Investigating Techniques to Help Early English Language Learners Prepare for Kindergarten

Gjenifer Stark

St. Catherine University

Follow this and additional works at: https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers

Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

This Clinical research paper is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Work at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact amshaw@stkate.edu.
Investigating Techniques to Help Early English Language Learners Prepare for Kindergarten

Submitted by Gjenifer Stark B.S.W.

May, 2013

Masters in Social Work Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University & University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota

Masters of Social Work

Committee Members
Felicia Sy, Ph.D. (Chair)
Zach Pruitt, MSW
Angèle Sancho Passe, MA

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota, and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the University Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present their findings. This project is neither a Master’s thesis nor a dissertation.
Abstract

This qualitative study examines the perspectives and efforts of Minnesota Reading Corps members and Master Coaches to help Early Language Learners become kindergarten ready. Minnesota Reading Corps is a statewide initiative to help every Minnesota child become a successful reader by the end of third grade. The program places Reading Corps members as literacy tutors in sites across Minnesota to implement a research-based early-literacy effort to help struggling readers. The Reading Corps strategies are designed for both preschool-aged children and students from kindergarten to third grade students. This phenomenological study looks at the stories and captures the essence of the interviewees’ experiences with the program and their efforts to help English Language Learners overcome the barriers that they face in order to become kindergarten ready. The findings included participants feeling well supported and trained in order to understand and overcome major challenges that English Language Learners encounter. By using their training, participants were able to better support their classroom teachers, and provide individual attention to the students who need it.
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 3

Literature Review ................................................................................................. 10

Methodology .......................................................................................................... 23

Findings ................................................................................................................ 30

Discussion ............................................................................................................. 47

References ............................................................................................................. 54

Appendix A: Explanation of SEEDS ................................................................. 58

Appendix B: Agency Letter .................................................................................. 60

Appendix C: Interview Questions ........................................................................ 62

Appendix D: Consent Form .................................................................................. 63

Appendix E: Participant Request Email ............................................................ 66

Appendix F: Prek Data ........................................................................................ 67

Figure 1: Member Support Model ....................................................................... 30
My Deepest Gratitude . . .

First, I would like to give credit to my wonderful son, who always gives me inspiration. This process has taken valuable time away from him, and he has been very patient and supportive. He continues to grow into a caring, supportive, creative, amazing person. I’m truly lucky to have him in my life.

To my chair and committee members who have taken their own time to help me with this process. They have taught me a lot. Without their feedback I would be lost.

To my wonderful roommate, who is also my best friend, Ranee Skinner. She has been my rock throughout this process. Thanks for loving me and my small human!

To my wonderful Uncle, Tom Dietz, who has always supported me. I will always be grateful for his support.

To Moe Behlim for your ongoing support and shoulder to cry on. Thanks for all the cake!

To Kate and Heidi for your group text messages, ongoing support and love, and Wednesday dinners to remember. I love you guys!

To my co-workers and understanding boss, Lindsey Torkilsen, who have been supportive throughout this process. I’m lucky to work for an agency that truly cares about what they do. It is that passion that shows in their work.

To Kate Horst, my mentor. I learn from you every day.

To Brian Wambach, who took the time to edit my paper and continues to be a great father to our son.

To Jan and Gerry Wambach who have been a great support and are always willing to help out. I’m lucky to have their support and guidance. I cannot thank you enough.

To my amazing classmates and friends of the weekend cohort, I can tribute my success to you guys. With out your kind words and encouragement, I wouldn’t have made it through this process.

Finally, to all my friends, family and support network. I would not have been able to do this without them.
There are several benefits for the children who attend high quality preschools. Early childhood education focuses on ways to enhance learning at an early age and equips families with skills and strategies that serve to help students overcome systemic barriers. The focus of this project is on the educational needs of Early English Language Learners. This paper will explore the Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) Pre-K program and examine outcome data of those classified as English Language Learners (ELL). In this study, the question being asked is how does the Minnesota Reading Corps help ELL students become kindergarten ready. This paper aims to answer this question and to make suggestions that other programs can benefit from across the United States. The paper beings with an overview of the status of literacy in the United States, the role of literacy and crime, the role of educator, and the role of parents and preschool programs in addressing the problem. This overview is then followed by the conceptual framework and methodology that guided the study. The findings and discussion are then presented. The paper concludes with a description of the limitations and implications for the future.

In the United States, young children struggle with literacy and learning. Children without a solid literacy foundation established early in life tend to fall behind in their education (Gutierrez, 2008). In 2005, only 23 percent of students in the United States were proficient readers by their graduation from high school. Reading scores have not increased, even with government spending increases of up to three times per student (Phillips, 2009). Moreover, a report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that only one out of three students scored at the “above basic” level on the 2009 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading test. Specifically, not only do U.S. students perform poorly in reading, they also earn low scores in math and science. Of note, the United States placed 25th out of 30 in math performance, as
compared to other developed countries in the world (Ripley, 2010). According to Ripley (2010), in 2009, 69 percent of eighth graders scored at the “below proficient” level in reading and 68 percent of them scored at the “below proficient” level in math. Ripley (2010) explained that gains continue to be slow in spite of the shocking statistics. Furthermore, reading and math can be more challenging for children entering the American education system with limited or no English language skills. These children are considered English Language Learners (ELL), which is defined by federal law as students who experience difficulty with “learning successfully” in core education classes conducted in English. Notably, these students are becoming the largest increase in the K-12 student population (Han & Bridglall, 2009). This includes children who are born in the United States but whose parents are immigrants. In 2003 alone, almost 33 million people, or 12% of the population, were foreign-born. This is an increase from 4.7 percent of the 1970 population. According to Han & Bridglall (2009), the ELL population grew by 65% in 2004. By 2050, this is expected to increase by another 14% (Borjas, 2006). This means that there will be an estimated 15 million students preschool through twelfth grade classified as English language learners (Harden et. al, 2007).

The growth of the ELL population is creating some difficulty for teachers, as many are not provided adequate resources to bring their current ELL students up to grade level or to tend to their literacy needs. Consequently, national test scores demonstrate that ELL students are not showing successes in math, science, or reading at grade level. Perez and Holmes (2010) report that, according to the National Education Association, only 29 percent of ELL students are at “above the basic” level in reading, compared to 73 percent of their non-ELL peers.

Further, the improvements that ELL students need to make in order to reach grade-level reading involves more than simply learning how to read. These students also have to learn to
utilize the English language and to navigate the American dominant culture. Potter (2007) indicates that the barriers faced by ELL students include the challenges inherent in having to adapt to a school culture which differs vastly from their home culture. For instance, the norms and common practices that are valued within their community and culture might not readily transfer or be accepted in the classroom. Traditional educational settings may not allow for a student who practices Islam to take time from class and practice prayer. There may also be a conflict between students who wish to bring a traditional dish prepared at home to school for lunch and then discover that they are teased because of their otherness. Students may be the only English speakers in their home, which results in their not receiving assistance to complete homework or to relay information from the school to the home regarding academic progress. Students may also face challenges when they are required to participate in tasks individually, because at home they are traditionally raised in a system of sibling caretaking. These students then begin to adopt patterns of learning from other children (Au, 1993).

School systems that are not adequately equipped hinder academic achievement for ELL students. Literacy assessments dismiss some children’s home languages as well as their culture (Potter, 2007). Han & Bridglall (2009) report that more “low income” and “minority” students are academically behind at the start of kindergarten as compared to their dominant-culture peers. Inequalities with regard to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status seem to adversely impact students from the non-dominant culture. Au, 1993 reflects that the factors listed above generate cognitive inequalities that are severe and provide a disadvantage to non-dominant-culture students before they even enter a classroom. These academic disparities reportedly continue much after their academic experiences. Before age 5, some children exhibit significant gaps in development and ability. Doggett and Watt (2010) report that high quality Pre-K programs
prevent students from being held back to repeat a grade, from dropping out of school, and from being placed in special education. In order to prevent these negative occurrences, economists have suggested that the U.S. government invest in preschool programs as a means to bring about more positive results to the American education system as a whole. By building literacy skills at an early age, these students will be less likely to fall behind. Renolds et. al. (2007) reported in their longitudinal study of over 1,400 low-income participants that the return on investment of a preschool program was $10.80 for each dollar spent. The benefits included increased earnings and tax revenues and averted criminal-justice costs because of a higher success rate in achieving literacy skills needed to attain jobs and higher education degrees.

In another study, Clark and Dugdale (2008) link high crime rates to lack of literacy. As such, social workers may benefit from incorporating into their practice referral sources focusing on early childhood literacy, in addition to the other programs successful in helping students from varying backgrounds. It is important for early childhood programs to be accessible to all, and social workers are in the optimal position to assist by supporting programs providing all students an affordable opportunity for success in life. For example, Head Start is an early learning program for families that have very limited economic resources. Students enrolled in Head Start live in poverty, and the families on the waiting lists sometimes wait several months before there is space for them in the program. In addition to these concerns, families qualifying as middle class do not get an opportunity to benefit from Head Start and other programs that have income caps as part of the admission requirements. The Minnesota Program Evaluation Report (2001), says that the amount of education acquired by parents has limited impact on student literacy, that all students benefit from early childhood programs, despite their parent’s education level. Social workers need to remain cognizant of this fact when in a position to make referrals to programs.
Little research exists that focuses on ELL student outcomes through the Minnesota Reading Corps (Reading Corps) Early Literacy Program. Minnesota Reading Corps is a statewide initiative to help every Minnesota child become a successful reader by the end of third grade. The program places Reading Corps members as literacy tutors in sites across Minnesota to implement a research-based early-literacy effort to help struggling readers. The Minnesota Reading Corps strategies are designed for both preschool-aged children and K–3rd grade students (www.minnesotareadingcorps.org). Moreover, the ability to identify what works for ELL students is imperative to the success and amelioration of early childhood programs. The author of this study analyzed data from a series of qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were administered to randomly selected members and Master Coaches of the Minnesota Reading Corps Program's Early Literacy Division. Findings have the potential to provide valuable information regarding what is effective and what is less effective for ELL students enrolled in early literacy programs across the United States. New effective strategies are needed to help these students succeed because the immigrant populations are projected to increase. The children of many of these immigrants will require ELL services (Han & Bridglall, 2009). Access to federal funding will be vital to school systems in order to support ELL services. In this vein, early education programs should be the focus, as they have been shown to be a more effective solution and not programs that show no or limited student growth (Mead & Guensey, 2010). Families of students who attend quality Pre-K programs benefit from their children's social, interactive, and academic gains. These programs teach parents and students what is expected of them in a school setting. This aspect is beneficial to students stemming from various backgrounds, not just those enrolled in ELL services (Mclelland & Morrison 2003).
This paper will begin by setting the context for early ELL education in the United States. Currently, in the United States, there are a startling number of people who are illiterate. Preventing illiteracy can begin by strengthening our education system with investments in programs that are proven to work. These programs should be targeted to at-risk populations. Early childhood programs, for example, have been identified to be the best long-term, early interventions. These programs are worth investing in because they are identified as being the most cost-effective and because of the major gains in outcome versus the money invested, including gains in graduation rates and, in some cases, drops in crime (Renolds et. al., 2007).

