

**ALMADINA LANGUAGE CHARTER SCHOOL
MOUNTAIN VIEW LITERACY PROJECT**

**Merton Palmer
Steve Truch**

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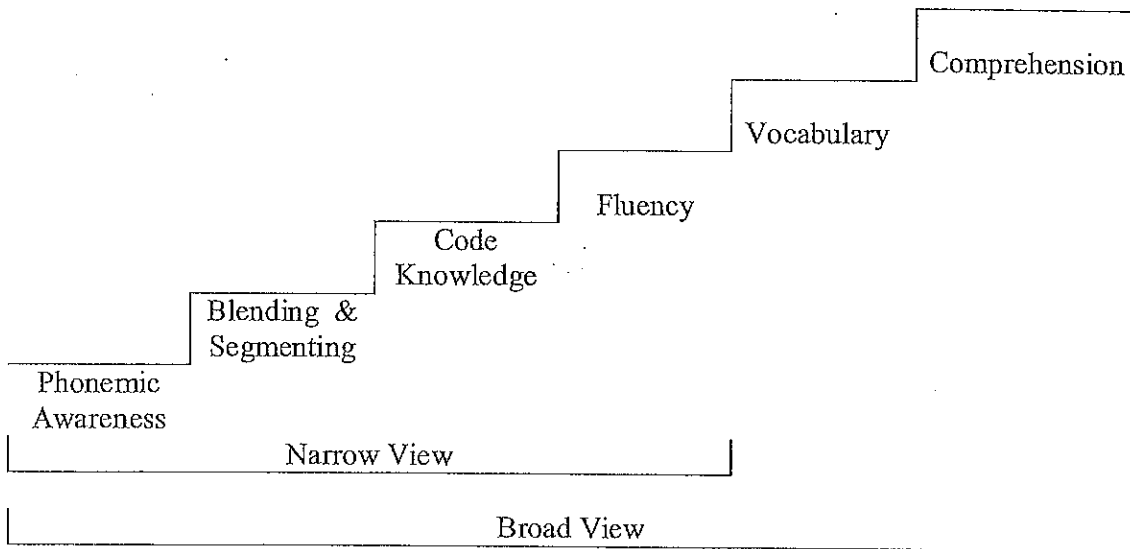
The Almadina Language Charter School has a history of excellence. The provincial achievement tests over the years provide some of the evidence for this. Also, Almadina's administrative and teaching staff work toward finding approaches that will improve the achievement of students who are not yet meeting expected levels. The purpose of the literacy project was to advance the excellence by focusing intently on the basics of reading and ensuring that lower-achieving students and struggling students would also develop the abilities for making good progress at school. Literacy is an umbrella term that can include many skills and curricular areas. Literacy can include math, written expression, technology, et cetera, but the entrance to all academic and technical areas is reading. So the Almadina initiative is really a reading project.

So, what is reading? Reading itself is a complex activity, but its components must be delineated in order to teach it appropriately – it is a process with a logical developmental sequence of skills. Reading is an invention, it is not a natural phenomenon and must be taught. Reading can be considered in two ways – one simple and one more complex. The simple/narrow view of reading is looking at words and pronouncing them (decoding) automatically with appropriate speed and accuracy. The wider view of reading includes the narrow view plus understanding of what is decoded – comprehension.

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Research has informed us now for several years, that in most cases, when children and adults have delayed or poor reading ability, including comprehension, it is because the skills in the narrow view of reading are inefficient. Therefore, this is where our reading project begins. For more in-depth reading on this, one can refer to innumerable publications. A few excellent ones will be referenced in the Appendix.

The following diagram shows the steps in the reading process, and the aspects of the narrow view of reading that are the main emphasis of the reading project.



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Phonemic awareness: Spoken words are made up of sequences of sounds. Written words are made up of spellings for the sounds. With this important understanding, students learn to listen for, and to distinguish discrete sounds (called phonemes) and then develop the ability to manipulate these sounds to read and spell words.

