for Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery began as a national program in New Zealand in 1983 based on Clay's research on literacy instruction (RRCNA, 2014). The program was introduced by Clay (1997) in 1984 and was first implemented at The Ohio State University. Since implementation, over 1.4 million students have been served through the Reading Recovery program.

The Reading Recovery Council of North America (2014) defines the Reading Recovery program as “a short-term intervention for first graders having extreme difficulty with early reading and writing. Specially trained teachers work individually with students in daily 30-minute lessons lasting 12 to 20 weeks.” Students are chosen for Reading Recovery based on their scores on the Observation Survey. The Observation Survey is a standardized set of six asks that is administered by the teacher to assess a child’s emergent literacy. These tasks include: letter identification, word reading, concepts about print, hearing and recording sounds in words, writing vocabulary and text level. Each raw score is correlated with a stanine score. Students who have the most low stanines are then selected for Reading Recovery.

Once a child is selected for Reading Recovery, teachers begin the series of lessons by ‘Roaming around the known’. These lessons build on the knowledge that a child already has and do not deliberately teach new material (Clay, 2005). There are several reasons that Clay gives for beginning with ‘Roaming around the known’. Roaming around the known allows the teacher and the child to build a relationship with one another. It also allows the teacher an opportunity to observe and see what else the child may know or be able to do. The teacher will strengthen what the child can do and help him to be confident in his abilities. The most important aspect of ‘Roaming around the known’ is that it forces teachers to differentiate each lesson for each individual child. The teacher must examine all that the student is able to do and work in individual ways to suit each child (Clay, 2005).

After ‘Roaming around the known’ is complete the teacher and child will begin the regular series of lessons. Each lesson consists of the following components: familiar

read, running record, letter and word work, writing a story, cut up sentence, and new book. The familiar read allows children to be successful by reading a familiar book. After completing the familiar read, students read the new book from yesterday's lesson. The teacher takes a running record and makes a teaching point based on his or her observations. After the running record, students engage in appropriate letter or word work based on his or her individual needs. Students then compose a story about his or her life or about a book that has been read during the lesson. Teachers cut apart the message composed by the child and students must reconstruct their story. Finally, the teacher introduces a new book to the child and supports him or her during the first read of the story.

At the end of 20 weeks, or before if students are ready, Reading Recovery students are reassessed using Clay's (1993) Observation Survey. Based on the scores of these six subtests, students are labeled as one of the following: discontinued, recommended, incomplete, or none of the above. A discontinued status means that students have successfully reached the average of their peers and have successfully completed the program. Recommended indicates that students have not yet reached the average benchmark and will need extra support such as small group reading intervention, English Language services or may be tested for Special Education services. Incomplete refers to students who did not have the opportunity to complete 20 weeks in the program – typically because there was not enough time left in the school year. None of the Above is a rarely used end of program status as it refers to students who were removed from the program before his or her 20 weeks were complete. Students are rarely removed from the program but can be if their behavior does not allow them to engage in everyday lessons

or if a student's progress is stalled to the point where they are assessed for Special Education services before the end of their program.

Many studies have been done that show the effectiveness of Reading Recovery. The What Works Clearinghouse has reviewed Reading Recovery and the program received its highest rating in the general reading achievement category. Reading Recovery also received positive ratings in all other categories. These categories include alphabetics, which encompasses phonics and phonemic awareness, fluency and comprehension (RRCNA, 2014). Below is a graph that shows the impressiveness of Reading Recovery's success.

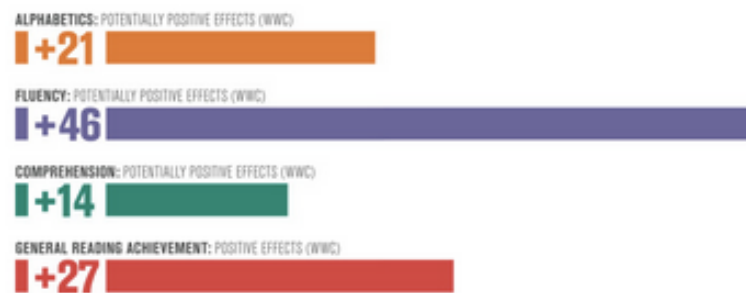


Figure 3. The success of Reading Recovery. Adapted from “What Works Clearinghouse document Reading Recovery’s scientific research base,” 2014. Copyright 2014 by RRCNA.

