

Research on Literacy Collaborative: Literature Review

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Summary

Three substantial and high quality studies have evaluated Literacy Collaborative effects on student learning. LC is also participating in three new studies. A more detailed description of the completed and in-progress studies follows this summary.

Indiana Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program

The effects of the Literacy Collaborative were examined by the Center for Education Evaluation and Policy (CEEP) at Indiana University as part of their evaluation of the state's Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program (ELIGP), 1998-2004, which funded a number of literacy programs, including Literacy Collaborative. They found that in ELIGP-funded schools there was more parent involvement, more diverse instructional approaches, more creative writing, more cooperative learning, more individualized instruction, and more independent reading.

Examining the effects of particular programs on state test scores, CEEP found that Literacy Collaborative schools had slightly higher passing rates on the Indiana 3rd grade assessment, and substantially greater year-to-year *improvement* in passing rates, including in *urban* schools.

CEEP also found that Literacy Collaborative schools had lower special education referral rates and slightly lower 2nd grade retention rates than schools without special literacy programs. In their summary report, CEEP wrote that "of the individual ELIGP-funded interventions included in prior CEEP evaluations, Literacy Collaborative has most consistently demonstrated success on student outcomes."

Literacy Collaborative Research Reports

In a series of reports, Literacy Collaborative researchers at The Ohio State University examined improvements in test scores in Literacy Collaborative schools from the fall of 1996 to the fall of 2001. They found, over the five years, increases in 2nd grade Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores, larger percentages of first graders reading on grade level, and cohorts of children in which few were reading on grade level in kindergarten but the majority were on grade level in 2nd grade. These researchers concluded that the longer a school implemented the Literacy Collaborative, the more it improved students' reading development.

Boston Public Schools

A third study was conducted by Terry Tivnan at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Lowry Hemphill at Wheelock College. They evaluated the effects on 1st graders of four interventions being used in the Boston Public Schools, including Literacy Collaborative and Success for All (SFA). Success for All differed from the other three programs in that it was more scripted, with more of an emphasis on workbooks and explicit phonics instruction.

Overall, Tivnan and Hemphill did not find major differences in outcomes among students in the four programs. (Because there were no schools without one of the four literacy programs, they were unable to compare LC schools to schools with no interventions.) None of the programs stood out as having benefited students substantially more than the other programs. This was surprising given the major differences in approach used in the SFA classrooms. There were, however, minor differences in student skills at the end of the year. One difference was that Literacy Collaborative children scored higher in writing than students in the other three programs.

One of the major findings of the Tivnan and Hemphill study was that although students entered first grade with many age-appropriate early literacy skills, at the end of first grade all the students were substantially behind grade level in comprehension skills and vocabulary knowledge. [Since that study was published, Literacy Collaborative has increased its emphasis on these two important literacy skills.]

In-Progress Literacy Collaborative Studies

Literacy Collaborative is participating in three new studies that will compare LC schools with non-LC schools. One study is being conducted by the Center for Research and Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis. CREP is following 1,000 kindergarteners in two economically and linguistically diverse districts—one with LC in all of its schools and one with no LC schools. They will compare the literacy development of students in the two districts. A second study of LC is being conducted by faculty and researchers at Stanford University (Tony Bryk) and the University of Chicago (David Kerbow). This study will include a “value-added” component that will test whether students in LC schools show more growth in literacy skills than they would have without the program. LC is also beginning a study that examines whether the LC program has an impact on student scores on state-mandated tests. LC schools will be matched by demographic characteristics to similar schools in the same state, and their test scores over the last five to six years will be compared to see if there are differences in the scores themselves and in the rate of change over several years.

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Three major high-quality research studies have examined the effects of the Literacy Collaborative program on student learning:

- A comprehensive, three-year evaluation of the Indiana Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program, a program that funded several early literacy interventions, including the Literacy Collaborative.
- Research conducted by Literacy Collaborative researchers at The Ohio State University.
- A study conducted by Terry Tivnan of the Harvard School of Education and Lowry Hemphill of Wheelock College that compares effects of four literacy programs implemented in Boston, including the Literacy Collaborative.

Indiana Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program

One of the most comprehensive studies of Literacy Collaborative effects was conducted for the Indiana Department of Education by the Center for Education Evaluation Policy (CEEP) at Indiana University, which evaluated a number of programs funded by the states Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program (ELIGP). CEEP's findings were as follows:

- As a group, the literacy programs had subtle, positive effects on schools: there was more literacy-related professional development, more parent involvement, more diverse approaches to instruction, more frequent use of creative writing, more cooperative learning, and more individualized instruction—including ability grouping and independent reading.
- Analyzing *rates of passing the state's standardized 3rd grade test*, CEEP found that Literacy Collaborative schools had slightly higher passing rates than similar schools with no interventions ($p < .10$). Another program, Accelerated Schools, also had slightly higher passing rates ($p < .10$), and Success for All schools had substantially lower passing rates ($p < .01$).
- CEEP found that both in general and *in high-poverty schools in particular*, Literacy Collaborative and Success for All schools showed substantially larger *increases* in passing rates—greater improvement—than schools with no interventions, schools with only Reading Recovery, and schools with the Four Blocks program.