Blending: Putting individual sounds together to make words. For example:

c a t = cat

qu i ck = quick

Segmenting: *cat → c a t*

happy → h a p p y

Code knowledge: Knowing all the different spellings for the sounds in English. There are 44 sounds (phonemes) and almost 200 common ways to spell them.

English is a difficult language to learn to read for many people because it has more sounds than most languages and multiple ways to spell the sounds. It takes children two years longer in the

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English speaking world to attain reading proficiency than in most European languages. (This is explained well in the Dehaene book, referred to below.

Fluency: Decoding words automatically with appropriate speed and accuracy.

ASSESSMENT

Besides instruction, assessment is a major part of the project. We assess students to determine their competence in the various components of reading. We reassess them to measure their progress. Another purpose of assessment is to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. There are different kinds of assessment, some more formal than others. A description of the assessment instruments, and a discussion on assessment in general will be appended.

The Almadina literacy/reading project began by training four teachers in a particular reading program that has been designed to include practice in all aspects of reading, particularly those of the narrow view of reading outlined above. The chosen program

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conforms to all the latest theories about reading instruction – both in content and protocol for teaching. This program, Discover Reading, was developed locally and has proven to be very effective and efficient at teaching children to read at the Reading Foundation in Calgary. The program is very teacher friendly because the correct sequence of lessons has already been worked out and the lesson plans and activities are provided. This assures good consistency of instruction from one teacher to another.

The four-day training of the four classroom teachers, one each in grades K to 3, was provided by the Reading Foundation, and the Reading Foundation is part of the Almadina initiative and maintains a close alliance with the schools and the Literacy Coordinator. In September, the Reading Foundation also provided a one-day session to the Focus Teachers on an adaption of the Discover Reading program to the Smart Board.

At the outset of the project in September 2012, the plan was to assess all the students in all the classes in ECS through to Grade 3. The Discover Reading program, however, was only going to be taught in the four focus classes by the specially trained teachers. At the end of the school year, all the students were to be reassessed and a comparison made between the achievement of students in the focus classes and the regular classes.

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The program was expanded in late October/early November when six new Educational Assistants were hired and trained in Discover Reading by the Literacy Coordinator. At the Mountain View campus, four Educational Assistants began working with individual students who were deemed by their teachers to need more intensive instruction than was possible in the classroom. These individual students were selected from all classes from ECS to Grade 4. Two of the Educational Assistants worked with individual students in Grades 5 and 7 at the Ogden campus. (The Ogden program will be discussed separately.)

This report will summarize the achievement of students and make comparisons in the following ways:

1. Students' average growth in measured skills in each grade and compare the results between the focus classes and the regular classes. The focus classes are the classes with the teachers trained in Discover Reading and having a Smart Board component as well. There was one focus class in each grade from ECS to Grade 3.

2. Students' average growth in each grade who were on individual programs (ECS to Grade 4).

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The students on individual programs were from all the classes in the school – not just the focus classes.

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ECS DISCUSSION

ECS children at the beginning of the year typically have not yet had any reading instruction. For this reason, they were not given any standardized reading assessments that would depend on achieved results from instruction. They were assessed, however, on the essential skills that early reading instruction is based. The ECS children were administered an oral language test and the phonemic awareness tests of blending and segmenting.

The following chart shows the test findings at the beginning of the year and the test findings in May.

Oral Language Assessment (Reported in Percentages)

<u>Class</u>	<u>September</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>Change</u>
1	17	40	23
2	26	58	32
3 (Focus Class)	20	46	31
Average for 1,2,3	21	48	29

The Oral Language Assessment is a set of 15 sentences of increasing complexity in vocabulary and syntax. It could be considered semi-standardized in that it has categories

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of “emergent readers.” It was used here to show the close correlation between oral language and written language. It will not be summarized, but the scores may be useful for discussion with teachers at a later date regarding the progress of individual students.

