An English language and literacy acquisition validation randomized controlled trial: Study protocol

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a research protocol for a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design to determine the degree of impact that the ELLA-V intervention has across 75 randomly-assigned urban, suburban, and rural schools with a total of 14,400 students and 600 teachers at each of four grades, K-3, on ELLs' English oral language, reading, and literacy skills. Secondly, ELLA-V will examine the impact of high quality professional development (PD) provided for treatment teachers through virtual PD using Blackboard, Tegrity, Citrix GotoMeeting, and ThereNow classroom cameras versus typical PD provided by the districts to the control group teachers. An additional implementation study will examine treatment teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the virtual and face-to-face PD and mentoring feedback.

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1. Intervention background

Project ELLA has been evaluated cumulatively at various time points (K-3). Specifically, the research team has 11 publications currently published or accepted for publication related to Project ELLA (K-3) and has presented at numerous international, national, and state conferences, including a presentation to the USDOE Officers and to IES (March 26, 2010) on the effectiveness of the holistic intervention regarding teachers' pedagogical behavior and ELL students' English oral and literacy development. Three of these studies were included in a best evidence synthesis by Cheung and Slavin (2012) accepted by *Review of Educational Research* on effective reading programs for elementary ELLs. The criteria for inclusion were rigorous longitudinal designs with quantitative measures, and the authors stressed a need to revisit the review of research on language of instruction for ELLs based on the new evidence from the ELLA studies, among others.

The present ELLA-V project is designed to validate, via a randomized control trial (RCT), the intervention components of the original Project ELLA (hence called ELLA, while ELLA-*V* denotes the current validation project), across urban, suburban, small town, and rural Texas sites. Findings in Project ELLA were based on *combined* intervention components; however, *which* of those combined intervention components by grade level was most sensitive to native Spanish-speaking ELL student growth on English language acquisition at each grade, K-3, was not determined. The next section presents a more detailed description of the ELLA-V program in each of the four years of the research.

ELLA-V PD is delivered virtually, and it is scripted for teachers along with video clips and materials with the following activities: (a) review and practice upcoming lessons, (b) reflect on and discuss student learning, (c) assess pedagogical progress as a teacher in the intervention, (d) ESL instructional strategies, (e) vocabulary building and fluency, (f)

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oral-language development and the importance of planned student talk with less teacher talk, (g) literacy development, (h) reading comprehension, (i) language of instruction clarifications, (j) language of instruction, language content, communication modes, and activity structures, (k) content-area instruction, (l) questioning strategies, and (m) reflective practice via portfolio development.

The full ELLA-V program is comprised of two tiers. **Tier I** is what all ELLs receive through their regular courses in the school's specified program language of instruction. In all districts in Texas, curriculum is aligned to state standards for each content area and English language proficiency (ELPS) with alignment to the state exam, STAAR, beginning Gr. 3. However, **Tier II** represents the focus of the present ELLA-V intervention components. It consists of the structured alignment and direct English intervention delivered to treatment ELLs during the state-required 45-min ESL block in K-3. As a manipulated condition, *Tier II* treatments will be implemented at individual grade levels and will not be dependent upon previous grade's treatment effects in order to test the independent impact of each component. As will be described in various sections below, the initiation of ELLA-V begins at Gr. 3 with backward implementation to K. Two variations of the intervention (Treatments 1 and 2) compared to a control condition will be examined in each grade.

Grade K: The ELLA-V Treatment Group 1 will receive *Santillana Intensive English* (*SEI*; Ventriglia & González, 2000). SEI, implemented for 28 weeks for 45 min of ESL time, provides a series of scripted Texas ELPS standards-aligned lessons based on effective reading practices in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension, and is a systematic approach to language instruction (engage, explore, teach, practice, apply, relate, and extend). Treatment Group 2 will receive *Story-reTelling and Higher-Order Thinking for English Literacy and Language Acquisition* (*STELLA*; Irby, Lara-Alecio, Mathes, Rodriguez, & Quiros, 2004; Quiros, Lara-Alecio, Tong, & Irby, 2012). STELLA, to be implemented for 28 weeks for 20 min daily in ESL time, employs authentic children's literature, narrative and expository text with one book per week. It is used with preselected ESL strategies and with scripts developed to increase oral language and to implement Bloom's Taxonomy with leveled questions and vocabulary words aligned to ELPS. Combined with STELLA is *Academic Oral Language in Science* (*AOLS*), which is aligned to state ELPS and science standards and intended to develop students' oral language. AOLS is to be implemented for 28 weeks, 10 min daily in ESL time.