- Analyzing *special education referral rates*, CEEP found that Literacy Collaborative, Success For All, and First Steps schools all had lower special education referral rates than schools with no programs, with Literacy Collaborative having the lowest rates ($p < .05$).
- Investigating program effects on *2nd grade retention*, they found that Literacy Collaborative and Reading Recovery schools had modestly lower retention rates ($p < .10$), while the other programs were not associated at all with lower retention rates. They also found that Literacy Collaborative schools had slightly lower retention rates specifically in urban schools ($p < .10$).
- In their summary report, CEEP wrote that “of the individual ELIGP-funded interventions included in prior CEEP evaluations, Literacy Collaborative has most consistently demonstrated success on student outcomes” (Plucker, Simmons, and Ravert, 2005, p. 35).

Literacy Collaborative Research Reports

A second set of studies on the effects of the Literacy Collaborative on student achievement are those conducted by researchers at the Literacy Collaborative at The Ohio State University. In a series of reports, Literacy Collaborative researchers examined improvements in test scores in Literacy Collaborative schools from the fall of 1996 to the fall of 2001 (Pinnell, 2000; Pinnell & Sharer, 2001; Scharer, Desai, Williams, & Pinnell, 2003). Their method was to follow cohorts over time to see if the percentage of children on grade level increased between kindergarten and 2nd grade, and to see if 2nd grade scores improved with each cohort. Their findings included the following:

- In an analysis of 2nd grade Gates-MacGinitie reading scores, they found that average scores in Literacy Collaborative schools rose from 36 points in 1996 to 49 points in 2000 (on a scale of 0-100).
- Analyzing the percentage of 1st graders who were reading on grade level, they found that these percentages increased from 23.6% to 25.1% to 29.9% over three years.
- Examining two cohorts longitudinally, they found that 10% of the children entered kindergarten with grade-level abilities, which increased to 25% when the same cohort was in 1st grade, and then jumped to more than 60% when the same cohort reached 2nd grade.
- These analyses did not include control groups, so it is possible that other schools were experiencing the same increase in scores at that time. The Literacy Collaborative researchers did show, however, that *kindergarten entry scores* did not increase over the years—children were not entering these schools better prepared each year, which led these researchers to conclude that the cohorts of

students in the Literacy Collaborative schools learned more the longer their schools implemented the program.

Boston Public Schools

A third study that included the Literacy Collaborative was done in the Boston Public Schools in the early 2000s by Terry Tivnan at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Lowry Hemphill at Wheelock College (Tivnan & Hemphill, 2005). They evaluated the effects of four interventions being used in the Boston Public Schools—Literacy Collaborative (LC), Building Essential Literacy (BEL), Developing Literacy First (DLF), and Success for All (SFA). Because *all* the Boston schools adopted a literacy intervention, the study was a comparison of the students in schools with the four interventions, not a study that compared intervention schools to schools with no interventions. Tivnan and Hemphill's findings were as follows:

- Of the four literacy programs, SFA was the most different from the other three in that it emphasized scripted teacher-student interactions; a heavier emphasis on explicit, sequential phonics instruction; more use of workbooks and drill; and use of SFA's own 1st grade reading text. The other three models all emphasized guided reading with leveled books, and teaching phonics within the context of reading (i.e. "embedded phonics"). Building Essential Literacy and Literacy Collaborative were the only two of the four to allocate time for writing.
- Tivnan and Hemphill analyzed student skills in a number of literacy areas. They found that across programs the students entered 1st grade with appropriate skills in some early literacy skills—letter identification, simple word identification, and simple decoding, but with weak skills in phonemic awareness and extremely low vocabulary skills. By the end of the 1st grade they had made gains in some areas, but vocabulary skills were still approximately one year behind and comprehension skills were weak.
- Overall, they did not find any major differences in student outcomes between students in the four programs: no particular program stood out as having benefited students substantially more than the other programs. This is surprising given the major differences in approach used in the SFA classrooms. There were, however, some minor differences in student skills at the end of the year. For example, SFA students showed slightly higher word attack skills than BEL students ($p < .05$), and DLF students showed slightly higher comprehension skills than SFA or Literacy Collaborative students ($p < .10$).
- Literacy Collaborative students scored the highest in writing, and their scores were significantly higher than those of the students in the lowest scoring program, Building Essential Literacy ($p < .05$). The authors attribute this to the greater emphasis on writing in LC classrooms.
- There were no statistically significant differences between programs in letter-word identification, phonemic awareness, or vocabulary.