Blending

<u>Class</u>	<u>September</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>Change</u>
1	17	64	47
2	16	54	37
3 (Focus Class)	11	58	47
Average for 1,2,3	15	55	44

Segmenting

<u>Class</u>	<u>September</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>Change</u>
1	7	54	47
2	5	55	50
3 (Focus Class)	5	63	58
Average for 1,2,3	6	57	52

In September, the Focus class began at a considerably lower class average than the other ECS classes. The average for the Focus class in Phonemic Awareness/Blending and Segmenting was 8, while the average for the other 2 classes was 11. In other words, there were more low-achieving students in the Focus class than in the other ECS classes. This may have been because of some four-year-olds in the class.

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When the students were reassessed in May, the average in the Focus class jumped to an average of 61% compared to an average of 56% in the other classes.

A conclusion we can draw from these findings is that although the classroom that used the Discover Reading program started out lower in the fall, it came out higher than the other classes in May.

The following chart shows the outcomes for the students who received additional help outside of the classroom.

ECS 1:1 Blending and Segmenting

(These are the scores for the ten children who had individual help from the Educational Assistants.)

<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>
0	90
0	30
0	0
0	60
0	84
0	40
0	50
0	50
0	20
0	84

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It is easy to see how well they have achieved. They could do none of the items in September, and all but one student has made good progress in the essential blending and segmenting skills.

The average change for these students who started very low is 51%, compared to 45% for the regular classes (blending and segmenting combined). The Education Assistants providing individual help obviously helped these students to gain a foothold on early reading skills.

(The child who seemingly made no growth also scored "0" on the language test. He or she may be very new to English.)

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GRADE 1 SUMMARY

Grade One students in September can be expected to have had little reading instruction in ECS, so we did not administer any formal reading tests. However, we did administer the phonemic awareness tests of blending and segmenting using oral prompts only, and we administered the Word Attack subtest from the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test. The Word Attack test measures a child's knowledge of the code – that is, the ability to decode words based on his knowledge of print-to-sound associations.

Word Attack Test Results

At the beginning of the year in Grade 1, most students do not attain grade equivalent scores. Instead, we use a measure called a "Standard Score" which results from statistically manipulating raw scores and allows a teacher to obtain a rating for a child's performance. These standard scores permit the tester to determine if the child is performing in the average, above average, below average ranges, et cetera.

By the end of Grade 1, children have usually learned enough to attain grade-equivalent scores – which will be reported on here as well as Standard Scores.

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<u>Class</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change (Standard Score Class Averages)</u>
1	99.2	92.3	-6.9
2	92.1	101.3	14.4
3	92.7	95.6	2.9
4	94.4	110.6	16.2
Grade 1 Average	92.1	100	6.7

The Standard Score average range extends from 85 to 115, so it is clear that the Grade 1 average is right in the middle (100).

By the end of Grade 1 (actually mid May), it is possible to provide grade-equivalent scores for the Post Testing of the Word Attack Test.

<u>Class</u>	<u>Post Test Grade Equivalent (Class Average)</u>
1	1.4
2	1.1
3	2.0
4	2.7
Grade Average:	1.8
Focus Class:	1.9

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The Grade 1 Focus Class averaged 1.9. It is clear that the Focus Class performed a little better than average, but not as well as two other Grade 1 classes. However, when I look back at the data sheets, there are some students with scores as high as Grade 10 and 12, which bring the average for the regular classes up unexpectedly high. If these scores were not used, the Focus Class would show a clear advantage.

Grade 1 Phonemic Awareness/Blending and Segmenting

<u>Class</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u> (In Percentages)
1	31	74	43
2	41	71	30
3	26	66	40
4	32	90	58
Grade Average	33	75	42

These are not standardized findings, so formal statistical analysis cannot be done. However, it is clear that there has been considerable growth in these essential skills throughout the year, in all four of the regular Grade 1 classes.

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Grade 1 Focus Class

	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u> (Standard Scores)
Word Attack	84	97	13

By comparison to the regular Grade 1 classes, these scores seem low, but these results are deceiving. The Focus class began with a below average score of 84 (average equals 85 - 115), whereas the regular classes' average was 92 – well within the average range. However, the gain in standard score from pre-testing to post-testing was 13 points for the Focus class and 6.7 for the regular classes. The Focus class average is now well within the average range. This is indicative of very good attainment for the class that used the Discover Reading program.