Reading Recovery’s success with struggling first-grade student has been well documented, not only within the Reading Recovery environment, but also within the classroom and other educational settings (RRCNA, 2014).

English Language Learners in Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery does not discriminate services based on limited speaking ability of English Language Learners. All children who are able to understand the directions of the Observation Survey are considered for the Reading Recovery program (Clay, 1993). Ashdown and Simic (2000) investigated the effectiveness of Reading

Recovery for English Language Learners by evaluating the literacy achievement of 25,601 New York Reading Recovery students over the span of six years. Three groups of student scores' were examined; native English speakers, limited English proficient (LEP) speakers and fluent English Language learners. Results of the study showed that LEP students and native English speakers successfully discontinued from the program at the same rate of 62%. The Text Reading Levels of LEP students in Reading Recovery were also compared to LEP students who did not qualify for the program and were only receiving classroom instruction. English Language Learners receiving Reading Recovery were able to read a whole grade level about LEP students who were not receiving the service. However, Reading Recovery proves to be most effective for fluent English Language Learners, as they were able to discontinue at a rate of 66%. Results from this study show that Reading Recovery is just as effective, if not more so, for English Language Learners as it is for native English speakers (Ashdown & Simic, 2000).

Neal and Kelly (1999) performed a similar study to investigate the effectiveness of Reading Recovery for English Language Learners in California over the span of three years. Findings from this study indicated that ELL students progressed in such a way that was statistically significant. Results also found that ELL Reading Recovery students consistently improved their scores on the Observation Survey. Seventy-two percent of ELLs were able to successfully discontinue from the program. This number is only slightly below the average 75.2% discontinuation rate of all Reading Recovery students. This examination of the Reading Recovery program verifies that ELL students can reach the average level of their classmates in 63 to 68 Reading Recovery lessons (Neal & Kelly, 1999).

A case study documenting the Reading Recovery intervention of a Spanish speaking first grade study also showed similar results (Kelly, 2001). Kelly (2001) recorded the progress of Danya during her Reading Recovery series of lessons. Data used in this case study included lesson records, running records, video and audio records, along with beginning and end of program testing. She also followed up her case study with evidence of sustainable learning by giving Danya the Developmental Reading Assessment in second and third grade. Kelly's (2001) research showed that not only did Danya make progress during her first grade Reading Recovery lessons, but that she developed a self-extending system that allowed her to be successful in subsequent years. These findings from all three researchers should prove to Reading Recovery teachers that Reading Recovery is an effective intervention for English Language Learners.

Oral Language Development in Reading Recovery

Oral language is an important component of Reading Recovery and is assessed using the Record of Oral Language. Developed by Clay (2007), the Record of Oral Language is an assessment designed to observe a child's control over English language structures. Students are asked to repeat sentences after the teacher while the teacher records the child's attempts. "One way to find out how much of the structure of adult speech a child has learned is to ask him to listen to a sentence and repeat it. By having a child repeat sentences which represent a range of different syntactic structures in English, a teacher can learn as much in a relatively short amount of time about his control of those structures as would be learned from listening to the child's spontaneous speech over a much longer period" (Clay, Gill, Glynn, McNaughton & Salmon, 2007, p. 11).

Reading Recovery teachers have a unique opportunity to engage in one-on-one conversations every day with their students. An investigatory study done by Janice Van Dyke (2006) suggests that Reading Recovery teachers can help foster and develop the oral language of their Reading Recovery students by engaging them in daily conversations about topics in which they are interested. By doing so, Reading Recovery teachers model and help to facilitate the increasing complexity of the children's spoken language.

Multiple researchers have come to the same conclusion; oral language is a strong contributor to literacy achievement. All of the components of oral language, in collaboration with one another, impact a child's ability to decode words and to comprehend the stories that they read. Although many studies have been done to show the correlation between oral language development and later literacy success, little research has been done on the specific area of how a child's language structures, or understanding of how sentences can be composed, impact reading success, more specifically within the context of Reading Recovery. This current study will investigate if there is a connection between a child's scores on the Record of Oral Language and his or her end of program status in Reading Recovery.

SECTION THREE

Methodology

Participants and Setting

This study was conducted in the 11th largest school district in central Ohio during the first half of the 2015-2016 school year. This district covers 47 square miles and is comprised of three high schools, four middle schools and twelve elementary schools. Participants included 28 first grade Reading Recovery students from eight different elementary schools. Thirteen Reading Recovery teachers from across the district were asked to participate in this study; their participation was completely voluntary. Data was obtained from eight of thirteen Reading Recovery teachers in the district.

