

Hacker, J. Increasing oral reading fluency with elementary English language learners (2008)

This study looks at the impact of Great Leaps, a specialized supplemental oral reading fluency program, on two elementary English Language Learners. Key influences include experience in schools, district mandates, and The National Reading Panel in 2000 which highlighted fluency instruction as an area needing attention. The research was conducted in the ESL classroom using instruction and systematic observations of the two subject's performance. The study concluded that placing attention on oral reading fluency results in improvements. The student's oral fluency improved with practice, the attempts required were fewer with practice, and the anecdotal evidence showed there was comprehension. Additionally, through anecdotal observations the researcher found that the personality of the learner had an impact on the rate of improvement.

INCREASING ORAL READING FLUENCY  
WITH ELEMENTARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by

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To my family,  
James, Annissa, and Philip  
You are my inspiration.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Teaching children of all ages has been a major part of my life. And, with children comes the topic of reading. Reading is an essential language skill that is now in greater demand than any time in history (Browning, 2003). Across the nation, there is a growing awareness of the dividends of early reading success and of the stark consequences of early reading failure (Good, Kaminski, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 2001). The National Center for Education Statistics (1999) states the reading levels of students in the United States has remained relatively stable over the past two decades, but these reading levels no longer satisfy today's societal requirements in our aggressive economic environment. With the advancements of Internet worldwide, for example, students need to master reading just to understand the knowledge the world is embracing them with (Browning, 2003). Technology is rapidly changing, and even the use of text messaging with cell phones is evidence that in order to communicate, students need to be able to read and to comprehend the messages print produces.

Since I began teaching English language learners (ELLs), I have become aware of ELLs' need for specialized instruction in order to read at levels comparable to native English speakers. English language learners must show a language proficiency gain of fifteen months for every ten months of their native English speaking peers (Drucker, 2003). For ELLs to accomplish this growth, teachers must learn strategies to support

learning goals for English language learners. Schools across the nation need to make English language learners an educational priority.

The population figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau show the foreign-born population of the United States was at 31.1 million in 2000; 11.1% of the total population (NCELA Newslines Bulletin, 2002). The result is classrooms across the United States with significant numbers of students speaking a language other than English in our schools. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCELA Newslines Bulletin) also reports that of 3 million public school teachers surveyed, over forty percent have second language learners in their classrooms, but only 12.5% have received eight or more hours of any kind of English as a Second Language (ESL) training (2002).

Many ELLs often struggle not only with second language mastery, but with cultural integration, possible family trauma due to relocation or separation, economic deficiencies, and other factors that often impede learning. As a result, reading competencies for these English language learners may be more challenging to attain. Regardless of the challenges, it is the job of teachers to structure instruction in such a way that supports ELLs' success, particularly in developing literacy in English. Kaplan (1998) claims reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary development determine success in school as well as in all life skills. This creates a conundrum, while more and more teachers are serving English language learners in their classrooms, very few teachers have received or are receiving formal education on how best to teach second language learners. As a result, especially in small school districts, teachers themselves need to explore methods that work. Helping ELLs develop strong literacy skills is a

challenge that motivates many educators to seek out best practices in teaching ELLs, but Drucker (2003) maintains it should be a routine requirement for all teaching experiences.

In my work with ELLs, I have observed the process of learning and using a new language takes extra time. It is an important fact students, families, and schools know that it may take seven or more years for an English language learner to master oral English fluency (Smith, 1999). This is true not only of speaking English, but reading and comprehending written English as well. Studies have shown that English language learners need extended time to effectively read and to comprehend English (Collier & Thomas, 1989). An area of particular interest to me is that of oral reading fluency.

The topic of oral reading fluency is not new. Fluency is defined as the freedom from word identification and problems that might hinder comprehension (Harris & Hodges, 1995). But, the study of oral reading fluency has been labeled as “the most forgotten reading skill” (Allington, 1983). Oral reading fluency is gaining new recognition as an essential element of every reading program, especially with children who are struggling readers (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Lack of oral reading fluency is a common characteristic of poor readers but a defining characteristic of good readers. Oral reading fluency is a reliable predictor of reading comprehension, the long term goal in the process of reading mastery (Nathan & Stanovich, 1991). Yet, it is one area of reading that teachers often omit or struggle incorporating into reading programs. Even when classroom reading experiences are rich with reading and print, students do not develop oral reading fluency on their own. There needs to be explicit instruction and experiences that specifically target oral fluency (Pinnell, et al., 1995).