Focus Class – Phonemic Awareness/Blending and Segmenting

(The regular Grade 1 class averages are in the parentheses.)

<u>Pre-Test</u>	<u>Post-Test</u>	<u>Change</u>
6% (33)	88% (75)	82% (42)

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This is remarkable growth. At the onset of the project, the Focus class was much lower than the Grade 1 average. Discover Reading focuses on the early-reading skills such as blending and segmenting and the advantage of the use of this program is obvious when one compares the Focus class outcomes with those of the regular Grade 1 classes.

Spelling

	<u>Pre Test (in October)</u>	<u>Post Test (May)</u>
Class Average	< K.0	2.0

This, too, is remarkable growth. It parallels the change in Phonemic Awareness. The dramatic growth in Blending and Segmenting resulted in this very significant growth in spelling of more than 2 grade equivalents.

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GRADE 2 SUMMARY

An additional standardized test was administered to the Grade 2 classes because they would have had reading instruction in Grade 1. The TOWRE was administered along with Work Attack, Blending, and Segmenting.

It is now possible to report the findings of the standardized tests in grade equivalents.

Word Attack Test

<u>Grade 2 Average (4 Classes)</u>			<u>Focus Class Average</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
2.4	4.3	1.9	2.7	7.2	4.5

The Discover Reading program is a systematic approach to teaching the sound-symbol relationship in the very complex English writing system. This is surely why we see this remarkable outcome for the Grade 2 Focus class. When one realizes the importance of knowing the code so well, it is easy to see that these children have built a strong platform on which to build on-going literacy and academic success.

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Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE)

TOWRE – Real Words

<u>Average Grade 2 Results (4 Classes)</u>			<u>Grade 2 Focus Class</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
2.0	3.0	1.0	2.1	3.7	1.6

TOWRE – Pseudo Words

<u>Average Grade 2 Results</u>			<u>Grade 2 Focus Class</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
2.1	3.1	1.0	2.3	4.5	2.2

As explained in the General Assessment section, the TOWRE test is similar to the Word Attack Test except that it is timed. This means that it measures fluency (rate and accuracy) as well as code knowledge. This is a higher step in the process of learning to read. (Please see the diagram of the reading process.)

The results are good for the Grade 2 average in that an entire year's growth was made in fluency in both real and pseudo words.

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Once again, though, the class in which Discover Reading was taught made significantly more progress in fluency – almost twice as much as the Grade 2 average, overall.

Blending and Segmenting

<u>Grade 2 Average (4 Classes)</u>			<u>Focus Class Average</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
57%	80%	23%	59%	85%	26%

In these essential skills, the Grade 2 class average and the Focus Class average are similar. All classes made significant gains with seemingly little advantage to the Focus Class that used the Discover Reading program.

Spelling

Only the Focus Class was given the Wide Range Achievement Test for Spelling. The pre-test average was 3.7 and the post-test average was 6.3, a gain of 2 years 6 months.

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Grade 2 One-on-One Intervention

Ten Grade 2 students received individual attention for Discover Reading. The results are as follows:

<u>Word Attack Average</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
1.3	3.9	2.6

This is an exceptional result. These students, on average, have gone from below expectations for their grade placement, to above their expected grade placement for the beginning of Grade 3 in the fall.

<u>TOWRE – Real Words</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
1.1	2.0	0.9

<u>TOWRE – Pseudo Words</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
1.2	2.0	0.8

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In the 6 months of intervention, these students have gained almost one grade equivalent. They are now, on average, where they should have been at the beginning of Grade 2. Although they have made good progress, they will still require additional support to close the gap between their present level to the expectations for the beginning of Grade 3 in the fall.

Blending and Segmenting

<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
50%	89%	39%

On average, these students have made excellent progress on these essential skills. The power of intensive individual help from a trained Educational Assistant has been demonstrated once again.