In addition to examining the scores of Reading Recovery students across the district, a more comprehensive case study followed the progress of one of my Reading Recovery students, Amira. She arrived in the United States in January 2015 in the middle of her kindergarten year. Amira was born in Libya and is a native Arabic speaker. Upon her arrival to our school, she was assessed by our English Language teachers and scored as a beginner in both listening and speaking. Reading and writing were not assessed at this time. At the beginning of her first grade year, Amira was tested for Reading Recovery based upon her end of year scores from kindergarten and on the recommendation of her first grade teacher.

Procedure, Research Design and Data Collection

This action research combines a correlational research design with an embedded case study. Therefore, this study includes both qualitative and quantitative data. Data to be used in the correlational research aspect of this study was collected at the beginning

and end of the Reading Recovery program, which lasts between 12 and 20 weeks. At the beginning of the school year, students were assessed and selected for Reading Recovery based upon scores on the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993). Participating teachers assessed their Reading Recovery students' oral language using the Record of Oral Language. Teachers then continued to work with students every day for 30 minutes, which is standard Reading Recovery practice. At the end of each student's program, students were once again assessed using the Observation Survey and the Record of Oral Language assessments. From this data, a determination was made, based on U.S. state-normed stanines, of whether the student had successfully completed the program. Participating Reading Recovery teachers shared their beginning and end of program information, which was used in further analysis.

Data from the embedded case study was collected during everyday lessons with Amira. The Observation Survey and Record of Oral Language assessments were also completed. In addition, during her lessons, detailed observations about her reading, writing and oral language were recorded on lesson records. Other data sources included daily running records and samples from her writing journal, in which she wrote daily. Videotaped lessons were used in order to further examine her oral language and reading and writing behaviors.

Materials

Correlational Research

Record of Oral Language – The Record of Oral Language is an assessment that allows teachers to see how much of the English language a student controls. Students are asked to repeat sentences after the teacher. These sentences, ranging in complexity, are broken

down into three different levels. Each of these levels is comprised of 14 different sentences. Teachers record on a recording sheet any errors that a child makes while repeating the sentences. A total score is then obtained by adding the number of sentences correctly repeated on all three levels, out of a total score of 42 possible points.

Text Levels – Students are asked to read continuous text in order to observe a child’s reading behaviors and to determine an appropriate level of reading instruction. These books are written by Scott Foresman (1997) and include a standardized introduction. A running record is taken as the child reads. The student is given credit for the highest text read at 90% accuracy or above.

Case Study

In addition to the Record of Oral Language and the Text Level assessment, the other materials that were used during the case study of Amira are summarized below.

Writing Journal – Each lesson consists of a writing component. Through conversation with the teacher, students compose a message ranging in topics from a book that has just been read or about happenings in the students’ lives. Students write their message with assistance from the teacher in their writing journal. Teachers help students solve unknown words in a variety of ways, using a practice page.

Videotapes – Several lessons were videotaped during Amira’s Reading Recovery lessons. These were recorded using Photo Booth and were used to examine the development of Amira’s oral language and reading ability.

Lesson Records – Reading Recovery teachers use this form to record their observations of the Reading Recovery lessons. These are used as planning sheets and record relevant reading and writing information from each session.

Observation Survey – The Observation Survey is comprised of six subtests that allow a teacher to observe what a student controls in reading and writing. The subtests are described below.

Letter Identification – Students are asked to identify all 52 letterforms, each uppercase and lowercase letter and type a and g. Students are given credit for identifying letters by name, sound or a word that begins with that letter.

Ohio Word Test – Students are asked to read 20 words that are commonly found in first grade text.

Concepts About Print – this is an assessment that allows teachers to see what a child knows about how books work.

Writing Vocabulary – Students are given 10 minutes to write as many words as they can. If students stop producing words on their own, teachers give suggestions for words that students may be able to write.

Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words – Students are asked to write a sentence dictated by the teacher. They are encouraged to say words slowly and record the sounds that they hear. One point is given for every sound correctly recorded out of a total of 37.

Running Records – Each day, Reading Recovery teachers take a running record on the new book introduced the day before. Teachers record accuracy of reading, noting reading behaviors along the way. Upon completion, running records are analyzed for use of meaning, structure and visual information.