The International Reading Association has conducted a survey of teachers, administrators, and college professors for the past eleven years to identify 'hot' topics in reading (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2007). The most recent survey included teaching English language learners and fluency as two very hot issues. Fluency was one of the five key instructional areas identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) research as impacting reading development and comprehension. The Bush administration's reading legislation has also targeted the ELL population. Schools in districts across the nation must demonstrate that they are using valid and reliable accountability in educating these learners. If tests scores do not show adequate reading progress for ELLs, an entire school district may find themselves being overtaken by their state to implement their educational programs (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2007). Therefore teachers, researchers, and administrators need to continue looking for more effective and efficient ways to build language fluency in English language learners (Smith, 1999).

I work primarily with K-4 students. The earliest grades are a natural fit for the development of oral reading fluency. As students get older, oral fluency programs become focused on struggling readers. One such program is called Great Leaps (Mercer & Campbell, 1998). Great Leaps is a specialized supplemental oral fluency program. In this study I want to know if improving oral reading fluency helps English language learners development reading comprehension skills. I am interested in expanding my professional skills to better support successful reading comprehension for English language learners. Specifically, I want to investigate if the oral fluency program called Great Leaps makes a difference in reading mastery and comprehension. The question

that I have is:

What is the impact of Great Leaps on oral reading fluency for my English language learners?

In the next chapter I examine the literature regarding the development of oral reading skills and the relationship of oral fluency to comprehension. I present a description of the Great Leaps program (Mercer & Campbell, 1998).

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in this study. Chapter 4 presents the results of this study, and Chapter 5 reflects on the findings from a personal perspective as well as the implications for the teaching field.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I discuss the need for increasing oral reading fluency and whether it is a reading component for increasing reading comprehension in elementary English language learners (ELLs). I explore the importance of training for teachers and school administrations regarding best practices in teaching English language learners at the 'learning to read' stage of literacy development. I investigate the importance of programs designed to address the needs the second language learners in mainstream classrooms.

### Oral Reading Fluency

Reading fluency has been considered the most neglected part of reading instruction for a long time (Allington, 1983). Recent results from Reading First Research (2001) of the five reading domains, which include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; show fluency as the area with the most unanswered questions regarding reading skills (Hiebert, 2003). According to the National Reading Panel (2000), fluency instruction needs the most attention. As a result, oral reading fluency is currently a focus of directed research.

Oral reading fluency is comprised of several linguistic, or phonemic, elements. Richards (2000) describes fluency as being the ability to project the natural pitch, stress, and juncture of the spoken word on written text, automatically, and at a natural rate to be a successful reader. Pikulski and Chard (2005) define reading fluency as efficient,

effective word recognition skills that permit a reader to construct the meaning of text.

Fluency is manifested in accurate, rapid, and expressive oral reading. When it is applied during reading, fluency makes it possible for silent reading comprehension. According to Prescott-Griffin and Witherell (2004) reading fluency is far more than reading letters and symbols out loud; it is the bedrock of comprehension.

Comprehension is the essence of reading. It is the active and intentional thinking in which the meaning is constructed through interactions between the text and the reader (Durkin, 1979). Harris and Hodges (1995) state fluency is freedom from word identification problems that often hinder comprehension. Therefore, reading fluency is a stepping stone to the goal of comprehension, the ultimate purpose for reading.

Evidence of this purpose of reading fluency to reach the goal of reading comprehension is given by The National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading (Pinnell, et al., 1995). The work demonstrated the inter-connectedness of reading fluency and comprehension. Students, who were not fluent reading grade level appropriate materials, also struggled with meaning and comprehension. Students, who were fluent, showed a positive relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. In an assessment such as this, it remains unclear whether fluency is an outgrowth of, or a contributor to reading comprehension (Strecker, Roser, and Martinez, 1998).

Despite the difficulty identifying the exact relationship between oral reading fluency and comprehension, fluency is gaining recognition as an essential element of every reading program (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Fluency is regarded as the bridge between word recognition and comprehension; freeing students to become

proficient readers (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2003).