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GRADE 3 SUMMARY

Word Attack Test

<u>Grade 3 Average (3 Classes)</u>			<u>Focus Class Average</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
3.7	5.7	2.0	3.7	7.5	3.8

The regular Grade 3 classes gained 2 grade levels this year according to the findings of this test. This is unquestioningly a good result. The Focus Class made almost twice that gain. It would be hard to prove that Discover Reading made all the difference; however, the correlation is very strong.

Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE)

TOWRE – Real Words

<u>Grade 3 Class Average (3 Classes)</u>			<u>Focus Class</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
2.8	4.0	1.2	2.8	4.1	1.3

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TOWRE – Pseudo Words

<u>Grade 3 Average</u>			<u>Focus Class Average</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
2.7	5.0	2.3	2.9	5.3	2.4

As explained in the General Assessment section, the TOWRE measures reading fluency. The findings above indicate that the regular Grade 3 classes and the Focus Class are almost even – having started and finished at more or less the same points. Good progress was made by all classes – an indication of appropriate and strong teaching in all classrooms.

Blending and Segmenting

<u>Grade 3 Class Average</u>			<u>Focus Class</u>		
<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
62%	77%	15%	68%	94%	26%

The Focus Class appears to have made significantly better progress on these two essential skills.

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Spelling

Only the Focus Class was administered the Wide Range Achievement Test, Spelling. The average grade equivalent on the pre-test was 4.6 and the average grade equivalent on the post-test was 5.9, a gain of 1 year 3 months.

This is a very good result for the Focus Class.

Grade 3 Students Who Had One-to-One Support

Twelve Grade 3 students received one-on-one intervention in Discover Reading from a trained Educational Assistant. The intervention was provided from early November to early May, a period of approximately 6 months only.

Word Attack

The following averages are for 11 of the students. The 12th student made a phenomenal leap from Grade 2.0 to Grade 12.9, so these scores are not included because they would skew the results and give a false impression of progress over all.

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<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
1.2	3.0	1.8

The students receiving individual assistance made a gain of almost 2 grade levels. This is remarkable growth and compares favourably with the Grade 3 class average of 2.0 grades. It is important to note, however, that with an average of 3.0, they are still almost one grade equivalent below where they should be at the end of Grade 3. These students still require individual support to close the gap between them and their grade placement.

Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE)

TOWRE – Real Words

<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
1.4	2.5	1.1

TOWRE – Pseudo Words

<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
1.3	2.1	0.8

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For the short duration of the intervention, these students made good progress in reading fluency. They still require additional support to close the gap between their reading levels and their grade placement.

Blending and Segmenting

<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Change</u>
54%	88%	34%

The one-on-one students made very good progress on these essential skills. Their final average score on the post tests (88%) is better than the final class average of 77%.

Spelling

- Focus Class Only -

<u>Pre-Test Average</u>	<u>Post-Test Average</u>	<u>Average Change</u>
4.6	5.9	1.3

This very good improvement follows from the excellent progress these individual students have made in the code knowledge (Word Attack) and Phonemic Awareness (Blending and Segmenting).

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GRADE 4

Grade 4 was not included in the original project plan, so during the assessment period in September this grade was not assessed. The individual Grade 4 students were referred by their teachers because these students were in need of help with their reading. The Educational Assistant who worked with them measured their phonemic awareness and their code knowledge.

Nine students received individual attention for approximately six months – from early November to early in May. Their average phonemic awareness (blending and segmenting) skills grew from 67% to 78%. Their code knowledge, as assessed by the Discover Reading Sound Links to Sounds Test, grew from 22% to 60%. Therefore, this improvement in the essential basics of reading and spelling should translate into improved achievement in the classroom.

These students should be assessed early in the new school year and if necessary, provided with the intensive intervention they are likely to require.

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APPENDIX 1

Assessment

For this project, two types of assessment instruments were used: formal, standardized tests, and informal curriculum-based tests.