Data Analysis

Data analysis took place in two phases. In phase one, the quantitative data was

analyzed by using descriptive statistics and correlations between all variables. In order to analyze effectively, the Hake Gain scores of the Record of Oral language and Text Level were found. This score is found by subtracting the pre-test score from the post-test and then dividing this number by the maximum score minus the pre-test score. This equation allows for a normalized gain and takes into account the fact that there is a maximum score that can be achieved. The descriptive and correlational statistics were then analyzed and tentative claims were made about the results.

A second phase consisted of a deeper analysis of qualitative data relating to Amira's progress in Reading Recovery. In order to establish trustworthy findings, several qualitative data analysis techniques were applied, including indexing of video recordings, open coding of the data, and condensing the codes into categories. In addition to the qualitative data, I also compared pre and post-test scores of her Observation Survey and Record of Oral Language assessments. Tentative claims were made about Amira's oral language and reading progress.

Validity

A variety of data sources and data points were used in this study to ensure validity. Pre-test data, post-test data, indices of video recordings, lesson records, writing journal and running records were used across the duration of this study. The triangulation of these data sources was used to establish credible findings (Barbour, 2001).

SECTION FOUR

Results

Data collected through this study was analyzed through descriptive and correlational statistics. These findings analyzed the data of 20 students enrolled in the intervention of Reading Recovery. Two of the original students had to be excluded from this study because they moved and six were excluded because they were not yet finished with their program at the time of this analysis. A table of raw data for these 20 Reading Recovery students is displayed below. The data shown includes the students' Record of Oral Language (ROL) scores, or how many sentences each student was successfully able to repeat, and the text level that each student read at the beginning and end of their Reading Recovery program.

	Entry ROL	Exit ROL	Entry Text	Exit Text	Status	ELL
Student 1	13	28	0	14	Discontinued	Yes
Student 2	36	41	0	12	Discontinued	No
Student 3	23	31	0	4	Recommended	No
Student 4	16	25	0	12	Discontinued	No
Student 5	3	14	0	14	Discontinued	Yes
Student 6	16	20	2	8	Recommended	No
Student 7	24	29	1	9	Recommended	No
Student 8	11	17	0	12	Discontinued	No
Student 9	16	31	0	14	Discontinued	Yes
Student 10	17	23	0	9	Recommended	No
Student 11	11	15	2	18	Discontinued	Yes
Student 12	18	25	2	20	Discontinued	Yes
Student 13	14	18	3	18	Discontinued	No
Student 14	21	27	1	6	Recommended	No
Student 15	18	20	1	16	Discontinued	Yes
Student 16	21	27	2	16	Discontinued	No
Student 17	7	21	1	12	Discontinued	No
Student 18	23	32	1	14	Discontinued	Yes
Student 19	14	24	3	7	Recommended	No
Student 20	18	19	0	3	Recommended	No

Table 1. Raw Data of Reading Recovery Students

The above assessment data was analyzed in several different ways. First, the Hake Gain Score, a normalized score that measures the available improvement, given that there is a maximum number of points that can be achieved, was calculated for both the Record of Oral Language assessment and Text Reading level. After this was completed, descriptive statistics were gathered and are shown in the table below.

	Mean	Range of scores
Entry Record of Oral Language	17.00	3 – 36
Exit Record of Oral Language	24.35	14 – 41
Entry Text Level	.95	0 – 3
Exit Text Level	11.90	3 – 20

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of All Reading Recovery Students

The above table shows that students who entry Reading Recovery possess a wide range of oral language ability as evidenced by a scores ranging from three to 36 points. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the means between the Entry Record of Oral Language ($M=17$) and the Exit Record of Oral Language ($M = 24.35$), and the difference was significant ($t = 8.16, p < .001$). These results showed that throughout students' time in Reading Recovery, they made significant gains in their ability to repeat sentences with increasing complexity of English language structures.

The other variable, important to this study, was the students' text level at entry and exit. Unlike the Record of Oral Language, students who qualified for Reading Recovery are all reading at similar level at entry. This is not surprising as Reading Recovery is an intervention for students who are struggling with early literacy. A paired-samples t-test was also conducted to compare the means between the Entry Text Level ($M=.95$) and the Exit Text Level ($M = 11.90$), and the difference was significant ($t = 10.88, p < .001$). This result is evidence that Reading Recovery is an effective intervention for struggling first grade readers. However, at exit, there is a wide range of reading

ability within the sample population. The highest student to complete Reading Recovery was able to read 17 levels above the lowest performing student (3-20). Reading Recovery does not work for all students and not every student makes the expected or hoped for progress. These results should confirm that, although not a fix for every student, Reading Recovery is an effective intervention and that the significant increase that exists between entry and exit Text Level scores is impressive.