Vincent (2008) shows in his study that the education system in the United States falls behind standard expectations of education. He surveyed high school graduates between the ages of 16 and 25 and found that 60 percent of those students performed below the literacy levels that society demands. In other countries like Finland, that percentage drops to ten percent of their students. American children are less equipped with the skills they need to succeed. More cost-effective, research-based early childhood programs are a strategy in helping those to begin their education with a strong foundation.

Raising children and setting them up with success begins before school starts. Currently, children are not getting what they need before they even step into a school. For example, in Minnesota, a School Readiness study shows that 56% of children do not have pre-literacy skills needed for Kindergarten Readiness (Reading Corps evaluation report, 2011). These students are starting school without the tools they need to be successful. They will then continue to fall behind unless measures are taken.
An Evaluation Report of the Minnesota Reading Corps says that right now, nearly one in five Minnesota third graders are failing to reach basic levels of literacy. This constitutes 15,000 children each year. Before third grade, students are learning to read. After third grade, they are reading to learn. Almost three-quarters (74%) of children who read poorly in third grade continue to read poorly in high school - making third-grade reading proficiency a key predictor of high-school dropout rates (www.minnesotareadingcorps.org). It is when they start off with a solid foundation that they can continue to achieve the literacy skills they need to be successful, productive adults.

Literacy is a bigger struggle for those with different ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic status. Inequalities of educational gaps between those who are of lower socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity of students who are entering kindergarten, compared with other populations is outstanding. These inequalities continue throughout their education (Han & Bridglall, 2009). There is a huge disparity between minority students and whites when it comes to academics. This begins before they enter kindergarten and continues throughout their academic career. Many times this leads to a higher drop-out rate. This is worse in schools that have a higher minority population (Evens, 2005).

A school’s environment and resources also seem to be important for ELL student’s success (Han & Bridghall, 2009). If a classroom is set up to be conductive to a child’s learning, allowing for themes to be integrated in every play and learning area, and if the classroom is organized, students are more likely to take an active part in learning and to feel comfortable. The structure helps them learn so they know what they should be doing and when. It is difficult for those students who are from an ELL background and who come from low SES to understand what they should be doing and when. On top of these major challenges, ELL students are more
likely to attend a school that has limited resources, as well as higher classroom sizes, unqualified and poorly trained teachers, and overcrowded schools. The schools they attend are in buildings that have a greater need for repair, that are using old or outdated textbooks, and that have fewer computers. After-school and extracurricular activities are limited due to lack of funding (Evens, 2005). These factors, as well as SES at home, debilitate a child’s progress in school.

These children do not fail to learn. We fail to give them opportunities to learn, resources, and proper teaching. Their learning starts when they learn the fundamentals that they need in Pre-K. The connections they make during this time have a strong bearing on their future education. Pre-K provides children with the social development they need to be ready for school and has shown to improve I.Q. growth. This is especially valuable for those who are economically and socially disadvantaged (Barnett, 1995). Children need adequate guidance from adults to understand the core concepts necessary to be successful. They should be provided support from adults who are experts in their field.

One consequence of poor education is a link to higher crime rates. The literature on this topic links crime to lack of literacy skills. Specifically, a study by Christe (2012) indicates that the American prison systems are made up of large numbers of inmates who are illiterate. According to the study, 60% demonstrate mild to moderate problems with literacy, and 40% are reported to experience severe problems with literacy. Additionally, 80% write at the level of an average eleven-year-old child. The conclusion derived from this study is that the lack of career opportunities afforded, secondary to deficiencies in literacy, has resulted in breeding individuals who are more inclined to commit crimes.
Leach (1995) proposes that children must learn basic concepts long before entering into the school system. This highlights the importance of the first few years of a child's life. There are certain windows of opportunity for neurological connections to occur in early childhood. These affect cognitive brain development, and without stimulation, the opportunity to make these neurological connections can be lost permanently (Penn, 2001).

In order to achieve literacy skills, the role has fallen on the shoulders of educators. It is also important for an educator to be able to help all students learn. It’s important for each student to understand what is being taught, and when a child doesn’t, education should be tailored to focus on each individual student at a level that they would be able to understand it. If they are not getting what they need in the core instruction, extra time must be taken to provide them with what they need. Teachers play an integral part in this process. It is found that many teachers who have been teaching for several years have become resistant to change. Weinsiek (2012) says that it is likely that more experienced teachers have discovered instructional strategies that work for them, have built up a repertoire of strategies that they use regularly, and, consequently, are more resistant to change.

A study by Hardin et. al., (2007) says that both special-education and regular-education teachers have been affected by the fifteen million incoming ELL students who make up ten percent of the total student body. These professionals not only have to teach a classroom of English-speaking students but have to be mindful of ELL students’ limited understanding of concepts as well as American culture. These teachers are also responsible for assessing students and providing education services. The rapid growth of the ELL population and lack of anticipation by educators indicates that this has become challenging.
The way teachers talk, the literacy experiences that they choose to offer children, the way that the classroom is organized, and the many other taken-for-granted routines that proliferate in the curriculum prevents success for some children (Weinsiek, 2012). Teachers often get in a routine that they feel comfortable with (Knight, 2000). This prevents them from finding other opportunities to learn the cultural differences that happen in the classroom with different student populations. Lack of funding and the ability to take time off for outside training may also prevent educators from seeking out opportunities to learn new strategies. It’s hard for teachers to teach individual students when they have a classroom of many students with diverse needs. Teachers are required to get all their students to the same level regardless of where they start academically. Teachers may not be aware of the emotional issues a child may face when it comes to challenges inside a classroom.

Learning new ways to teach students who are not the traditional students is a struggle for some. ELL students are “not on the same page” when it comes to learning (Lake & Pappamihiel, 2003). Because they are not the same, they need to be treated differently, but not unfairly (Lake & Pappamihiel, 2003). They need to have instruction that reflects the child’s differences culturally and linguistically. Teachers must be aware that ELL students may know how to speak English socially but are not proficient in academic English. Not being confident in their English skills can hinder a child from future attempts to try and speak English or give an answer. (Lake & Papamiheil, 2003). ELL children sometimes lack the understanding of school rules because of their differences in cultures (Potter, 2007). They may get in trouble for things that are appropriate in their home. Teachers must be sensitive to this and understand when children shut down because of the lack of confidence they may have. Many times it’s easy to assume that these
students are not following rules, when really they do not understand them. Some classrooms discourage the use of their home language and require that they only speak English.

When these children begin to enter kindergarten, teachers may place ELL students in special-education programs after not passing an initial developmental screening. This practice could be avoided if teachers understood the meaning of cultural and linguistic differences (Hardin et. al., 2007). With the tests being administered in English, the children might know the concepts and understand the material but because of the language barriers are unable to give the answer the administrator is looking for. The placement of these students causes an overrepresentation of children in special-education programs (Hardin et. al., 2007).

Educators often focus on where the children are at on the assessments rather than on the strengths the children have. Teachers lack the time to work individually with each student and proper assessments for ELL students. This hinders a teacher’s ability to produce favorable outcomes for ELL students (Perez & Holmes, 2010). Although the education system is critical to improving early childhood literacy for ELL students, parents also have a role to play in addressing the issues. This next section explores the role of parents.

One roadblock in the parental home that often plays a role in ELL illiteracy is parental illiteracy, which produces an inability to assist in the educational process. Vianne (2008) says that illiterate parents cannot fill the gap that the school misses. Helping with homework becomes a challenge. A lack of resources available for students prevents them from acquiring the knowledge they need to begin school. If there are no books at home, the child will not be exposed to certain concepts and vocabularies that print provides. If parents are illiterate, they can’t help a child with homework and provide supplemental learning. So many barriers and
roadblocks are put in place. Children whose parents read to them at an early age learn to read themselves at an early age. They are set up for success in school (Gazier, 1998).

When a student’s parents do not speak English, it makes it extremely difficult for them to be involved in the lives of their children. When they need a translator and none is available, it becomes difficult for them to help their child with their education. Md-Yunus (2008) says that most parents are very willing and want to support their child in school, but they begin to feel helpless when they realize the cultural differences that prevent them from doing so. The language barrier and fear or embarrassment prevents them from participating in parent conferences even if they know what’s going on. When a student is referred to different services, it may be challenging because of the linguistic and cultural differences between a teacher and a parent. It can be difficult to explain to them in a culturally sensitive way so a parent can fully understand and support their child (Hardin et al., 2007).

Moreover, homework is usually sent home in English. This prevents parents from being able to assist their child. There are schools that provide homework in different languages. This is helpful to parents who speak that language. It’s impossible to reach every language a parent may speak. With the amount of information being sent home, it’s impossible to adequately provide that for each parent.

Parents who speak limited to no English and have few resources to help pay for childcare may not be able to find a high-quality childcare center to place their children. With limited resources, parents are forced to place their child where they can afford. This may or may not be a high-quality, literacy-rich environment. Head Start programs provide a variety of education, health, and social services. But, Head Start participants must come from a family with incomes
below the poverty line (Report for the Office of The State Legislator, 2012). This restricts children who could benefit from a Head Start program but whose parents can’t afford it and limits the amount of students allowed to benefit from these programs. A further description of the role of preschool programs can be found below.

Early childhood education focuses on ways to enhance learning at an early age in order to overcome barriers in early education. It is important to recognize the importance of high quality preschool programs. Mead and Guernsey (2010) recognized new neuroscience and psychology studies that show insight on the importance of learning from birth to age eight because this is a crucial time where neurological wiring in the brain happens. Young children need to experience rich language interactions with other adults and teachers. Young children need to experience rich language interactions with adults and teachers because their brain is most adept at learning language at this time. They benefit from being read to and encouraged to explore.