Standardized Tests

These tests have been given to thousands of people of a wide age and grade range, over a wide geographical area, and to people of the cultures represented in North America. Statisticians use the findings of these tests to determine appropriate scores for all ages and grades and these are set down in tables so we can look up a student's score and compare it to the score of hundreds of others the same age and grade. So we measure students against other students with standardized tests.

Curriculum-Based Tests

These are considered informal because they do not go through the rigid statistical manipulations that standardized tests do. These tests are made up from the actual

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teaching materials one is using with the students. These tests are very helpful in telling us precisely what a child has learned on the subject and what he still needs to learn.

We measure a student against himself, in a way; that is, how much does he know about what he has to learn?

The Word Attack Test

The Word Attack Test is a standardized test. It measures understanding of the complex code of English, and how well a student can decode nonsense words compared to other students. This test uses nonsense words, not real words, very deliberately. Real words are sometimes memorized as entire units – so when a child reads real words, there is a chance that he is not using the ability to decode by automatic analysis of the individual sound representations in the word.

Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE)

This test requires a student to read lists of real words and pseudo words. It is similar to the Word Attack Test except that the TOWRE is timed. Therefore, this test measures decoding ability and fluency (accuracy and rate). Fluency comes from automaticity with

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the code. It is important to know the code so that a person doesn't need to think about the decoding aspect of reading. He is able to use his cognitive resources to comprehend what he is reading and not be using his resources to figure out what the words are.

Blending and Segmenting Tests

These are two of the most essential skills that one needs to read and spell. (They were briefly explained above.)

These are Curriculum-Based Tests because they test a student's ability directly with the material he is using and needs to know.

The Discover Reading program provides much practice in these skills and moves logically and systematically from easy words to more complex words. Easy words have only one syllable made up of very common spellings. A complex word may be made up of several syllables and use uncommon spellings for the sounds.

An easy word is one like "man" – one syllable with three easy to spell sounds. A harder word could be "pneumonia" – four syllables and a rare spelling for the sound "n" at the beginning.

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Some General Comments About the Assessment Procedure

Accurate assessment requires training and experience. Because of time restraints we had to use all of our available resources which meant the Literacy Coordinator and six Educational Assistants – all of whom did receive some initial training.

As the data was analyzed for over 300 students, some anomalies were bound to surface. For example, if there was a wide discrepancy between a pre-test and a post-test where the post-test was lower (Eg. Pre-test Grade 3, 1st month and Post-test < K or Grade 1), there was obviously an error – either in administration or in recording. In any case, wherever illogical events occurred, the scores were not used.

Kindergarten children were only assessed on oral blending and segmenting of words. Because they would not have had any prior instruction, they were not presented with anything to read.

The Grade 1 students were given an additional test to blending and segmenting. Because it is becoming quite normal to do some early reading instruction in kindergarten/ECS, the Word Attack Subtest was administered. With only two or three exceptions, the Grade 1 students did not acquire grade equivalent scores on the pre-test (they did on the post-test

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in May). It was not possible to use grade-equivalent scores to measure progress. Instead, I used different derived scores called Standard Scores. They are more abstract than grades, but one can see changes and some indication of what is average.

For Grades 2 and 3, we administered the TOWRE fluency tests as well as all the others.

In September, Grade 4 was not going to be part of the project. However, with the addition of trained Educational Assistants in October, we included on our caseloads individual Grade 4 students for individual help. These students were selected by their teachers and were not identified by the assessment initiative in September that only included students up to Grade 3.

Spelling

At the beginning of the project in September, we did not have a standardized instrument for measuring spelling, so there are no pre- and post-test spelling findings for the regular classes – only for the Focus classes.

Spelling (encoding) is the reciprocal of reading/decoding, so the Discover Reading program can be thought of as a reading and spelling program. A systematic approach to the reading process also helps students improve their spelling ability.

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Two additional assessment instruments should be added to the pre- and post-testing procedures:

- 1) A standardized spelling test, and
- 2) An easily administered, standardized comprehension test.