The t-test results were encouraging and show that Reading Recovery is an effective intervention that helps to enhance oral language development and also reading ability. In order to answer the primary question of this study, whether there is a relationship between a child's score on the Record of Oral Language and his/her discontinuation from Reading Recovery, correlations were calculated between these two variables. The Hake Gain Scores of each variable was analyzed via a Pearson Correlation, with a surprising result: there was no statistically significant relationship between the two. I ran two additional correlations with subsets of the total population; one to include only discontinued students and the other English Language Learners. I was interested to see if a relationship existed between the two variables within these specific subsets. However, the same result was produced; no statistically significant relationship was found.

Although no statistically significant correlations were found, other important results were discovered. These findings relate specifically to students who are English Language Learners (ELL). Of the 20 students involved in all phases of this project, seven of them qualified and are identified in the district as ELL students. Descriptive results of these seven students are displayed in the table below.

	Mean	Range of scores
Entry Record of Oral Language	14.57	3 – 23
Exit Record of Oral Language	23.57	14 – 32
Entry Text Level	.92	0 – 2
Exit Text Level	15.71	14 – 20

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of ELL Reading Recovery Students

English Language Learners involved in this study showed some slight differences from the whole set of students who participated. For example, the mean of the Record of Oral Language (ROL) scores were slightly lower for English Learners than the mean for the entire sample set (14.57, 17.00). The discrepancy of ROL scores between ELLs and all students continued to be consistent for the exit scores on the Record of Oral Language (23.57, 24.35).

On the other hand, English Language Learners entered Reading Recovery with the same text level mean score as the entire population involved in the study (.92, .95). However, the average exit Text Level for English learners was about four levels higher than the mean of the complete group (15.71, 11.90). This finding suggests that Reading Recovery is not only an effective intervention for these ELL students but may actually be *more* effective for ELL students than for native English speakers.

Another interesting finding is that all seven English Language Learners participating in the study were able to successfully complete their Reading Recovery experience and discontinued from the program. These students were able to discontinue at a rate of 100% compared to their native English-speaking peers at 46%. One of these English Language Learners was my Reading Recovery student and was the subject of a case study, which led to the tentative conclusion that oral language development and an increase in literacy skills are positively related for Amira.

Amira is a first grade student who qualified for Reading Recovery at the beginning of her first grade year. She is a native Arabic speaker, born in Libya and has been in the United States for just over one year. At the beginning of her program, she was very hesitant to speak. She is a hard worker who wants to learn. She has parents at home that help her to complete her homework, although very little English is spoken in the home.

Throughout Amira's Reading Recovery lessons, her language, in speaking and in writing, became more complex. Typical examples of this, drawn from indices of video-recordings, show the interaction between Amira and her teacher while composing a message during the writing part of her lesson. The first example is from week six of her lessons, while the second example is an interaction during week 17 of her lessons.

Week 6

Teacher: What are we going to write about today?
Amira: No response
Teacher: Are we going to write about Nick? Are we going to write about me meeting mommy and daddy? We wrote about going to the zoo yesterday.
Hmm...what do you think?
Do you want to write about one of these books?
Amira: points to book
Teacher: The Hungry Puppy? What are we going to say about that book?
Amira: Where is my food?
Teacher: Ok! Let's write that – Where is my food?

Week 17

Teacher: What are we going to write about today, Mrs. Pig or something else?
Amira: Something else.
Teacher: About what you like to do in the snow or what you did with your cousins? What you would do with a marshmallow necklace?
Amira: I can build a snowman
Teacher: And then we will talk about what it would look like because I bet you could make a great snowman
Amira: Rereading sentence – I can build a...(writes snowman)
Teacher: What would your snowman look like? What would you put on it?
Amira: My hat and my gloves. I am going to make it a girl
Teacher: Repeating – I am going to make it a girl. Let's write that!
Amira: (writes story)
Teacher: Read me your story
Amira: I can build a snowman. I am going to make it a girl

Figure 4. Transcripts of Amira's video-recordings

The first transcript, from week six, shows an interaction between Amira and the teacher during a writing portion of her lesson at the beginning of her lesson series. When asked a question, Amira would give a one-word answer or reply nonverbally by pointing or nodding her head. At the end of her lesson series, while she still occasionally answered nonverbally, her answers became more verbal and comprised of more than one word. She was more likely to expand upon her answers without prompting. Amira adding more to her story in the second example from week 17 provided above provides evidence of this. She became more independent in the writing of the story.