High-quality Pre-K programs can provide an immediate boost to a child’s performance (ECFE report, 2001). Thirty percent of children who come from low-income homes have been found to have no familiarity with print. This means that they are unfamiliar with how a book begins, with the information typically contained on the front and back cover, and with how to correctly read a book from left to right. Sixty percent of these children do not know the alphabet. These children have significant gaps in their development and abilities before they turn five years of age (Doggert & Wat, 2010).

ELL children who have no background in English, and whose parents only speak their native language in the home, have a greater disadvantage. Han (2009) stated that ELL children started kindergarten with significantly lower reading and math scores as compared to their
English-speaking peers. While their math scores improved and lowered the gap, their reading skills continued to fall behind well into their fifth-grade year.

Research shows that it takes between five and eight years for a student who does not have an English background to acquire the cognitive ability to be proficient academically in English (Hardin et. al., 2007). These students may or may not be exposed to literacy in their early ages. Those who attend a Pre-K program are exposed to social interactions and interactions in English that will help them develop those skills at a crucial time in their development (Washington, 2002).

Pre-K programs can provide students with huge gains in their academics when they are high quality. Students who are provided with enriching environments improve their pre-reading skills, gain richer vocabularies, and develop stronger basic math skills (Barnett, 1995). Having access to high-quality Pre-K programs prepares preschool children and gives them a strong foundation before they enter kindergarten. These programs prevent students from repeating grades, dropping out, and being placed in special education (Kappan, 2010).

With low test scores and a large achievement gap (Barnett, 2011), even though it is significantly smaller, the United States cannot compete with Finland’s education system and success. Contributions to Finland’s success can be seen in their early childhood education. They implement a high-quality, universal early-childhood education program. They also require their educators to hold a Master’s degree. Shanghai also provides a universal pre-k program (Barnett & Fred 2011). They are among the leaders in education and see the value in investing in early childhood programs to ensure success in all students. We can learn techniques from countries leading in education.
In states like Virginia, Pre-K programs are available to “at-risk” children. This encompasses children who are vulnerable to academic failure because of their social economic status (SES), living in severe poverty, being homeless, or having parents who are unable to adequately prepare them for school. With more and more parents going back to work, this begins to include those who have both parents working. This population is growing, categorizing them as children as “at risk” (Constanzo & Lichter, 1987).

Kindergarten teachers in Michigan tested their students who attended Pre-K programs against those who did not. They found that those who had attended a program tested higher in language, literacy, math, music, and social relations. These students were also more likely to pass Michigan’s reading and math tests in eighth grade. Another study found that Hispanic and black children, but not white children, saw significant benefits in cognitive and language skills from attending Pre-K programs (Gormely et al., 2008).

It’s not just the academic piece that children are exposed to when attending high quality preschools but also the social interactions and language development that happens. Students learn how to play. They learn the rules and expectations of the class. They also learn how to follow a schedule and work together as a team. They develop work habits and how to clearly communicate their needs, desires, and feelings. Preschool is where they can play pretend with friends their own age and start socializing (Lee, 2009). They also get the opportunity to communicate with other adults. Preschools have been documented as having long-lasting effects, such as fewer grade repetitions, lower delinquency rates, and less welfare for those students who attend (as previously cited by Barnett et. al, 1992).

The high quality Pre-K programs that show significant impact on learning for our young children are the programs which have high quality teachers. These teachers continue their
professional development in order to continue their learning to reach more students. These are the programs that create a literacy-rich environment that prepares students to be kindergarten ready. They are also the programs that show significant outcomes in student learning for all children, even ELL students who are being taught in a language that is not their own.

Every year of schooling counts towards a child’s success in education and should be recognized as important (Guernsey & Mead, 2010). State governments decide what agencies and policies to implement. They design funding to support the programs that they feel are adequate for our students (Lawton, 2012). It’s their role in assuring proper education for all students. They are also the ones who have taken the responsibility in the successes and failures of these programs. It is important to find cost-effective programs that work. We must use the extensive research that has been done regarding the importance of early childhood education to implement more programs that work.

Minnesota must not overspend on programs that do not work and instead must invest in quality programs (Guernsey & Mead, 2010). The money that we spend on quality Pre-K programs now will prevent future spending on special education services, due to an over represented ELL population, in the future.

High-quality programs benefit from a benefit-to-cost ratio of about $10 to $1, proving the long-term effects of quality programs (Guernsey & Mead, 2010). All children deserve to have equal access to affordable, high-quality education that will set them up for success. The teachers that instruct them also deserve the training that prepares them to work with students with different skill sets. With the growing immigrant population and increase in ELL students, teachers will need to adapt and learn new strategies to effectively reach every student.
This research project focused on the Minnesota Reading Corps (Reading Corps) Pre-K program and their work with ELL students. Reading Corps has a lot of data that can show student outcomes and growth in children ages three and four. The following question was asked: How does the Minnesota Reading Corps program help English Language Learners become Kindergarten Ready?

By exploring this question, the findings will bring this knowledge to the organization as well as educators. It will also identify the quality strategies that are proven to work, thereby indicating what strategies we should invest in.

**Conceptual Framework**

For the purpose of this study, the conceptual framework will be seen through the lens of the Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) program. The focus will be narrowed in on the professional training program provided by Reading Corps known as SEEDS (Sensitive, Encourage, Educate, Develop through doing, Self image). This early-literacy training model was developed by Kate Horst and has been used by early-childhood programs across Minnesota since 2003. The researcher chose this framework because of its data-driven approach. It has been proven to work and addresses the needs of many children with different backgrounds.

**Social Learning Theory**

The researcher used Social Learning Theory as a lens inside this research project. Social Learning Theory focuses on learning by direct experience. People learn from observing behaviors. Once someone is successful with a desired behavior, they are reinforced and want to continue their behavior. The opposite can be said when they are unsuccessful. They will then avoid these unsuccessful activities and focus on the behaviors that have presented them with
positive outcomes (Bandura, 1977). This theory focuses on learning through three different aspects: behaviors learned through observing others, environmental factors (i.e. room size, noise, etc.), and past experiences. Many people go into a situation with presumptions of how it might go based on past experiences (Boyce, 2011).

One way students learn under the Social Learning Theory is by observing others model appropriate behaviors (Bandura, 1977). When a student fails at an attempt at an answer in front of a large group and then gets scolded or has it brought to their attention as negative, they are less likely to attempt to answer another question.

Interpretations also influence a child’s learning. Students will answer a question based on what they think a teacher wants to hear. They observe an instructor and their behaviors, and then they take that into account when completing a test or during other interactions they might have. Students want to give the answer that they think a teacher desires, not necessarily what they believe to be the right answer (Wiley, 2007). People need social interaction and modeling in order to learn important skills necessary for learning language acquisition.

**Minnesota Reading Corps**

Minnesota Reading Corps is a cost-effective, federally funded program model that is free to the agencies it partners with. Members work for a small living allowance and an education award they receive after completing their service term. Professional Corps members are teachers from a site and receive an education award and supplemental training. The model is an evidence-based practice to increase reading skills from Pre-K students to grade three.

Members are recruited from all educational backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. They are given the training and professional development they need in order to provide services
to students. Each member is required to assess students. They monitor progress and compile data on each student they work with. Each member has an internal coach who provides supervision, observation, and feedback. A master coach also provides feedback. This ensures that the members are performing the interventions correctly for fidelity of the program. This also ensures that the members are getting what they need to provide effective services.

**Professional Lens**

The Minnesota Reading Corps framework was chosen because this is a research-based program where the participants use data to drive instruction. It was also chosen because it is an AmeriCorps program. The philosophy of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act that implements AmeriCorps aligns with many social-work principles. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) believes that it is essential to have organization and leadership within the community. Their hope is to guide individuals to become more involved in community leadership. AmeriCorps programs focus on national service and, like NASW, emphasize community leadership. AmeriCorps focuses on strengthening communities by providing opportunities for people to use their skills to help others and meet critical needs in the community (www.AmeriCorps.gov). AmeriCorps members address critical needs in communities all across America including fighting illiteracy.

Improving illiteracy is consistent with social-work values and aligns with the code of ethics and standards. Social workers believe in strengthening communities by providing services. A strong belief of social workers is that all children have the right to equal access to education and other opportunities for quality learning experiences. Because many children come with
special needs, they require additional services (Barnett, 1992). These services are important in helping the child succeed.

It is not only important to help clients succeed but also to increase knowledge. Social workers believe in increasing their own knowledge in order to increase and strengthen their ability to work with clients. Social workers also encourage their clients to increase their own skill set and knowledge base (Levy, 1985). Aligning with this principle, AmeriCorps encourages all members to participate in professional development opportunities to expand their own skills. They also provide an education award at the end of their service to be applied to past federal student loans or future schooling.

In order to succeed in helping others, it’s important to build relationships with organizations and clients. NASW emphasizes the importance of building relationships in order to “enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities”. With an emphasis on building communities, AmeriCorps builds relationships in order to directly impact the clients that members serve and to create self-sufficiency.

**Researcher’s Scope**

The researcher currently works with the Minnesota Reading Corps program since March of 2011. The researcher’s passion for equal education for all stems from her own experiences growing up in, and aging out of, the foster care system. The researcher’s passion also stems from having a sister who has a learning disability. Her sister did not get the proper education and help she needed to succeed. If there was a program that focused on the individual needs of a student, then all children would be given an equal chance to learn.
Growing up in foster care made the researcher realize the importance of programs that are centered on helping all children learn and meeting the children where they are at. Education has been the pathway to success for the researcher, and finding new ways to help others achieve their goals is important to her. Children come from many backgrounds and challenges. School shouldn’t hinder their successes but instead should be used as a tool to help them grow. More programs need to become available for those who face major challenges.

**Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to focus on what Reading Corps members are doing to make a difference for early English Language Learners. The researcher will specifically examine the data relating to English Language Learners that has been gathered by the Reading Corps. This section will describe the research setting, research design, sampling plan, recruitment strategy, protection of human subjects, data collection, and strengths and weaknesses of the Reading Corps.