In a 2005 report at the National Reading First Conference, Davidson included nine steps to building fluency. The need for increasing vocabulary and oral language skills, teaching word-part and spelling patterns, use of decoding skills with adequate practice, use of guided oral repeated reading strategies for students, and overall support of readers were addressed. Davidson included the need for students to have some basic background before fluency. These steps include the ability to know the sound-symbol connections of sounding out words and being able to automatically recognize the words after seeing them a few times. Students need to be able to learn that words share spelling patterns and the patterns connect spoken syllabic units rather than just the graphophonemic, or sound units. Davidson also stated the fastest and least intrusive way to read text is reading words from memory by sight. When reading words instantly from memory by sight, students will be prepared to become fluent readers and will allow time for vocabulary and comprehension development.

Other aspects of oral fluency connect oral reading practice, oral expression, phrasing and pausing, and correct use of intonation to add meaning to the text (Rasinski, 2003). Richards (2000) stresses that all forms of oral reading fluency are critical to reading performance. In the classroom, one of the most obvious student behaviors that accompany difficulties in reading includes a slow, choppy rate of reading. This is most frequently accompanied by poor phrasing, halting intonation, and lack of expression when reading. While the connection between oral fluency and comprehension is quite intensive in the classroom, Allington (2001) cautions little actual research has focused on

reading fluency despite the wealth of reading research in general, and reading accuracy.

### How Kids Learn to Read

Learning to read does not just happen. It has to be taught through a systematic, organized method of instruction. Reading is a skill built upon through stages in an ongoing process (Beers, 2003). There are several theories regarding learning to read, and Chall (1996) is one who outlines her work in six stages. Chall's work about learning to read was first published in the 1960's, and her work is historical and seminal. Chall's predictable six stages of reading development include: Stage 0-pre-reading or oral language development that will support learning to read; Stage 1-recognition of letters represent sound and spelling relationships; Stage 2-decoding skills, fluency, and additional strategies to make meaning from print; Stage 3-using a wide variety of text to expand vocabulary to obtain information from text; Stage 4-analyzing text critically to understand multiple points of view; and Stage 5-constructing and reconstructing, where readers understand multiple points of view based on analysis and synthesis.

These six stages have been redefined and modified over the past fifty years. As a developmental process, the stages help in tailoring a framework to reading. The successive stages are characterized by a growth in the ability to read more complex, technical and abstract material. The intent of Chall's program is to use six steps as an aid in educational research and theory. Chall states this reading concept is to be used as a developmental scheme that allows for flexibility, dependent on the student population. Chall's concept is not a specific reading program, but a guide in the process of learning how to read.

## Chall's Stages of Reading Development

### Stage 0: Pre-reading Stage

The first stage of Chall's reading process is pre-reading. This period encompasses the literacy behaviors that are developed prior to formal instruction. That is, the learner develops a foundation of oral language that will allow later reading instruction to proceed in a meaningful manner where the outcomes will be a confident, proficient reader.

Pre-reading includes literacy behaviors that are developed before any formal instruction such as some knowledge of print and vocabulary. This is the stage where oral languages support learning to read. At the pre-reading stage, children identify about 6,000 vocabulary words and recognize there are letter/speech sounds in words.

### Stage 1: Initial Reading Stage, or Decoding Stage

This stage is the initial stage of conventional literacy or the beginning of formal reading instruction. At this stage, the instructional emphasis is upon developing learners' recognition of basic sound-symbol correspondences while providing learners with sufficient opportunity to establish their decoding ability. This relationship between being able to speak and understand the oral language and reading skills is especially important for English language learners. Children develop the ability to understand spoken language and master the complexities of speech, yet they do not know that spoken language is made up of discrete words. These words are those small parts of word sounds, and learning these sounds, or phonemes, need to be taught and are a crucial factor in learning to read.

Ehri (2002) states even before words can be decoded, children need to be able to identify the sounds represented by the letters or letter combinations, blend phonemes, read phonograms and use both letter-sound and meaning clues to determine exactly the pronunciation and meaning of the word that is in the text. These are fundamental elements of reading that must be mastered before moving to the next reading stage of development. ELLs need to be taught the English language has specific phonemes for the alphabet letters.