In addition to her oral language growing in complexity, so also did her writing. The first two examples below are typical writing samples from the first weeks of her lessons. The second set show middle lesson writing samples and the third set are examples that come from later lessons at the end of her program.

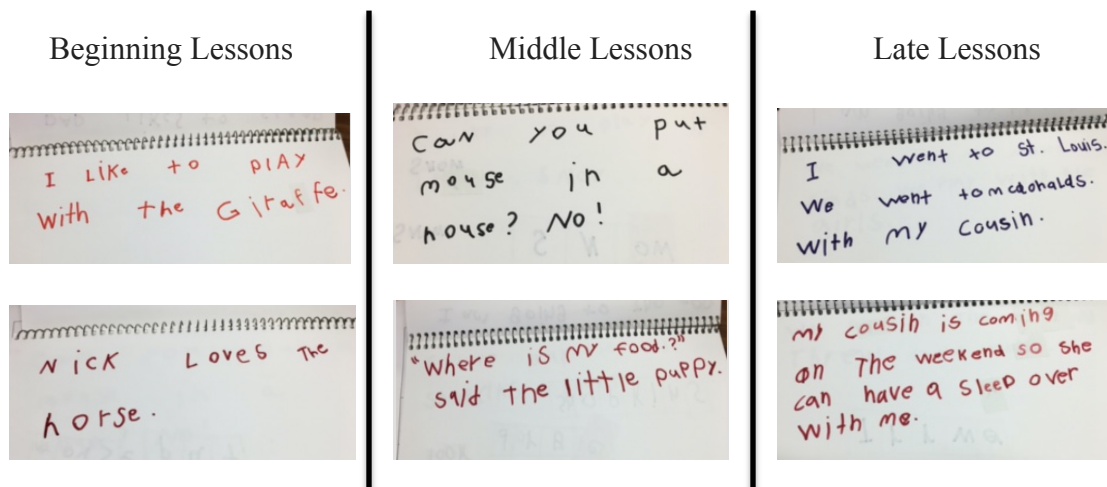


Figure 5. Writing Samples

The first two writing samples show that Amira is using safe sentences, comprised mostly of high frequency words that were already known. Samples are repetitive and do not show much variety in the types of sentences that are composed. For the first six

lessons, all writing samples began with I like or I love. These appear to be sentence structures that she controlled and felt confident in writing. As her lessons progressed Amira became more confident and her writing became more diverse and complex. During mid-lessons, she started using sentence structures from the books that she was reading. She also started writing about things that were going on in her own life with words that she needed to solve how to write. Toward the end of her lessons, she started composing and writing more than one sentence.

The qualitative data of Amira's oral language and writing samples show that her oral language and literacy abilities both grew in complexity throughout her weeks in Reading Recovery. Quantitative data also supports the claim that Amira's oral language development and her reading improvement are related. The table below compares Amira's entry scores into Reading Recovery with her final test scores at her discontinuation from the program.

Assessment (Points Possible)	Entry into Reading Recovery (Pre-Test)	Discontinuation from Reading Recovery (Post-Test)
Letter Identification (54)	43	54
Ohio Word Test (20)	1	19
Concepts About Print (24)	11	18
Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (37)	5	35
Writing Vocabulary	6	55
Text Level	0	14
Record of Oral Language (42)	13	28

Table 4. Amira's Assessment Results

These pre-and post-assessment results show how much progress Amira made throughout her time in Reading Recovery. She was able to grow in all areas of the Observation Survey. Her letter identification increased by 11 points and she is now able to identify all letters by name. At the beginning of her program she was only able to read

one word on the Ohio Word Test, an assessment consisting of 20 commonly found words in first grade text. At the end of her program, she only missed one of these words. Her Concepts About Print assessment showed that she gained an understanding of how books work and is better able to demonstrate what she notices about print. When Amira entered Reading Recovery, she was only able to hear and record five of 37 sounds in a dictated sentence. Upon exiting, she was able to record 35 of these 37 sounds. Her writing vocabulary also increased from six words to 55 words. Amira was able to take all that she had learned and apply it to continuous text. She entered Reading Recovery not able to read any text given to her and at the end of her program she discontinued by reading the level 14 text. Not only did her reading and writing scores improve, so also did her oral language. Amira went from being able to only repeat 13 sentences to 28 sentences, showing that she had gained control of more English structures. Amira scores show that as her oral language increased so did her literacy skills or vice versa. From this data it is not possible to know whether or not her oral language influenced her reading skills or if her literacy skills influenced her oral language. It appears that oral language and literacy skills grow reciprocally and as one improves so does the other. Amira's progress in Reading Recovery showed and should suggest to others, that English Language Learners, who are struggling with early literacy skills, greatly benefit from the intervention of Reading Recovery.