**Research Setting**

The researcher asked contact partners of the Minnesota Reading Corps for participation in the study. Members are trained with research-based “instructional techniques and technically adequate assessment tools for decision making” (Reading Corps evaluation report 2010-11). Reading Corps members work inside the classroom and focus on integrating and focus on integrating speaking, reading, and writing into daily activities. They also provide resources and information to parents. Parental involvement is a key part of members’ roles.

The goal for Reading Corps is to not only improve the reading scores of students from Pre-K to grade three who but also to train members building being effective and passionate
advocates for Pre-K programs. Reading Corps provides training and quality literacy tutors for all interested preschool programs and promotes literacy methods for staff within those agencies. A detailed description of Pre-K AmeriCorps members’ roles and training can be found in Appendix A.

Each member is supported by an Internal Coach (IC) and Master Coach (MC). An IC’s role is to support the members during their eleven-month commitment. They are part of the partner organization and go through training provided by MRC. They observe the members with their interventions and correct them if there are any mistakes. They also give them ongoing support on how to better serve their students. A Master Coach (MC) supports the members by visiting the sites about once a month to do an observation. They then provide the member with feedback. Both support the program to help improve outcomes of the students.

Lastly, Minnesota Reading Corps has collected data on student progress in Pre-K agencies with Minnesota Reading members. This data has been collected for the last five years from students who were participants of the Minnesota Reading Corps preschool program. This data was collected through assessments of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principles, and total literacy in comparison with other student groups in the Minneapolis Public Schools. This data shows the significant difference between the kids who have Reading Corps versus Head Start and non-Head Start students. For the purposes of this research project, interviews were done in those sites with high ELL populations.

**Research Design**

The focus of this project was on ELL student successes in Pre-K classrooms that have the support of a trained Minnesota Reading Corps volunteer. The question being asked was: How
Investigating Techniques to Help Early English Language Learners Prepare for Kindergarten

does the Minnesota Reading Corps program help English Language Learners become Kindergarten Ready?

The author of this study conducted a phenomenological study. This methodology was chosen for this project in order to better understand the experience of members and MCs as they provide services to early ELL learners. The researcher hoped to provide a qualitative explanation for the quantitative evidence of student success that was already collected.

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology will be the philosophy used in this theoretical framework. Phenomenology was chosen because it captures the “essence of the human experience,” capturing how a person saw, felt, and imagined the experiences happening around them. This meaning influences the person and how they live their future experiences (Flood, 2010). In order to understand meaning behind an idea, a researcher must analyze intentional experiences (as previously sited by Sadala and Adorno Rde. 2002).

Instead of arguing a point, phenomenology focuses on finding meaning in experiences lived by a person. With this information, researchers are able to better understand meanings in everyday life (as previous sited by Van Manen, 1997). As a researcher, it is important to capture, without influence, a person’s ideas and experiences as they have gone through them. With this, researchers can analyze and understand the world that they live in. This helps them understand meanings in common practice (Flood, 2010). This project found meaning in the experiences of those who are familiar and work with the Minnesota Reading Corps organization. It was through this lens where the researcher captured their experiences. The researcher explored the context of the interviewees, constructed theories based on them, and then reflected on the meanings of their
experiences. This allowed for the essence of a story to be shown in the research. The experiences and perspectives of the subjects were recorded during this process. Each subject shared their experiences and perspectives regarding the work they have done.

Interviews were conducted with members and MCs of the Minnesota Reading Corps Program. These people were invited because they meet the following criteria: the sites have been a partner with the Minnesota Reading Corps for more than a year; they have a high ELL population; the language of instruction is in English; and all students are going to kindergarten the next year. Members were interviewed because they work directly with the students. They provide services and use the training they have to work with the students. MCs were interviewed because they work with many different sites and have background knowledge of the interventions used. They also work with a variety of different members and thereby have a unique perspective.

The subjects chosen for this study were determined by the above criteria. They were then selected by availability. The researcher worked with the Minnesota Reading Corps database in order to get the information to match the criteria. Agency approval was given before beginning research. The project was explained to the director and other key staff within the organization. A copy of the signed letter can be found in Appendix B, which shows permission given to the researcher to use the organization as part of the study. All of this was done before the research began. The interviews were then held in person at their sites or at a coffee shop.
Protection of Human Participants

Participants in this study were 18 years of age or older. Some were professionals in the field of Early Childhood Education, while others came from different backgrounds. They ranged from having multiple years in the education field to very few or none at all. The education of the participants included degrees in Psychology, Early Education, and Elementary Education, and one participant with no college degree. None of the participants will be identified by name, nor will the Pre-K agencies they work for be named. To protect anonymity, all of the participants came from agencies in areas of populations over 15,000 people.

Participants were informed of any risk the study may have before being interviewed. Support was available for those who participate by other staff members and the Minnesota Reading Corps Employee Assistance Program. The agencies involved were not aware of the study. In the unlikely case that information shared triggered responses that are emotional for the participant, support from their supervisor was arranged.

After the data was collected and transcribed, names were taken out of the transcription and replaced with code names. All interviews will be erased on May 20, 2013, after the researcher has presented the outcomes.

Data Collection

The researcher used a judgment sample and asked all participants if they would like to take part in the study. A judgment sample was chosen because it involves a predetermined reference group. Reading Corps Members and MCs were specifically chosen for this sample in order to get the information needed. The interviewees participated after signing a consent form. The interview was a semi-structured and flexible format that lasted about 30 minutes to an hour.
Each interview was recorded with an iPhone. The recordings were only heard by the researcher and kept on an iPhone that requires a code to unlock it. If someone tried to unlock the device without having the correct password three times, the entire device is wiped clean of all material on it. The same would be of any transcription typed on a laptop owned by the researcher. All devices were stored in the home of the researcher.

The research questions were reviewed by Dr. Felicia Sy and follow the Protection of Human Subjects Guidelines. The questions were not personalized in nature and were related to research question. The research questions did not identify any specific student or group of students, were open-ended, and were shown to the interviewee prior to the interview. Questions were adapted by using Minnesota Department of Education’s Early Learning Standards from 2005 and indicators of progress, in order to make a connection between the subject’s work with ELL students and kindergarten readiness. Other questions were asked about the outcomes of the program, and comparisons were made between classrooms with trained Minnesota Reading Corps volunteers and those without.

Interviews were done with MCs and members who work with both suburban and urban sites. These participants were emailed requesting their participation. The researcher worked with the Minnesota Reading Corps to get the email addresses of the participants. The members were selected because the ELL population they work with consists of 25% of the student population in the program or more. This information was gathered by using the Minnesota Reading Corps database. The researcher works with the organization and understands how the database works. With consent from the Executive Director, the researcher then gathered the information for all possible participants. All agreed to take part in the study and signed a consent form before the interview.
Analysis Technique

The analysis technique for this project will follow phenomenology. Each interview conducted was recorded by the interviewer. These interviews were then transcribed word by word. This included literal statements with notes on nonverbal cues (Hychner, 1985). The researcher then wrote down any presumptions made of the interviewee by bracketing. These presumptions were then shared with the research participants, in hopes to filter out any other presumptions unknown to the researcher.

After the presumptions were identified and analyzed, the researcher then listened to the recordings of the interview multiple times. Notes were taken while listening to the interview. After the recordings were completely transcribed and listened to multiple times, the researcher then began going over every word and paragraph in order to find any meanings. After looking at the entire interview, the researcher found meanings that tie to the questions that were explored.

The meanings pulled out were discussed with the participants. Cross-referencing ensured accuracy when pulling themes out. Themes were determined and sent to each participant. Clarification was asked from one participant. After clarification, the themes were sent back to the participants. The themes were then approved by all and used in the findings.

The Pre-K agencies used for this study may have felt as if they needed to participate because they are partners with the Minnesota Reading Corps. Each agency was told that participation in the study does not influence or affect their relationship with the Minnesota Reading Corps. To prevent any biases or persuasion, none of the sites that took part in the study were those that the researcher works with. The researcher contacted the agencies and did not include other program coordinators from the Minnesota Reading Corps in the process. This was communicated to the participants of the study to prevent the participants from feeling like they needed to be a part of
the study. The researcher had the interview questions reviewed and approved by her committee members before conducting the interviews to prevent any personal biases.

Findings

There were a total of eight participants who were interviewed for this project. There was originally one additional interview that will not be used because the recording device did not record the interview. Major themes included: **Members Feel Well-Trained, Supported, and Equipped to Reach the Needs of Early Language Learners**, **Having an Extra Person in the Classroom to Assist Early Language Learners With Core Instruction**, **SEEDS Quality Interactions and Affirmations Were Used to Encourage ELL Students Learning**, **Awareness of Challenges That Dual Language Learners Experience, in Order to Help Overcome Them**, **Scaffolding to Integrate Appropriate Level Learning For ELL Students**, and **Learning to Change the Structure of the Classrooms to Better Meet the Needs of English Language Learners**.

The stories told are described below.

Figure 1. Member Support Model

The figure below represents this process. Each member comes in with different backgrounds (SES, education, gender, and age), they learn the trainings and then become a support system for their lead teachers and are also supported by the program.
Investigating Techniques to Help Early English Language Learners Prepare for Kindergarten

Member Feel Well-Trained, Supported, and Equipped to Reach the Needs of Early Language Learners

Each interviewee spoke of the quality of the training sessions they attended and how they felt supported by program staff. When asked about what the benefits of the program were, one participant responded:

*I think the benefits are the trainings throughout the year. [They] are my favorite things about it. They keep me motivated and inspired, so I feel like they’re really nailing it on the head because I feel really well supported and encouraged by all the people at MRC, and the trainings are a way they kind of boost you and send you back.*

Members feel confident before entering a classroom and working with students, because of the high quality training sessions they receive throughout the year. These ongoing trainings help them understand the importance of early literacy. They get lots of practice before having to work with students. They do not feel that they go in blind but instead have the tools they need to work with all students and the support to ask questions when they have them.

*I feel like the members are very well trained, that when we get into the classroom we have a lot of good knowledge and practice. We practice a lot. The training is really good. I feel like the program really supports us.*

Training also includes ways to work with ELL students in particular. They are given an overview of some of the challenges that come along with these populations and some of the strategies to overcome those obstacles.

*Well, in a lot of our trainings, we’re told and taught to be sensitive to ELL students, and I’ll try to sit next to my ELL students in large groups to give vocab words and to stay more engaged.*

Another interviewee stated her appreciation for the time and effort the program took to train them adequately and how she uses what she learns in her practice. She understands the
value to scaffold instruction to meet the needs of each individual student. This was common practice among all interviewees.