These tests could be class-based which would take less time than individually-administered tests.

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CONCLUSION

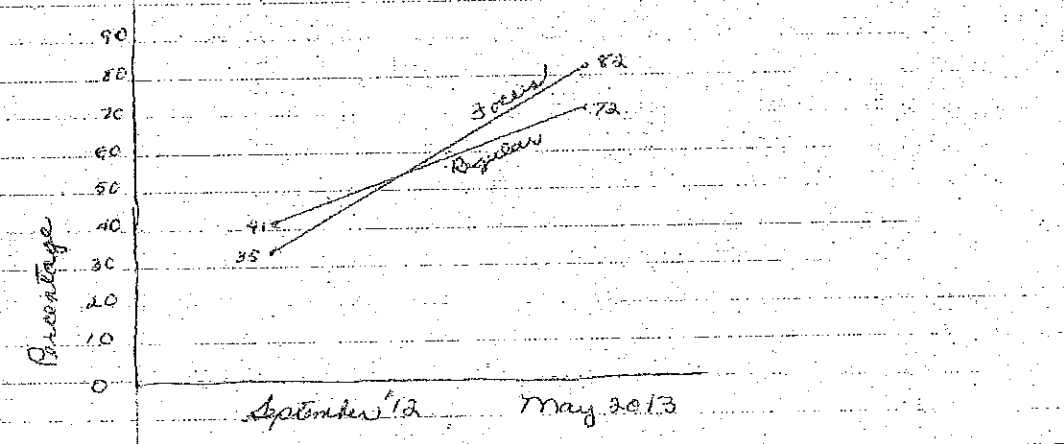
Pages and pages of data have been added, averaged, compared, correlated, and, finally, distilled into the short summaries in this report. So, what does all this analysis show, and what can our conclusions be?

Generally speaking, Almadina Mountain View continued with its characteristically good success. This is obvious from the tables showing averaged student achievement. The charts also indicate that in every case, the Focus classes performed even better.

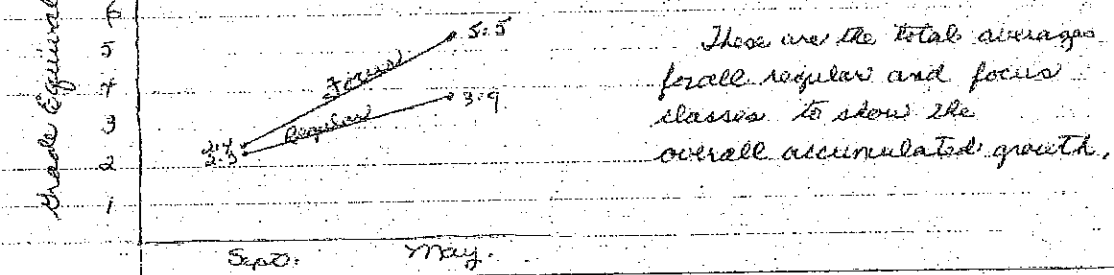
The appended graphs compress the findings even more, and make it easier to visualize the results of the three main areas of emphasis: phonemic awareness/blending and segmenting, code knowledge, and fluency/automaticity with the code.

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① Phonemic Awareness: The average of all the focus classes is compared with the average of all regular classes in K to Grade 3.

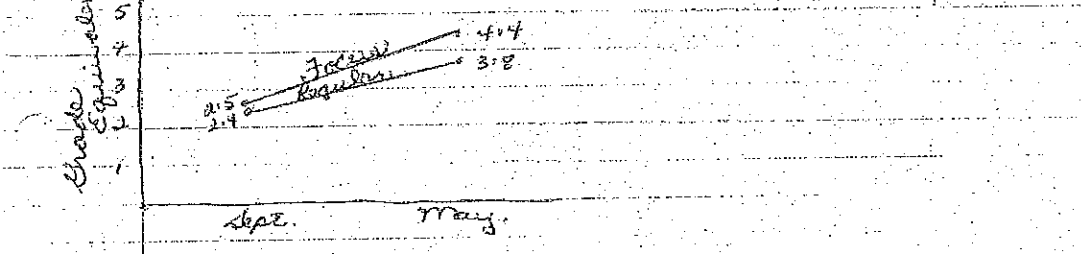


② Code Knowledge as assessed with the Word Attack Test (As explained in the text, ECS was not given this test. The Grade 1 Pre-Test average used for this summary is K+8)



These are the total averages for all regular and focus classes to show the overall accumulated growth.