- The Tivnan and Hemphill study did *not* find that the four programs had little effect on students' literacy development: they found that none of the programs had a substantially *larger* effect than the other programs. They could not estimate the effects of these programs relative to schools without any literacy reform programs because all the Boston schools had adopted one of the four programs.
- Tivnan and Hemphill concluded by saying that “the main finding of this study is that average achievement appears similar for children in one district’s urban, high-poverty classrooms implementing four nationally disseminated reform models,” however “the outcomes of the early literacy reforms appeared not to be as positive for reading comprehension...and appeared to have especially limited effects on vocabulary knowledge” (p. 435).¹

The three studies described above suggest that the Literacy Collaborative program has a positive effect on *academic achievement, special needs referral rates, and grade-level retention rates*. Particularly encouraging is the Indiana study that showed that high-poverty LC schools *increased their 3rd grade passing rates* more than high-poverty schools with no special literacy programs. The Tivnan and Hemphill study was positive in that it found *no substantial differences in the skills of student in the Literacy Collaborative schools as compared with those of the students in the far more structured Success for All program*.

The research on the effects of the Literacy Collaborative program on student achievement has also been reviewed by the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center (CSRQ) in Washington, D.C. This review is available in CSRQ’s on-line catalog, www.csrq.org, under “Our Reports.”²

In-Progress Literacy Collaborative Studies

The research goal of the Literacy Collaborative is to have more studies comparing LC schools to non-LC schools, i.e. control-group studies that can more conclusively determine whether LC has an effect on student academic achievement. Three studies with control groups are currently underway.

- LC is participating in one study that started this fall being conducted by the Center for Research and Educational Policy (CREP) at the University of Memphis. CREP will follow 1,000 kindergarteners in two similar school districts—one that has adopted LC in all of its six schools and one that has not adopted LC. The student populations in both districts are very diverse, with large numbers of low-income students and students from non-English-speaking homes. This fall, teachers administered one-to-one screening tests to all 1,000 children in the two districts, which will be used as baseline data to analyze how much students’ skills increase over time. They will also do classroom observations in all eleven schools in the study, and will survey teachers about school climate and their satisfaction with their literacy and reading curriculum. We will receive preliminary results from researchers at CREP this summer.

- A second study is being conducted by faculty and researchers at Stanford University (Tony Bryk) and the University of Chicago (David Kerbow). This study looks at the use of a web-based professional development tool that allows literacy coordinators to watch classroom videos, hear expert commentary, and communicate with other literacy coordinators. The achievement of children in LC schools that have access to this tool will be compared with the achievement of children in LC schools without that access. Most importantly, the study will include a “value-added” component that will test whether students in LC schools show more growth in literacy skills than they would have without the program.
- LC is also beginning a study that examines whether the LC program has an impact on student scores on state-mandated tests. LC schools that have had a literacy coordinator for three years or more will be matched by demographic characteristics to similar schools in the same state, and their test scores over the last five to six years will be compared to see if there are differences in the scores themselves and in the rate of change over several years.

Results from these studies will be disseminated as soon as they are available.

Questions about Literacy Collaborative research can be addressed to Emily Dexter, Director of Research, Center for Reading Recovery and Literacy Collaborative, School of Education, Lesley University, Cambridge, MA 02140 (617) 349-8857 or edexter@lesley.edu.

¹ Since the Tivnan and Hemphill study, the Literacy Collaborative has reorganized its professional development in the areas of comprehension and vocabulary, and the program now uses a new professional development text, *Reading for Comprehension and Fluency* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Recognizing that students do not acquire adequate comprehension strategies and vocabulary by reading on their own, this text emphasizes ways to teach deep comprehension and word-solving strategies explicitly and directly during guided reading, writer’s workshop, and word study. In response to studies showing the importance of oral and written vocabulary, the text offers many suggestions for how teachers can help children increase their vocabularies both within the literacy block and across the whole curriculum. In addition, the LC program now places more emphasis on non-fiction texts, has increased its expectations of the level of texts that children can read, and is teaching literacy coordinators how to analyze text structure so they can best introduce new texts to children.

² CSRQ reviewed approximately 100 programs and chose 22 well-established and comprehensive school reform programs, including Literacy Collaborative, for formal review and inclusion in their catalog. They rated the quantity and quality of research on each program and judged Literacy Collaborative’s research as “Moderate.” This does not mean that the effect of the program on student outcomes is necessarily moderate, but rather that the amount of research is moderate. Research from two very large programs, Success for All (SFA) and Direct Instruction (DI), was rated as “Moderately Strong,” research from seven programs, including the Literacy Collaborative, was rated as “Moderate,” and research from the other thirteen programs was rated as “Limited” or “No Research.” No programs received the highest rating of “Very Strong.”

One of the studies included in CSRQ’s report is a 2005 dissertation conducted by Ashley Clayburn. We have not included it in this review because she did not use a measure of reading achievement appropriate for research and her statistical method did not match the design of her study; therefore it is difficult to evaluate her findings.

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Some of these studies are available on the Literacy Collaborative website:
www.literacycollaborative.com.

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