Grade 1: The ELLA Treatment Group 1 will receive SEI during the first semester, and *Early Interventions in Reading I* (*EIR-1*; Mathes, Torgesen, Menchetti, Wahl, & Grek, 2004), which is aligned to ELPS and reading standards, during the second semester. Each strategy will be used for 14 weeks, 45 min daily in ESL time. EIR was adapted by Mathes for ELLA and is taught in whole group instruction and aligned with five central strands: Phonemic Awareness, Letter-Sound Correspondences, Word Recognition and Spelling, Fluency, and Comprehension Strategies. In Treatment Group 2, STELLA will be implemented for 28 weeks, 20 min daily in ESL, following the same format as in Grade K. As in Grade K, STELLA will be combined with Academic Oral Language in Science (AOLS), to be implemented for 28 weeks, 10 min daily.

Grade 2: For Treatment Group 1, *Early Intervention in Reading II* (Mathes et al., 2004) will be used. *EIR-II*, which is ELPS and reading state standards aligned, is implemented for 28 weeks, 45 min daily in ESL. Treatment Group 2 will receive STELLA for 28 weeks, 35 min daily during ESL, as for Grades K and 1. Combined with STELLA is Academic Oral and Written Language in Science (AOWLS), implemented for 28 weeks for 10 min daily (writing is added).

Grade 3: For Treatment Group 1, *Content Reading Integrating Science for English Language and Literacy Acquisition* (*CRISELLA*; Irby, Lara-Alecio, Mathes, Rodriguez, & Quiros, 2007). CRISELLA, which will be implemented for 28 weeks, 45 min daily in ESL, is a structured curriculum aligned to state and new national science standards. It addresses a set of instructional skills for science-embedded English language development. The 2006 Edition of Pearson-Scott Foresman's Gr. 3 science text will be used including scaffolded expository reading passages to assist ELLs in developing science academic language and expository reading skills. CRISELLA includes pre-reading skills, vocabulary building activities, partner reading, graphic organizers, hands-on inquiry activities, cooperative grouping, scaffolded and leveled questions, vocabulary extensions, fluency practice, and direct teaching of reading skills. The *5E Model* (originated with Bybee, 1997; Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate) is employed for comprehension and retention. Treatment 2 will receive STELLA-implemented 28 weeks for 35 min at Gr. 3. *AOWLS* continues as a 10 min component.

Please note, Treatment 1 and Treatment 2 are similar in terms of strategies (derived from prior ELLA studies and logically grouped in terms of instructional approaches) and the outcomes they will be addressing. That is, Treatment 1 and Treatment 2 are designed to achieve the same types of outcomes, as explained by a common logic model.

As indicated above, the ELLA-V program is delivered to treatment ELLs during a 45-min Direct English instruction time period which meets the state-required minimum ESL block in K-3. Because the design is cross-sectional, not longitudinal, with the intervention administered to and examined within descending grade-levels (K-3) per year, results will not be dependent upon a previous grade's treatment effects. Specifically, the initiation of ELLA-V begins at Grade 3 with backward implementation to Kindergarten. At the separate grade levels, ELLA-V is implemented in two experimental treatments, each encompassing instructional strategies that had been combined rather than separately evaluated in prior research. The various strategies across treatments and grades include with younger students (K-2) phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondences, word recognition and spelling, fluency, and comprehension strategies; and with older students (grades 2–3), integration of English language literacy with science, pre-reading skills, vocabulary building activities, partner reading, graphic organizers, hands-on inquiry activities, cooperative grouping, scaffolded and leveled questions, vocabulary extensions, fluency practice, and direct teaching of reading skills, story-retelling and higher-order thinking for English literacy and language acquisition.