③ Code Knowledge and Fluency: TOWRE Real & Pseudowords Revisited



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RECOMMENDATIONS

Subjective feedback and objective data support the value of continuing with the literacy/reading project. It enhances the progress of regular students. It can prevent reading failure and also help to close the gap between struggling readers and their appropriate competence levels. In light of these things, I think the following recommendations are in order:

1. Provide training in Discover Reading for teachers who request it.
2. Provide on-going support and consultation for the program throughout the year.
3. Continue with the Educational Assistant support to ensure that all students receive the amount of support they require to succeed.
4. Provide teachers with information about and training in comprehension strategies.

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APPENDIX 2

Some General Observations

The benefits of an intensive program like Discover Reading that works on cognitive change are not always immediately apparent. The improved ability carries on even when the training is over. This is especially true if the students actually become engaged in reading. We learn to do things by doing them. Reading is learned by reading. This is the same as any other skill such as dancing or flying jet planes. After some initial training, practice brings about the desired competence.

The mastery of reading lies, above all, in our ability to decode new words. ...Once they master the spelling-to-sound correspondences, children can, on their own, decipher the pronunciation of a novel string and associate it with a familiar meaning... the neuronal links from letter strings to sound and meaning can be progressively automatized without any further formal instruction. (P. 226 Reading in the Brain) ...decoding and comprehension go hand in hand. The children with the best scores in decoding single words and pseudo words also perform best on sentence and text comprehension. ...The faster the speech-to-

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sound route is automatized, the more a child will be in a position to concentrate on the meaning of what he reads. (Pg. 228, Reading in the Brain)

The trained Educational Assistants accomplished good results already; however, now that they are really familiar with the program, and their learning period is over, they will be ever so much more effective in the future. One of the most important reasons for their on-going improvement is that they have learned a lot more than just teaching a program by rote. They have learned and understand a great deal about the reading process. Besides knowing how to teach various activities, they understand why they are necessary. This understanding will help them to be more creative and flexible in adapting to the needs of their students.

Resources for Further Exploration

Diane McGuinness, Why Our Children Can't Read and What We Can Do About It

Diane McGuinness, Early Reading Instruction

Stanislas Dehaene, Reading in the Brain, The Science and Evolution of a Human Invention

"The Case for the Narrow View of Reading" and "The Narrow View of Reading Promotes a Broad View of Comprehension" Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, Volume 40, April 2009

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APPENDIX 3

Note about Grade Equivalent Scores

Often grade equivalent scores are considerably higher than students' grade placements. This is noticeable on the Word Attack Test and the Wide Range Achievement Spelling Test, but not necessarily on the Test of Word Reading Efficiency. What is the reason for this seeming discrepancy?

Children are expected to learn the code early in the primary grades. As the students move through the grades, there are only a few more items (spelling of sounds) that are expected of older students. For example, on the Word Attack Test there are 42 items. A Grade 3 student is expected to obtain 27 of them. A Grade 7 score would only be 34, and a Grade 12 score would only be 36 out of 42. Therefore, when children learn the code well, and start obtaining these higher scores, they are considered to have the equivalent code knowledge of older students. The same reasoning applies to the acquisition of spelling. If a young child spells the words on a test as well as older students, the child will receive the high mark.

Although the TOWRE tests code knowledge, too, it adds the additional challenge of fluency – not just knowing the code, but knowing it automatically without requiring

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much cognitive energy. This improves with practice, so it is not as easy for young students to obtain the same scores as older students.