SECTION FIVE

Discussion

Oral Language is a contributing factor to literacy success

The aim of this study was to determine if a relationship exists between a student's oral language and his/her success in Reading Recovery. The existing literature on the topic of the importance of oral language in the development of literacy skills, specifically in the intervention program of Reading Recovery, has been supported by the results of this study. Kirkland and Patterson's research (2005) shows that oral language development plays a critical role in a child's speaking ability and also in the development of listening, reading and writing. This claim was supported by this research because all students made progress on the Record of Oral Language and on the Text Level assessment from the beginning to the end of the intervention. Although the relationship was not statistically significant, students made gains in their oral language development and progressed in their ability to read more difficult text. Results of this study show that oral language, although not statistically significant, improves along with reading development. Previous research shows that all components of oral language contribute to the development of speaking ability and later academic achievement (Genishi, 1998; Foorman, Anthony, Seals & Mouzaki, 2002; Lundberg, 2006; Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002). Perhaps that is why no statistically significant relationship was found in this study, as the Record of Oral Language only assesses a student's ability to retain and repeat the syntax of the sentence. It does not assess the other areas of phonemic awareness, semantics, pragmatics or vocabulary.

Reading Recovery is a successful program that helps children learn to read

Findings from this study confirm previous research results that show that Reading Recovery is an effective intervention program for teaching struggling first grade readers how to read (RRCNA, 2014). The paired samples t-test conducted as a part of the study continued to prove Reading Recovery's effectiveness. Results of this t-test showed a statistically significant relationship between a child's ability to read text at entry and at the end of the program. Reading Recovery helps children to be able to read more complex text and helps them to learn how to effectively problem-solve when they come to difficulty. This program has been well researched and studies, including this one, continue to endorse the claim that Reading Recovery is a successful program that helps children learn to read.

Reading Recovery helps students to enhance their oral language

Findings from this study also indicated that there is a statistically significant relationship between a child's entry and exit Record of Oral Language scores. These results are in line with Janice Van Dyke's (2006) work. Her research suggests that Reading Recovery teachers can help foster and develop the oral language of their Reading Recovery students by engaging them in daily conversations about topics in which they are interested. By doing so, Reading Recovery teachers model and help to facilitate the increasing complexity of the children's spoken language. Evidence from this study confirms this claim. All students made gains on the Record of Oral Language assessment, although some more than others. For example, Amira, the subject of the case study, increased her score by 15 points. Not only did her score show that her oral

language was increasing in complexity, but so did her writing and her recorded interactions with her teacher.

English Language Learners were more successful than their English-speaking counterparts in Reading Recovery

Research done by Neal and Kelly (1999) showed that 72% of English-language learners (1796 of 2496) were able to successfully discontinue from the Reading Recovery program. This was only slightly less than the 75.2% (9352 of 12445) discontinuation rate of all Reading Recovery students. Ashdown and Simic (2000) found the same results and concluded that Reading Recovery is an effective program for English Language Learners. Their study showed that Limited English proficient students successfully discontinued from the Reading Recovery program at 62%, the same rate as their English-speaking peers. The current study reinforces that Reading Recovery is an effective intervention for English Language Learners and suggests that it might be even *more* effective for English Language Learners than for their native English-speaking peers. In this particular study, all seven identified English Language Learners were able to successfully complete their program. Their English-speaking peers discontinued at a rate of only 46%. Results of this study suggest that Reading Recovery is a far more effective program for English Language Learners than for native English speaking students. A reasonable explanation for this could be that these English language students did not yet have the oral language skills to be able to successfully complete tasks of the Observation Survey. As their English progressed they were able to show what they knew more effectively. Even though they may have scored low on the tasks of the Observation Survey at the beginning of their program, the issue may not have been a reading one but a language one. More research would need to be done to determine if this is true. In any

case the results from the study show that Reading Recovery does help English language learners grow in their ability to read more complex text and successfully discontinue from Reading Recovery.