*I think it’s great that Reading Corps takes the extra time to train us in appropriate ways to work with ELL students and proper approaches to take to individualize to scaffold to their individual needs. I also like the cultural competency training we had this year; it got me to really think outside my own norms and look at different ways of thinking and doing things.*

Each member who serves in a preschool classroom is well-trained. Having an extra pair of hands to help students is important. Reading Corps has trained that person, who can come from a variety of different backgrounds, to focus on each individual student’s needs. The trainings are backed by current research and taught in a way that is applicable to all. Shown below is a response by one participant who communicated the importance of an extra well-trained person in the classroom.

*It also gives an extra body with a community member so it just sort of runs off that force they have in the classroom so this well-trained person with all the tools they need.*

Another interviewee stated:

*We’re very well trained. We have many training sessions. I would say we’re as well trained, from a group of people who come from a variety of different settings, some of them educated some of them not, what we do is some intuitive but most is what we do with the older kids is academic, we’re very much trained for that.*

The quality of the training sessions was a big highlight in all interviews. The members felt supported by the training session because they were spread out over the year. The sessions inspire them and give them extra time with program staff, and other members, so they get ongoing support throughout the year.
Reading Corps does a great job. The biggest thing is I want to give Reading Corps kudos for is their support of their members and um the trainings.

Spreading the trainings over the year, is good. You come out of training in the beginning of the year super amped. I felt like I did not see people for a long time, and I’m on my own, but it was probably only a few weeks.

Reading Corps makes it a point to use current research to enhance future trainings. They take feedback from evaluations and collect information about what gaps are missing in current training sessions. They also communicate with other professionals in the field to get feedback on how to better train members. Training sessions evolve every year to try to meet new challenges students may have. Below is a response from a trainer:

We’re getting smarter in when we started, we’re evolving. We’re getting smarter, and it’s good when we get challenged and pushed by people saying to us this isn’t working and we need more strategies for ELL students. We’re changing for the better and constantly taking feedback.

Having an Extra Person in the Classroom to assist Early Language Learners with Core Instruction

Each of the interviewees pointed out the extra attention each student gets because there is an extra person in the classroom to reinforce what the teacher is teaching. By having a well-trained individual, the students who are behind get an extra session with a caring adult. This adult provides interventions everyday and builds a relationship with the students by providing consistent, positive interactions. They feel this is especially beneficial for those who are learning English. Below is a response from a participant who has observed the work of a member in the classroom:

I think one of the biggest benefits is that there is an extra valuable person in the room that is well trained. Makes the teachers feel less stressed and it makes children have more connections. The research would actually say that it looks at a Head Start and a classroom with Reading Corps and one without and it says that that matched sample,
those that had Reading Corps dramatically outscored those on the BKA [Beginning Kindergarten Assessment] versus those that do not have a Reading Corps trained tutor.

Interviewees provide one-on-one and small-group interventions. The transition times are filled with rhyming and alliteration songs instead of quietly walking in the hallway. Each moment is utilized and filled with quality interactions throughout the day. With an extra person in the classroom, the teacher benefits through support by this person. The member can greet a student when they walk in the door and spend time on structured educational transitions between activities. Below is a response from a participant who is a member in the classroom. This member has observed the differences between classrooms with a member and one without:

I’m the only high five (preschool) classroom so I know with kindergarten they struggle because they do not have as much adult interaction with the kids, because it is just one teacher with the kids, over 20 students, and they rarely have an aide. I know it has helped having more one-on-one attention with the kids in my classroom cause there’re three of us including the aide. We’re able to do more individual work and group work.

The benefits for the kids is that they have an extra person in the classroom, an extra adult, an extra caring adult in their lives.

Interviewees recognized that having an extra person benefits and improves the student’s confidence. Students build a strong relationship and trust the member. They then find themselves taking more risks and answering questions that they might have been scared to do in a large group. Below is a response of how one participant responded to how Reading Corps helps build confidence in the students they work with.

Being another trusted adult in the room and someone who can be a go to person, I think does help their confidence a lot.

Members see a difference in student skills and can be there during their interventions;

I think definitely with sign in and journaling. Those are big ones. The kids come in everyday and sign in. Some kids know how to and others do not. I’m right there to help
them. Helping with how to hold a pencil. They always write their name on their journals, if that’s too hard for them we use the white board.

All interviewees pointed out that having an extra caring adult in the lives of these students was one of the biggest benefits. They not only support the students but the teachers as well. Because of this, they find themselves invaluable. Not only are they there to help out, but they are trained to focus on the individual needs of each student. This is something that is rare when it comes to resources for other classrooms in their building. Below is an observation by a participant.

*I think that the teachers feel more supported. I know that the classes with a Reading Corps tutor, the vocabulary and transitions make the day go a little bit easier, those are the definite things I see and there is just one more person to help get things done before or after school. I know I stay after. For Pre-K, the teachers that do not have Reading Corps members, we do not have any in our building but for example the kindergarten could use help with just everyday stuff.*

With the data the member keeps, all of the work the member does with the student matches their needs. They know where the student is at all times, and they help catch them up by performing interventions every day.

*So for the kids, they then have well-informed group of people around them who are able to really know what their needs are and know how to meet those needs so there isn’t any guessing and there isn’t just ‘let’s just do this’.*

With large class sizes and limited resources, adding a Reading Corps member in the classroom allows for another person to collect and use data to show the teacher where the student is at academically. Often times, preschool teachers are trained to collect data but unsure of what to do with it. They collect it because that is what they are told to do. The members are there to support their efforts and use the data to help a student.
I think that (the major benefits of Reading Corps) in thinking about teachers first and (for) members, it gives them the knowledge and data of what is going on.... benchmarks first for what a student needs to know from the data of what the kids do and do not know. And then it gives them the tools that they can do, so I think it really enlightens and empowers educates teachers and gives them the hands on pieces.

**Scaffolding to Integrate Appropriate Level Learning For ELL Students**

Scaffolding is a useful tool to address the individual needs of a student in literacy. Scaffolding refers to support that an adult or a more knowledgeable peer supplies to a student in terms that they will understand. They explain these concepts to them in a different way that matches their development in order for them to learn and apply the concepts on their own (Many et. al, 2007). Members use this technique to help the students they work with. Below is an example of the way a member approaches each child.

*Every kid is an individual and different. I try and think of each kid as a separate situation.*

The extra person in the classroom can recognize different cultures, language abilities, and skill levels of students and allows instructors to tailor activities to meet the individual needs of each child. When a child enters a classroom, they are not all at the same level. They come from a variety of different backgrounds and skill sets. There are the students who can learn from regular instruction, there are other students who need a little bit of help and get that reinforcement in small groups with a member, and finally there are students who really need extra attention and find that the best way to learn is to get one-on-one instruction. Reading Corps members provide this extra attention daily. They are trained to be aware of different skill levels and how to work with each level. Below is a response of one participant’s role in the classroom.
The repetition, like, I’ve got ELL students I do interventions with, just having that daily one-on-one practice, they do not speak any English at their house so they just need that extra practice and support, the regular classroom stuff is not enough. They need high repetition with smaller groups.

Reading Corps members take time to integrate learning in everything that the student does. If they are playing in the play center, the member will narrate with the student is doing, and give them the vocabulary. This helps them build their vocabulary in order to use it in other areas of their lives.

I think defiantly you need to downscale it, you can’t expect a student who doesn’t speak English able to understand at the level of other students. You have to be at their level and narrate what they’re doing.

When testing all the students, members found that the students who struggle the most are the ELL students. They recognize that the students have the ability but lack the language skills. Testing them gives them a starting point. Knowing where a student is beginning and what interventions to use with the student is the beginning point of each member. The focus is on all students, not just the ELL students. They focus on encouraging and helping all kids learn.

It’s an overall thing; we talk to them, we ask them questions, we try and listen. The testing that we do helps us get a focus. The kids who struggle with rhyming, vocabulary, and ELL kids struggle in most areas, even though you know they’re not dumb, it’s there, we help them get the vocabulary to describe things. The testing helps that way, it helps us say, yeah, this kid needs help with this….it’s all a big package.

Many benefits in this class, it’s one on one time with a student. We test their abilities and determine which students can use the one on one time. Most cases they are the kids whose language skills are the most behind.

Members recognize the importance of not assuming that the students know something. They start at the beginning and share the meaning of simple things, such as “same” and “different.” They begin to work with all kids at a very basic level. Below is an example of that.
And you really have to start at the very beginning with the environmental shakers and environmental sounds and using the sound shakers to develop that distinction between same and different sounds and then move on to what’s a rhyme. So kind of really scaffolding the instruction.

For the kids with limited English language skills, extra time is taken to work with them in small groups. Members find it helps students open up and encourages them to take risks they might not in a larger setting. They also get to try new things that help their students learn. Practice has been beneficial for those who are behind. These small group interventions help them practice. Below is an example of how a member feels they help students with the interventions they use.

*My intervention groups, and read aloud (a Reading Corps intervention), encourages them to use the English language and practice speaking. This practice helps them become more confident in their ability to speak English and be understood by other adults and peers better.*

*Um…I think the small groups. Trying to keep them engaging, singing along, trying to teach them different things. Draw pictures and things like that.*

The interventions also reinforce what the teacher is already doing. If the student struggles with core instruction, the member can practice with the student and help them learn what the teacher is trying to teach. This is common among ELL students who do not understand the language and need extra attention to understand what is being taught.

*ELL kids are the ones that I work with individually. We reinforce what the teacher does. She has circle time each day, she would read the book, she has read the book 5 times and then I read it to them one on one, we sit in the hall and we read it and I can gear my 5 min lesson to their strengths and reinforce what she’s doing*
Each member attends SEEDS quality training. During this training, they learn to work with students by being sensitive and encouraging. All participants in this study described the importance of SEEDS and how they use it in their everyday practice.

*We did SEEDS training with St. Paul, creating a relationship with a child, because you can’t just go into a classroom and talk about rhyming, you have to build a relationship, you have to know where they are and where they’re coming from, you have to say...the first few weeks are going to get to know the student, they’re coming in. They do not know how to line up, they’re coming in with no knowledge.*

Creating relationships is important because the student feels less stress as his or her relationship with staff improves. If a student is stressed, he or she cannot think or come up with answers. If the student is constantly stressed, nothing will be taught.

