

**AN EVALUATION OF THE LITERACY LOOP:  
AN AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING PROGRAM**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2001, Action Learning Systems, Inc. (ALS) designed and piloted a cross-age tutoring program called the Literacy Loop (LL) at an LA's BEST site (Coliseum) in an effort to enhance elementary school students' reading comprehension and writing skills. The initial exploratory findings showed promising results for both students and tutors (CRESST, 2002). In October 2002, the Literacy Loop expanded to two additional LA's BEST sites, Baldwin Hills and Sylmar. The UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation was asked to conduct a study of this expansion. The study examined Literacy Loop relative to a number of issues:

- effectiveness at the original site,
- effectiveness of the expansion at the two additional LA's BEST sites,
- fidelity of implementation to design specifications,
- effectiveness for the major ethnic groups served by the program, and
- benefits to students' reading and writing development.

### Methodology

The study used a treatment and comparison group design to examine issues of program effectiveness. The performance of 180 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade LL participants across the three schools was compared to that of 75 non-participants from the same grade levels at those schools. Student performance measures included the Index of Reading Awareness, a multiple-choice survey designed by Jacobs and Paris (1987) to provide information about students' reading strategies; students grades in reading; results from two standard, curriculum embedded tests administered as part of each school's regular *Open Court* reading program; and results from the California Standards Test. Regular classroom teachers and LL tutors also were asked through specially designed surveys to report on the program's impact on students' academic and social skills.

Issues of the quality and fidelity of LL implementation were addressed by direct observation of the daily interactions among the tutors and students. The

evaluators observed three sessions in a row each week. All of the classrooms at each site were observed multiple times and by multiple observers.

## Results and Discussion

In this discussion we revisit some of our evaluation questions and answer them based on our quantitative and qualitative data results.

### Evaluation Question 1

*How effective is the expansion process?*

Overall, the program is operational at all three sites. The students are usually engaged in the LL program, completing their reading and writing assignments, learning new story concepts and vocabulary, learning how to interact well with one another, and are motivated to do their work. In most cases, positive relationships between students, tutors, and staff were established and maintained during the program. These findings were supported both by classroom observations and surveys. Although there are a number of areas in which the Literacy Loop could be improved so as to achieve even more of the program's goals, the program has a solid foundation and had a strong beginning.

### Evaluation Question 2

*Does the Literacy Loop have an effect on participants' academics in class?*

The results of our analyses revealed that there were no overall differences between the Literacy Loop students and the control group on overall Index of Reading Awareness or *Open Court* and classroom reading and writing scores, and the CST performance. The effects of the Loop program did not differ by gender. There is also no significant difference in most achievement indicators between the African American and Hispanic students. One exception is the *Open Court* Comprehension score, in which Hispanic students had a significantly higher change score than the African American students. These results raise speculation about the extent to which varying degrees of program effectiveness may be related to students' Limited English Proficient (LEP) status. Students with lower English proficiency tended to benefit more from the program in certain areas of reading and writing. For future studies, it will be beneficial to examine this issue in depth and to

carefully consider the finding in order to make the program more beneficial for students of all English proficiency levels.

The majority of the tutors perceived that they had positive academic and social impacts on students. Students' regular classroom teachers also were positive about the effects of LL on their students' classroom performance and participation.

### **Evaluation Question 3**

Does the Literacy Loop have a social effect on LA's BEST students?

Tutors and teachers noted that there were positive effects of the LL on their students' social skills and improvements in discipline and social interactions during the course of the program. Most of the tutors perceived that they had a positive impact on students in terms of improving students' self-esteem, conflict resolution, social interaction, peer relationships, tutor-student relationships, comfort level, and confidence. Most of the teachers also rated that the students' efforts to help others, social behavior, and quality of performance in the classroom had improved.

Further improvements in this area could be realized with a little extra effort from the staff, tutors, and students. It appears that while the tutors generally were able to help mentor their students, a majority of them may need additional help and time to develop mentoring relationships as well as students' collaborative and cooperative skills. With improvements in this area, the Loop program could become a powerful tool for fostering positive social interactions between students and their peers as well as with adults.

### **Conclusions**

Evaluation observations and findings give rise to a number of recommendations for building on the foundation that LL has established to further strengthen the program and its effectiveness. These suggestions address social climate, nature of activities, tutor-student interactions, instructional feedback, teaching strategies, academic motivation and inspiration, social motivation and inspiration, and student interaction.

However, these recommendations should not detract from the positive findings of this evaluation. Literacy Loop was able to effectively expand to two more sites. The classroom teachers and tutors at all three sites are satisfied with the progress of

the program, believe the program is beneficial to the students, and support the program. The Loop is achieving its goals in offering students a structured time three days a week where they can work on improving their reading, writing, and art skills. The Loop also provides students with the opportunity to learn different means of writing, such as through the use of graphic organizers and essay writing. The students and tutors have developed positive relationships.

Interestingly, it appears that the Loop program is more effective with students working on their language skills, such as LEP students. This is illustrated by the gains at the Sylmar site, where the Loop students have achieved higher reading and writing classroom grades than the control students. Further investigation in this area will be beneficial. Although there were limited academic results, the teacher and tutor surveys appear to indicate that students developed a better attitude towards reading and writing and were able to demonstrate a higher quality of classroom participation than before.