

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Effectiveness of *On Our Way to English* for Development of Reading and Oral Proficiency by Elementary English Learners

A Report of Randomized Experiments in a California and a Texas School District

We conducted an experiment during the 2003-2004 school year to determine whether *On Our Way to English*, a product to help elementary students learn to read and speak English, was more effective in a California and a Texas school district than materials already in place.

Intervention. *On Our Way to English (OWE)*—a new supplementary, text-based product focusing simultaneously on English language and literacy skills—consists of materials for kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms that address oral language, reading, and writing. Month-long thematic units contain large-format graphic organizers, chant and song charts with audio CDs, explicit phonics and skills materials, and leveled readers. Assessments are supplemented with standardized test practice. Teacher guides provide a comprehensive daily activity sequence integrating all resources. Teachers received a one-day in-service session from the publisher, Harcourt.

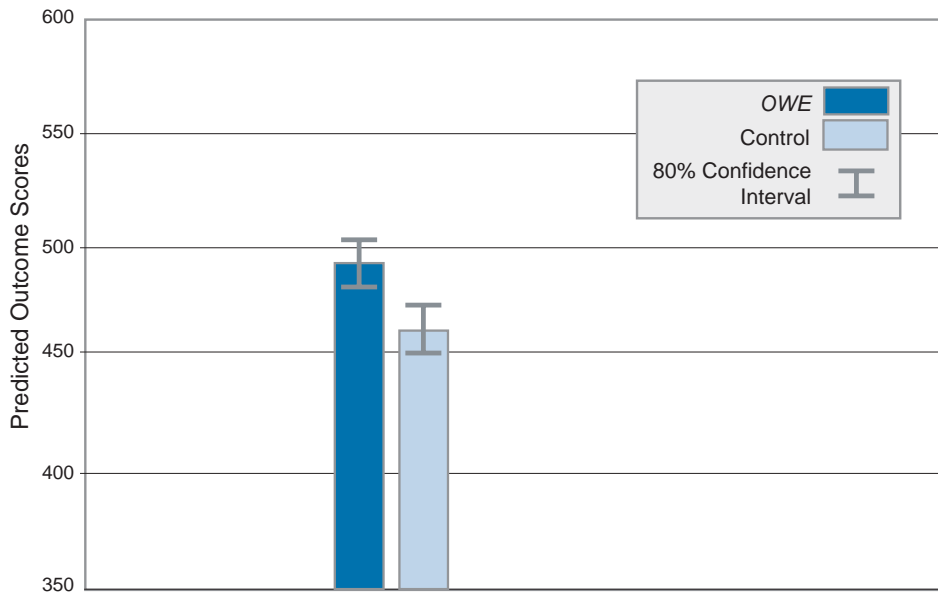
Settings. The California research site was an urban center where 30% of students are English learners. Control group teachers used the existing materials: the Houghton Mifflin reading textbook supplemented by published and teacher made ELD materials. The California English Language Development Test, given in early fall, includes measures of reading, writing, and listening. In the Texas site, also an urban center, about 9% of the students are English learners. Most control group teachers used materials they developed or collected themselves. Immersion teachers had English-language leveled readers and the Harcourt reading basal, which was used by some bilingual teachers, who also had Spanish texts and leveled readers in English and Spanish. The district administers STAR Reading, a computer-adaptive English language reading test, to all students at the beginning and end of the school year. In addition, the IDEA Proficiency Tests—Oral addresses vocabulary, comprehension, grammar/syntax, and verbal expression.

Research design. We conducted a randomized controlled trial experiment, assigning teachers who volunteered to participate to *OWE* or control groups by coin toss via a mechanism that assured approximately equal numbers of classes in the two grades involved in the study (second and fourth) and in bilingual vs. English immersion classes.

Participants. In the California study, 354 English learners and 24 teachers participated, including six bilingual classes and 21 immersion classes. In the Texas study, 169 students and 20 teachers participated, including seven bilingual and 13 immersion classrooms.

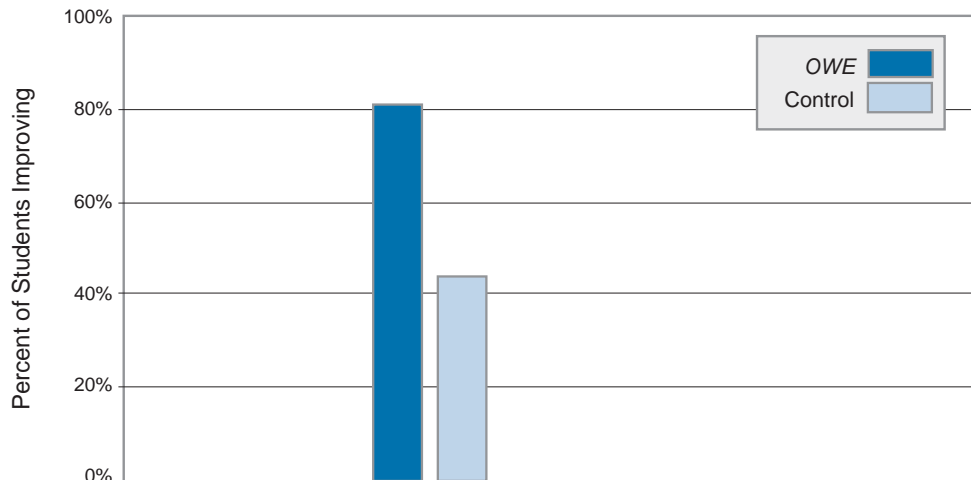
Statistical analysis. We analyzed data from the two districts separately because of differences in outcome measures. We used primarily a mixed model statistical analysis that involved two levels—students and classes. For both districts we performed separate analyses for reading and oral proficiency. Our models distinguished between bilingual and immersion implementations and made use of student pretest scores.

Results. Findings from the two settings were similar: *OWE* is generally as effective as the products used by the control group for reading proficiency and is generally more effective than control in improving oral proficiency. In California the value of *OWE* in promoting oral proficiency was greater in the immersion setting, where the effect was greater for the students starting with low proficiency. The following graph shows results for students in the bottom quartile of immersion classes.



Median Student of the First Quartile of the Pretest

However, in the Texas district, where most immersion students were already proficient, the positive impact of *OWE* is observed for bilingual students. The graph below compares *OWE* and control conditions for these students in terms of the percentage making gains during the year.



Conclusion. In these districts we found the primary value of *OWE* in its effectiveness for improving oral proficiency. In interpreting these results it is important to consider (1) the context of the different implementations—bilingual vs. immersion and (2) the differences between districts in the learning environment they provided. Districts' variations in ways of serving English learners suggest caution in generalizing these results to other locations. In assessing a new product such as *OWE*, it is also necessary to consider the products and practices already in place and the relative level of existing student proficiency. Our recommendation for the districts in this study is to focus the use of *On Our Way to English* in the area of oral proficiency.

To read the complete report, contact:

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