*SEEDS was created to care about relationship-based interactions. If a child is stressed, he cannot get to his thinking brain. When you have a solid relationship, you have time to develop those skills. That kiddo is developing pathways to function.*

Members try to be sensitive in understanding what a student is going through, knowing he or she may come from a different background than their own. They make sure they acknowledge this and not discourage the student from speaking a language other than English. Their hope is to encourage who they are but also learn what they need to learn. A participant spoke about how she responds to those children who prefer to speak English, and how she encourages them to work with her on the interventions. She describes her experience below.

*I guess I go back to SEEDS in that you’re being sensitive and understanding of what they bring to the table and wanting to kind of blending the two. It’s kind of funny, some of my students speak English and know English, but they do not want to speak it, they want to speak Spanish. And so it’s not seeing it as a bad thing and saying you know, it’s really cool that you speak two different languages and I wish I spoke two different languages, you want to practice speaking English with me?*
SEEDS helps students with social and emotional interactions, giving students affirmations when they do something positive or get something right. They also encourage a child to seek out answers when they get them wrong. A participant describes below how they use SEEDS to foster social and emotional interactions.

Well, I think that everything that we do is supposed to be in the SEEDS, based in SEEDS, which means that members are trained in the 17.5 hour SEEDS training, some of it at institute and then throughout the year by their internal coach. We train them to have quality interactions with kids, which in turn will help them with their social and emotional interactions with kids. I think that really helps with the social and emotional indicators, helping the student feel welcome and safe in the classroom.

Students are more likely to take risks and build confidence if a member is encouraging and supportive. Once a student has success while taking a risk, he or she begins to become more confident and continues to take risks. Below is a description from a trainer who communicated how important affirmations are when building confidence.

I hope that members get the message from us that they should be affirming, so that the second they see the kids taking a risk and having some sort of achievement, that affirmations should be happening so that confidence building happens because of that.

I think that one of the ways we try to help them is... and that Reading Corps tries to help that is by giving students words to use to express how they feel so other people around them can understand how they feel.

By using SEEDS, members encourage their students in a positive way to help with problem-solving skills. Members encourage students to think critically and give them the vocabulary to help express themselves in a safe space. Below is a description of how a member uses SEEDS to help build vocabulary and risk-taking skills.

In risk-taking, by expanding their vocabulary and encouraging them to use new words in English in a non-threatening environment. Also helps them having skills in problem solving by using words instead of actions. The repetitive nature of my groups helps them learn persistence and sticking with it. Expanding their vocabulary helps
them with their imaginative play, which is the dramatic play area so they can engage with their peers.

SEEDS quality training is used when members work with children in small groups. The students are encouraged to participate and recall what was learned. They are also encouraged to use their imagination by telling the member what they think will happen next. Members do not stop at a simple answer but ask more questions in hopes of a more comprehensive answer. The goal is to get the child to think critically about what is happening and to use their imagination to finish a story.

They’re encouraged to ask me questions and seek answers to the questions during the interventions I do with them. During the small group repeated read aloud, they’re encouraged to recall events in the story and make predictions as to what will happen next.

Awareness of Challenges That Dual Language Learners Experience, in Order to Help Overcome Them

New this year to the Minnesota Reading Corps was Intercultural Competency training sessions provided to all members. This training was provided because there was a need. It was entered into the grant as a way to enhance the professional development skills of members. Below is a description of how they are using their training to understand where there student is at.

I think that...especially after coming off of my diversity training, one of the best things that you can do is try to understand where they come from and what they know and understanding that culture and understanding our culture and not making it seem like a simulation process into English.
Most interviewees pointed out that a student who doesn’t understand the language can easily be misunderstood as having behavior issues. When a child doesn’t understand the language or culture, he or she won’t understand what they are supposed to be doing.

..and behavior things. It’s easy to get that mindset that they are not listening to you, but realizing they do not understand what their supposed to be doing.

They pointed out that they are all trained to recognize the stages of language development. Knowing what stage a child is going through can help them better understand them. They can then work with students in different ways and be sensitive to their learning.

Below is a response of a participant who tries to understand where that student is at.

Because they are ELL, when we see a behavior, it’s difficult for us as adults when we see a behavior, is it because this person doesn’t understand what’s going on or is it because there’s something else going on there that we haven’t figured out yet. Are you rolling around on the floor because you do not understand the story or do you just need to learn to stand up straight?

And how they use what they have learned in practice:

I think those stages that kids go through is huge for them to understand. They can be easily understood as a behavior problem or belligerent. I think that it’s important for them to understand that at first they are going through the stage they go through, their home language and then after awhile they realize that people do not realize what their saying. Then they often go into a nonverbal silent stage where they are not talking. They are not comfortable, and sometimes when people see that they think they’re mute or belligerent or this or they’re that. Educators need to know the stages and know how to interact. And when they are in this stage, what can we do sensitively... not any shaming. It’s a really important piece.

Members are taught to understand the process of language development, they understand that they must wait longer for a child to answer a question. The child is thinking in a different language and must translate it into English. They know it’s not that they do not know it but that it takes longer. They do not give the answer right away like they would with a child whose
language is English. Reading Corps members also ask a question multiple times in the same format. This helps a child process the question and not be confused by hearing multiple questions in different formats. An example is shown below.

_I really think that, I think that a lot of it is patience, a lot of it is that waiting, waiting for them to be ready, not pushing them to a point that they’re not at. If you’re thinking in a language and you’re translating into another language, there’s a process going on there that takes them longer to tell you that that’s a muffin. And I think that instead of jumping in and supplying the word, to sit with them and let them process and find the word._

One of the respondents noticed that some ELL students are slower to respond because they do not want to give the wrong answer. They find it helpful to not just give students answers but to wait and give them options.

_They get nervous about talking, that’s most of it, especially with the little girls, they do not want to say a wrong word. So I try and ask them what they are having for breakfast and then I wait longer. With like an English-speaking kid, I would expect them to answer faster, like, they know this is a muffin, a kid who’s English isn’t their first language, I give them more time to process that and then I also offer them some options—creating a safe space for them to feel confident._

Because they are afraid to give a wrong answer, they are less likely to take risks. Once they become comfortable with the member and receive affirmations, they begin to open up. Because the member is there every day, the consistency of having the same encouraging person in the room helps with these challenges. The response below is from a participant who uses their understanding of language development in their work with kids.

_I would say that in one of my trainings, they talked about the different stages of learning a language and at the beginning, they try to talk to you in their language and then they kinda shut down a little bit and then they are kind of listening, and I would say this time of year the kids are just coming out of that stage where they’re just kind of checking out and understanding that other people can’t understand me in my language. So we have a couple kids who are sort of just feeling comfortable answering questions in English, where other kids just kind of shake their heads and know they’re comfortable with us,_
comfortable with the language and be more adventurous about guessing the name of the color

Members are there for extra support and guidance for ELL learners. They get the chance to do the extra things that a teacher might not have time to because of their focus on the large class. They get to give affirmations and sit next to a student to give them extra guidance. They are there to help a child understand what is going on in the large setting. They understand that they need extra guided attention.

Well, I’ve noticed that it’s hard to tell to see some of them tend to get lost in a large group, or with something that’s not as engaging they stand or play with their shoes. And then I think the hard part is that they’re labeling things really well but they’re still not understanding a lot of directions, that’s the hard part. Our oral language kids are labeling those things so when it gets to the point about that but they’re kinda still not understanding conversations, other students are understanding better. But that’s not unique to others

Students who do not speak English are in a world that is foreign to them. They come in not knowing that everyone around them will speak a different language. They begin to realize that the strangers they are with do not understand what they are saying. Some of the practices they are used to at home do not apply to them. Interviewees understand how difficult and scary this might be for a student. They begin to pay extra attention to the needs of a student.

Well, in a lot of our trainings, we’re told and taught to be sensitive to ELL students, and I’ll try to sit next to my ELL students in large groups to give vocab words and to stay more engaged.

Members find ways to make activities engaging to all the students. They want their students to have fun with vocabulary words and are always looking for creative, fun ways to present them. Their hope is to create a positive environment where the kids want to learn. When
asked what is important for educators to know when working with ELL students an interviewee responded below.

*Patience, I think. We’re taught to watch, wait, listen, and I think that that’s important because I’ve seen teachers ask a question and then ask it in a different way and then the kids are just staring at them like “what” and they do not understand. And they can’t catch up. Just being patient and drawing on things they can understand. And the repetition and routine consistently and making the vocab words come alive, making things engaging and not just for certain kids. Do not assume everyone knows what you’re talking about. I’ve heard many of my teachers comment how they do not pay attention and that they’re in their own world when they just do not understand.*

Interviewees want the students to understand the world around them. They want their kids to learn in a positive, fun environment. They make up new strategies to make it fun. They feel that when a child is excited about learning, they get more out of it. They enjoy watching a light bulb go off when a child understands. They understand the process a student goes through and use new, creative strategies to overcome them.

*A challenge while gaining a footing in English acquisition, because of lack of understanding of what is being said to them. And what they’re trying to say to us. And often times they may seem off task during whole group activities where as they’re just tuning out because it’s just blabber blabber going on around them until they get kind of an acquisition, then they start paying attention more. So it’s just kind of that challenge of overcoming that gap*

*They see the image and they think at first in their home language, and then they have to translate it and they have to say it. The fluency that they have to do that intervention is slower than a kid who just has to look and say it and think of the name.*
Learning to Change the Structure of the Classrooms to Better Meet the Needs of English Language Learners.

For teachers who are new to MRC, having a member in their class requires them to change the way that they would normally structure their class. At first, this can be a major adjustment.

*And I know it’s really changed the way it’s structured her class. The way she teaches vocab, things like that. It’s still an adjustment for her to make that transition.*

These adjustments, once put in place, structure the classroom so the students know what to expect. When they know what to expect, they have an easier time learning. They do not have to worry about what might happen and what they should be doing. Their stress level goes down. They also have less behavior issues. When every moment of their time is planned out and being used, they do not have time to goof off or get in trouble.