Limitations

Although carefully constructed, this study inevitably has limitations. For example, the sample size was limited to 28 students of willing Reading Recovery teachers, of whom only 7 were English Language Learners. Also, some participating students were unable to be included in all aspects of the study due to moving or not yet finishing their Reading Recovery program at the time of analysis. Therefore, results from the study cannot be generalized to the whole Reading Recovery population, as participants are not representative of all students, only participating schools within the selected district. The study also does not take into account how many lessons each student received, the experience of the Reading Recovery teacher and his or her past successes, which may have influenced the quality of intervention that each child received. Furthermore, this study only focuses on a child's oral language and reading ability and does not take into account other needs of each student, such as; IEPs, behavior issues, speech concerns, past interventions, home environment, parental support and socioeconomic status. Although all students made progress in their oral language and reading ability, it cannot be determined that this is the result of only the Reading Recovery program. In addition to receiving this intervention, students are also receiving quality classroom instruction and therefore it is not possible to say that these gains are only because of the Reading Recovery intervention. This is in part because there was a lack of a control group in this study. A control group could have helped determine more specifically the role that

Reading Recovery had in the improvement of reading ability and oral language development.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The results of this study have several implications for practice and for future research. This study supports that Reading Recovery teachers should continue to build the oral language of their students. Although results did not yield a statistically significant relationship between oral language and reading ability, they still seem to impact each other in some way and appear grow reciprocally. This research also shows that Reading Recovery is an effective intervention for English Language Learners and these students should continue to be considered for participation in this program. This research also shows that oral language, while a contributing factor to reading success, is not the only factor. More research needs to be done to find additional impacting sources on reading ability. The subject of the case study, Amira, successfully completed her program and it will be important to follow up and monitor her progress in subsequent grade levels. This will give more information as to the impact of her early intervention and determine whether or not she has develop a self extending system that allows her to be successful throughout her academic journey.

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Class:

School:

Child's Name:

Date of Birth:

Date:

Age:

Recorder:

The Levels Sentences

Level 2 Part 1.

Type

A *That big dog over there is going to be my brother's.*

☐

A *That old truck in there used to be my father's.*

☐

B *The boy by the pond was sailing his boat.*

☐

B *The cat from next door was chasing a bird.*

☐

C *The bird flew to the top of the tree.*

☐

C *The dog ran through the hole in the fence.*

☐

D *For his birthday Mary gave him a truck.*

☐

D *For the holidays Grandpa bought us a ball.*

☐

E *Can you see what is climbing up the wall?*

☐

E *The boy saw what the man was doing to the car.*

☐

F *Here comes a big elephant with children sitting on his back.*

☐

F *There is my baby riding in his pushchair.*

☐

G *My brother turned the television up very loud.*

☐

G *The girl threw her book right across the room.*

☐

Total for Level 2 / 14

If the score is 12 or more, enter 14 on the next page for Level 1.

Level 1 Part 1.

Type

A *My brother's knees are dirty.*

B *Baby is drinking some milk.*

C *Sally is staying at home.*

D *John is buying me a boat.*

E *I know he's in there.*

F *There's another fire engine.*

G *She's driving her car quickly.*

Level 1 Part 2.

Type

A *The car's radio was stolen.*

B *Sally is riding her bike.*

C *Mary is going to town.*

D *Mary is giving me a book.*

E *I guess we're lost.*

F *Here are some more fish.*

G *He's playing that music very loud.*

Total for Level 1

/ 14

Level 3 Part 1.

Type

A *Be as quiet as you can when your father's asleep.*

B *My aunt and uncle want to start building a new house.*

C *The two cars drove along the road for a long time.*

D *The baker sold my father some hot pies.*

E *The girl saw who her mother was giving the cakes to.*

F *They are the books that you were reading at my place.*

G *My mother usually puts the cat out of the house at night.*

Level 3 Part 2.

Type

A *Be very careful swimming when there's a big wave.*

B *That dog and the one next door like to chase big cars.*

C *All the children talked loudly to each other at the table.*

D *The new teacher read our class a scary story.*

E *The teacher knows how much wood we will need for the house.*

F *There goes the fireman who put out the fire in the building.*

G *My brother often puts some bread outside for the birds.*

Total for Level 3

Level 1

Level 2

Grand Total

Data Collection Chart

Student Name	ELL? (Langauge)	Entry ROL score	Entry TL (%, s/c rate)	Exit ROL score	Exit TL (%, s/c rate)	Status (D, R, I, N)