*So I think that teachers are much more intentional, teachers are much more thoughtful. We often see then behavior situations go down because the teachers are making use of every moment so, instead of ‘let’s go walk down the hallway silently,’ ‘let’s sing a rhyming song on our way down the hallway and then the kids are engaged and there are fewer behaviors.*

*I think things like what I said, the behavior because our classrooms are organized and structured, then they have some more self-regulation because of that.*

Members have noticed that their efforts in changing the structure of the classroom have been beneficial for not only the ELL students but the non-ELL students as well. They know that they will practice alliteration and rhyming every day. When a student has never done any kind of rhyming or alliteration (common among many incoming students) but practice it every day, they begin to understand the concepts. Most kids enter into school without any idea of what a routine
and structure is. They then stress about what they are supposed to be doing and cannot focus on what needs to be learned.

*Routine of the classroom and I think that helps build understanding. I’ve noticed some of my ELL students, they’ll start singing the words. At first they make it up but then they’ll start saying the words. I do not think they know what it means yet, but they’ll start singing and practice English, which is kind of fun. Alliteration game and rhyming. They’re kind of getting it. I think that the routine really helped. It gives them the time*

Soon, the transitions become embedded in their brain. When things come naturally to a student, their confidence grows. They begin to have structure in their lives. They get a chance to learn what is expected of them before they enter school. When they reach kindergarten, the students will already know how a school works. This allows them to understand the school setting before entering kindergarten. They will know that they need to line up, listen, and follow the structure of the school.

*Persistence, organization, and planning-all executive-function skills. Ask teachers to have a consistent schedule which helps ELL students know exactly what’s going to occur so they know what’s going to happen. Those big transitions are a cue to the little child’s brain this is what’s going to happen. When they know what’s going to happen they can use their imagination because they do not have the stress or (high) cortisol (levels) or what’s happening. If things are irregular and not changing.*

Reading Corps offers a classroom teacher the tools to set their classrooms up in a structured way that focuses on literacy. When they are being intentional about the structure of the classroom changes, more time is then being spent on doing extra things for the students versus exerting energy on correcting misbehaviors.

All interviewees agreed that they were seeing major differences in the students this time of year because of the work they are doing. They noticed the student growth in vocabulary. The kids are busy talking and taking risks inside the classroom. Kids who barely spoke or did not
Investigating Techniques to Help Early English Language Learners Prepare for Kindergarten

speak any English at all during the beginning of the year are joking with their classmates in English. The data is supporting their observations.

*Just looking at the data, it seems as if I’m making a difference.*

The benefits of the program seem to be deeper than just helping the students learn and become kindergarten ready. With the stories the members have expressed, it seems to be changing their lives as well. They are now thinking about careers in education and feel that they are making a difference.

Agencies are also benefiting from having an extra person without having to pay them. They get a well-trained employee with no cost to them. Minnesota Reading Corps is immersed in over 200 preschool agencies in Minnesota. The benefits are allowing these agencies to get evidence-based training for employees to enhance their programs. AmeriCorps and education are partnering to battle major issues that affect a growing population of students. The benefits encompass helping the students and the people who serve in the positions.

**Discussion**

This study consisted of well-trained individuals from many different backgrounds and ages expressing their feelings about being trained to help all students learn and to pay extra attention to those who struggle. The individuals all feel that they are supported by the program and continue to learn new strategies from the ongoing training sessions throughout the year. They use their SEEDS training to continue to build a supportive, encouraging environment for their students. They find themselves valued in the classroom. Having an extra well-trained person to work with the students who are behind gives them an extra boost. Each participant
found that their student’s scores had increased as well as their confidence and vocabulary as compared to the beginning of the year (data can be found in Appendix F).

The SEEDS quality training helps with interactions and builds confidence. This is not only beneficial to students but to members in their personal life. They have used these techniques to provide affirmations to parents and to their own kids. Members are coming out of the program with new skills and trained to meet the needs of students from different backgrounds. They can use these skills in future positions and practice.

Reading and Math were found to be the most challenging areas for those students who are English Language Learners (Ripley, 2010). Reading Corps is a literacy program that focuses on reading and writing. Math was not a focus or observed as a struggle for English Language Learners. It was noticed, similar to the research, that with a larger group of ELL students coming in (Harden et. al., 2007) educators are having a hard time catching them up when they are behind. They wouldn’t be able to provide the individual attention to reinforce the core instruction that a member can do.

Participants or teachers in their building have stated that they have seen significant growth in early language learners compared to non-ELL students. This is similar to the research that says there has been a 65% increase in immigrant populations since 2004 (Han, 2009). With the growth comes new challenges. With these challenges comes a dismissal of the child’s home language when it comes to literacy assessments they are required to take (Potter, 2007). The participants of this study acknowledged this and have been trained to change the way they assess the students. Because it takes ELL students longer to respond, they begin with the words they
know a student knows and practice them. The program is also looking into new ways to asses the students who are dual language learners.

Very similar to what Potter (2007) illustrated, children face the challenge of having to navigate the school system in a culture that is different than their own. What might be standard at home doesn’t translate in the classroom. In the classroom, children are encouraged to ask questions and talk about their feelings. At home, this might not be the case.

All participants recognized that their role was to help all students. The ELL students were the ones who generally scored the lowest on their assessments. All students benefited from learning what was expected of them in a school setting. They also began to learn basic concepts that will help them when they enter school (Washington, 2002).

Members were trained in noticing the different stages of language development. Similar to the research, they saw students lack confidence in their English skills and therefore shy away from future attempts (Lake & Papamheil, 2003). Understanding this, members became more sensitive to a child when they began to shut down. Sending materials home in their language helped the parents work with the student. Throughout the program, members and teachers trying new techniques that aren’t the ‘norm’ in the classroom was being implemented.

Many of the participants worked with teachers who were new to the program. Challenges came with trying new things inside a new classroom with a teacher who had been practicing for many years. Many members had changed the way the classroom was organized. Weinsieck (2002) expresses the importance of this to a child’s learning. Teachers that are hesitant to change can hinder a child’s experience and learning. With new research being done on language development, there needs to be new ways to meet the needs.
Minnesota Reading Corps makes it a point to find new research that will benefit the students being served. They draw on research when they are planning for trainings and are expanding their knowledge by taking feedback. They understand that there are other countries where children speak multiple languages and are successful. They work with school districts and agencies which may already have a supportive environment full of rich vocabulary, and Reading Corps enhances that with an extra person who is well-trained. They are growing every year and changing the way they do things.

The benefits and outcomes for the students are not the only changes that the program has contributed to. This study has shown what the Minnesota Reading Corps has contributed to the lives of eight participants who are working with the students. The members who participated have learned skills in a short period of time and applied them to the students they work with. These skills were identified by the participants and used not only inside the classroom but outside in their everyday lives. The educational backgrounds and experiences of the participants ranged from none to having an advanced degree in early childhood education. All of them are doing the same work and seeing improvements in the students they work with and their own lives. The training they receive is unique in the fact that all participants work on improving their skills.

The agencies that Reading Corps partners with pay nothing to have a member in their classroom. They receive a full-time or part-time well-trained employee to work with and improve the skills of all early learners. This program works with Head Start, early childhood, and other programs who apply, without limiting it to low-income students. They provide training for current employees of these agencies as well as training to become a SEEDS trainer within the organization.
Participants noted that they felt empowered by the training. They entered the program for a variety of reasons, including wanting experience, wanting to serve their community, and needing a job. They felt there were limited jobs, and they wanted one where they knew they would be making a difference and acquiring skills they needed to continue working with students.

Policy should focus on programs that are showing significant gains and allocate funding and resources to these programs. One of the major benefits of the program is that they are finding effective ways to collect data and to use it for instructional purposes. There is no guessing. They are using their training to be sensitive and encouraging, and they are seeing positive results. These trainings can be used not only with students but also with parents. Parents would benefit from learning these techniques to improve daily interactions with their children.

This study would be beneficial for social workers to see how Reading Corps works with a variety of different students, helping them with their learning styles. It provides over 1,000 jobs throughout Minnesota. It is cost-effective for preschool centers in Minnesota, providing them with resources and support. It also strengthens the community with the service projects members take place in. The SEEDS training helps those understand the importance of affirmations and gives parents, teachers, and members tools to be sensitive and encouraging to others. This research has shown how Reading Corps improves the lives of the students as well as the participants who work with them.

**Strengths and Limitations**

Very little qualitative data has been collected on ELL students within the Minnesota Reading Corps. Having qualitative data to go along with all the quantitative data is a major
strength of this study. This will allow more questions to be asked and in-depth explanations to be provided. Another major strength is that this study’s findings will be informative to the Minnesota Reading Corps.

There were several limitations to this study. The biggest limitation for this study was lack of time. This study could have been more comprehensive if more applicants were interviewed. The hope of the project was to be able to interview directors and internal coaches who worked with the program. This was restricted because of the time it would have taken to get approval from the St. Paul Public School Review Board and the Minneapolis Public School Review Board. This was due to the fact that they are employees of this district and approval would have taken months longer than what was needed for this project. The sample size could have been larger and included a demographic that matched the ELL population. All interviewees were white and were not or had not been English Language Learners. They were also all from the metro area. None of the interviewees worked with sites outside of the Twin Cities.

The researcher also worked for the Minnesota Reading Corps. This can be both a strength and a limitation. Having the background information and resources that came with working for the organization was benefit for this study. This same influence can also be a limitation, with a very narrow scope. The influence of working for the agency could have played heavily on the information collected and the major themes that were used.

Future research would include participants who come from an English Language Learner background in order to give a different perspective. If this study was done again, it would include a survey as well as focus groups. Analyzing this data would give a more in-depth perspective. If more resources and time were available, it would be beneficial to interview members from
preschool agencies like Head Start and agencies in rural Minnesota. Head Start agencies would provide a look at what Reading Corps is doing to help English Language Learners in a low-income setting. Income was not a factor in this study and wasn’t examined. With the Minnesota Reading Corps being a large organization with over 1,100 members this year, it would be beneficial to learn more about their efforts in other preschool agencies in Minnesota.
References


Knight, J. (2000) What Can We Do about Teacher Reistance?. *Phi Delta Kappan* 90(7), 508-513


Appendix A

Pre-K AmeriCorps members work one-on-one with students in a classroom of between 17-20 children each year and perform the following specific activities:

- Collect data on each child related to key literacy skills so that specific interventions can be tailored to specific needs of each child. Benchmark data is collected three times per year and students’ literacy progress is regularly monitored using the following five measures – picture naming (vocabulary), alliteration, rhyming, letter name, and letter sounds.

- Create literacy-rich environments by setting up and updating five classroom centers to make play more meaningful through integrating reading, writing, and talking into all activities.

- Implement a “5-Day Read Aloud” using dialogic reading techniques to expand vocabulary, phonological awareness, and letter knowledge.

- Provide tailored relationship-based interventions to individual or small groups of children needing focused time on specific skills such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, alphabetic principles, conversation, and book/print concepts.

- Implement activities to make writing meaningful for young children.

(Taken from the MRC 2010-11 Evaluation Report).

According to the MRC 2010-11 Evaluation report, the Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) literacy assessments measure literacy outcomes for three- and four-year-olds. After an initial reliability check, members administer the assessments in the fall/winter/spring to establish baseline data and track progress. Final scores measure improvement in critical literacy skills and compare each child's results to benchmarks correlated with kindergarten reading assessments.

The Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) (Smith, Dickenson, et al, 2002) tool is also used to inventory strengths and areas of need in the Minnesota Reading Corps members' classrooms. The tool is completed in the fall and spring. Results provide an
objective report about what is needed to design a more literacy-rich classroom. Members implement improvements such as setting up stations to practice specific literacy skills, adding more books, or more visible literacy props (Taken from the MRC 2010-11 Evaluation Report).

Pre-K members get training in all strategies and evidence-based interventions used. These training sessions begin in August with three full days. They then receive continued training through the year. They are required to attend at least four full-day training sessions. All Pre-K members are also required to go through SEEDS (Sensitive, Encourage, Educate, Develop through doing, Self image).

SEEDS

SEEDS (Sensitive, Encourage, Educate, Develop through doing, Self image) was developed by Kate Horst, a former educator and now Master Coach and trainer with MRC. SEEDS is a nationally recognized professional-development curriculum used by Pre-K members and teachers inside the classroom. SEEDS has four components to help develop positive relationship-based interactions:

Sensitive-Aware (notice and respond), Comment, Listen and think, ask a question, watch wait and listen, quick response.

Encourage-give affirmations, acknowledge feelings and facts, make eye contact, positive touch, positive non-verbal, smile caring voice.

Educate-conversations and oral language, vocabulary and meaning, book and print rules, alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness

Develop-talk, think, write, read, sing, play, jump, clap

Each site will have a SEEDS quality trainer take a week-long course. They will then train each member on the five sessions of SEEDS.
Appendix B

November 5, 2012

Gjenifer Stark
6538 Bloomington Ave
Richfield, MN 55423

Dear Gjenifer:

Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss your studies in the Masters Program in the School of Social Work at the University of Saint Thomas. I am pleased to confirm that you have the support of the Minnesota Reading Corps in interviewing 8-10 program partners in support of your research project: How does the Minnesota Reading Corps overcomes barriers when working with English Language Learners to help them succeed in becoming kindergarten ready?

I understand that this study is a qualitative research project that will invite our program partners to participate in a confidential interview. The partners invited to participate will have the opportunity to participate or decline the interview. I am aware that each participate will receive a consent form explaining the confidentiality and protocols of this study as well as the risks and benefits.

I appreciate that you will implement appropriate measures to protect the confidentiality of all participants, and that all reports and presentations will protect the confidentiality of the research participants as well as the organization.

I understand that you will not proceed with your research until you have obtained the approval of your clinical research committee and the Institutional Review Board at the University. I also understand that your research project is a part of your clinical research paper which will be published and presented in a public forum.
I do not anticipate any direct benefit or risk to our organization or to our participating staff. However there will be indirect benefit from your research, in that you will be adding to the knowledge base in the field of social work in an important area of study that this received limited attention. I am here to help you in facilitating this project if you need any assistance in logistics or distribution.

Sincerely,

Sheila Piippo
Interim Executive Director
2400 Park Ave. S
Minneapolis, MN 55404

Phone: 612-206-3044
E-mail: spiippo@mnedc.org
Fax: 612-871-1777

www.mnedc.org
2400 Park Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55404

Phone: 612.206.3030
Fax: 612.871.1777
Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. What is your background or experience in early childhood education?
2. What is your connection to the Minnesota Reading Corps?
3. How long have you been familiar with the program?
4. What do you feel are the benefits of the program?
5. What are the demographics of the pre-K classrooms?
6. Approximately what percentage of your students are dual-language learners?
7. What changes, if any, do you see to classrooms that have an MRC trained volunteer/employee?
8. What challenges do you see with working with ELL Students?
9. How do you feel MRC works with challenges ELL students have?
10. How do you see MRC helps ELL students develop social and emotional indicators of progress?
11. How do you see MRC helping ELL Students with approaches to learning for example: showing progress in risk taking, imagination, problem solving skills, and persistence?
12. How do you see MRC work with ELL students with Literacy and Language development by showing progress in listening, speaking, writing and reading?
13. How do you see MRC working with ELL students on Cognitive development?
14. How do you see MRC working with ELL students on development such as fine and gross motor skills?
15. (MC only) What observations have you made in a classroom with a MRC tutor? What if any differences do you see between a classroom with a tutor and one without?
   a. Member will be asked: What observations have you made in the differences between your classroom and other classrooms in your building?
16. What do you see as important for educators to know when working with ELL students?
17. What strengths do you see MRC has when it comes to working with ELL Students to make them Kindergarten ready?
18. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?
### Appendix D

**CONSENT FORM**

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Investigating Techniques to Help Early English Language Learners Prepare for Kindergarten</th>
<th>IRB Tracking Number</th>
<th>395436-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### General Information Statement about the study:

This research project will look at how the Minnesota Reading Corps members work with English Language Learners. It will explore how professionals view successful outcomes and strategies to get those outcomes.

#### You are invited to participate in this research.

You were selected as a possible participant for this study because:

Of your experience working as a reading corps tutor or your experience working with the program.

#### Study is being conducted by:

- Gjenifer Stark
- Research Advisor (if applicable): Felicia Sy
- Department Affiliation: Social Work

#### Background Information

The purpose of the study is:

To explore the educational needs of Early English Language Learners. By examining the Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC) Pre K program, the researcher will look at outcomes of those classified as English Language Learners. The hope is that this study will result in a better understanding of how to serve English Language Learners so they can become kindergarten ready.

#### Procedures

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

*State specifically what the subjects will be doing, including if they will be performing any tasks. Include any information about assignment to study groups, length of time for participation, frequency of procedures, audio taping, etc.*

If you agree to this study, I will ask you the following: To participate in a 45-60 minute interview, in which I will ask you a maximum of 20 questions pertaining to your professional role, knowledge and impression in relation to the study; agree to be audio taped during the interview, agree to allow me to transcribe the data; and agree to allow me to present the findings in a public dissemination of this
clinical research study at the University of St. Thomas in May, 2013. The results of what you say may be disseminated during the research presentation, but I will not identify any position and or title that may affect confidentiality.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the study**

The risks involved for participating in the study are:

There are no known risks involved in this research study.

The direct benefits you will receive from participating in the study are:

**Compensation**

Details of compensation (if and when disbursement will occur and conditions of compensation) include:

*Note:* In the event that this research activity results in an injury, treatment will be available, including first aid, emergency treatment and follow-up care as needed. Payment for any such treatment must be provided by you or your third party payer if any (such as health insurance, Medicare, etc.).

N/A

**Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report published, information will not be provided that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records, who will have access to records and when they will be destroyed as a result of this study include:

Transcripts will be password-protected on my home computer and audio recordings will be kept on a password-protected Iphone and Ipad. Setting for the Ipad and Iphone make it so the data will be erased if anyone enters the incorrect password more than three times. I am the only person who will know what the password is. All audio recordings will be permanently deleted from the digital recorder by May 30, 2013, after the clinical research presentation. Electronic paper transcriptions will also be destroyed after the presentation. During the interview, I will not identify the participant on the recording and at the time of the transcription, documents will be coded with numbers so that no identifying information is needed. A document to track codes for participants will be created and then will be shredded by May 31, 2012.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with any cooperating agencies or institutions or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until the date\time specified in the study.

You are also free to skip any questions that may be asked unless there is an exception(s) to this rule listed below with its rationale for the exception(s).

N/A
Contacts and Questions
You may contact any of the resources listed below with questions or concerns about the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher name</td>
<td>Gjenifer Stark</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gmstark@stthomas.edu">gmstark@stthomas.edu</a></td>
<td>612-354-0009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Advisor name</td>
<td>Felicia Sy</td>
<td><a href="mailto:felicia.sy@stthomas.edu">felicia.sy@stthomas.edu</a></td>
<td>651-962-5813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UST IRB Office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>651.962.5341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I am at least 18 years old. I consent to participate in the study. By checking the electronic signature box, I am stating that I understand what is being asked of me and I give my full consent to participate in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Study Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electronic signature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print Name of Study Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Parent or Guardian (if applicable)</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Signature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print Name of Parent or Guardian (if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Researcher (if applicable)</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electronic signature*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print Name of Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Electronic signatures certify that:

The signatory agrees that he or she is aware of the policies on research involving participants of the University of St. Thomas and will safeguard the rights, dignity and privacy of all participants.

- The information provided in this form is true and accurate.
- The principal investigator will seek and obtain prior approval from the UST IRB office for any substantive modification in the proposal, including but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators/agencies as well as changes in procedures.
- Unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events in the course of this study which may affect the risks and benefits to participation will be reported in writing to the UST IRB office and to the subjects.
- The research will not be initiated and subjects cannot be recruited until final approval is granted.
Appendix E

Greetings,

My name is Gjenifer Stark. I am a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St.Catherine University & University of St. Thomas. I am sending this message to inform you that I am conducting a study on how the Minnesota Reading Corps overcomes barriers when working with English Learners to help them succeed in becoming kindergarten ready.

I would like to invite you to help by allowing me to interview you. This would be a 40min to a 1hour interview in the month of February or March. This would be completely confidential and work around your schedule. I'm not including your program coordinator in on this process as to not influence your decision.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of the Minnesota Reading corps, and your site has been a partner for over a year. Your site also have a higher ELL population, and come from an area where you won't be identified in the study.

Please let me know if this is a possibility.

I would like to thank you in advance for considering this request.

Feel free to give me a call if you have any questions.

Best Regards,
RESULTS:
Preschoolers are Ready to Succeed in Kindergarten

Reading Corps students are outperforming their peers and exceeding literacy goals

Source: Dr. David Heistad, Minneapolis Public Schools (Matched Sample)