In this stage, the concept of phonemic awareness is developed. Phonemic awareness is a subset of phonological awareness in which learners are able to distinguish phonemes, the small units of sound that can differentiate meaning. An example of this would be when a learner could break the word “can” into three separate phonemes: /k/, /a/, and /t/. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear the sounds and to distinguish between them. This knowledge is part of the meta-linguistic awareness. It helps learners recognize and produce sounds by combining sounds that are specific to language; in this case, English. Being able to hear rhymes and alliteration as measured by knowledge of nursery rhymes, to do oddity tasks such as comparing and contrasting the sounds of words for rhyme and alliteration, to blend and split syllables, to count out the number of phonemes in a word, and to add or delete particular phonemes in a word are all parts of phonemic awareness (Adams, 1990).

The distinction between phonemic and phonological awareness is often confused. However, they are interdependent. The term phonological awareness refers to an awareness that words are made of sounds which are like interchangeable parts. They

consist of syllables and phonemes. The relationships as defined have been adopted in the No Child Left Behind approach in reading instruction (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1998).

Knowing about phonemic awareness is necessary for all learners. Research indicates phonemic awareness is the best predictor of the ease of early reading acquisition (Stanovich, 1993, December/1994 January), even better than IQ, vocabulary, and listening comprehension.

### Stage 2: Confirmation, Fluency, Ungluing from Print, Automaticity Stage

Stage 2 is a period called confirmation and fluency. This is the area that has recently drawn national reading attention, since research is indicating there needs to be more emphasis put on oral fluency to make proficient readers (National Reading Panel, 2000). Chall's stage 2, oral fluency, is of greatest relevance to this study. Stage 2 is where readers apply their knowledge of phonemic awareness and decoding (Stages 0 and 1) in order to develop their oral reading fluency skills. Having established accuracy in decoding during the previous stages, learners must now develop automaticity with print.

Reading automaticity refers to the reader's ability to recognize words without consciously decoding. Automaticity is the ability to do something quickly without a lot of conscious thought (Beers, 2003). This means a reader recognizes words quickly and accurately. Automaticity requires repeated exposure to words that can be decoded according to the phonemic rules of the language being read. Automaticity is a cognitive skill, referring only to accurate, speedy word recognition, not to reading with expression. Therefore, automaticity is necessary, but not always sufficient, for fluency (Ambruster,

Lehr, & Osborn, 2001).

Independent readers, those who do not rely on others for direction, need about ten attempts to automatically recognize a word, whereas a struggling reader may need to see a word forty times (Ambruster, et. al., 2001). Without automaticity, cognitive energy is not spent on constructing meaning from print but recognizing discrete meaning-making components. Student effort is directed at individual words. In addition, struggling readers often pause between words or phrases, ignoring punctuation marks that assist in reading fluency. These students fail to recognize meaningful chunks of text and often make frequent mistakes applying phonemic and phonetic rules. Struggling readers often use a monotone, which further inhibits their ability to make meaning from what they hear.

Fluent readers, in contrast to struggling readers, have had experience with decoding and comprehending that every new encounter with text requires less cognitive processing. When the words in a text can be decoded with ease, or automatically, this leaves more cognitive resources available for the task of comprehension, the automaticity theory of LaBerge and Samuels (1974). Research by Nathan and Stanovich (1991) indicates fluent word recognition may be a necessary condition for enjoyable reading experiences.

According to Chall's model, after the learners have established a basic familiarity with sound-symbol correspondences, learners need to focus on automatizing decoding abilities. This period of development is not for learning new skills, but for confirming what is already known by the reader. This type of practice allows learners to become

comfortable with print and enables the transition from learning to read to reading to learn proceed smoothly (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). Adams (1990) emphasizes without automatic processing, students will continue to expend a disproportionately large percentage of their attention on decoding which, in turn, leaves them with an inadequate amount of their attention to be used for comprehension. In other words, these studies support Allington (1983) that fluency is a prerequisite if learners are to succeed in the primary purpose of reading, the construction of meaning from text.

When working with English language learners, accurate pronunciation of English sounds, rhythms, and intonation patterns support accuracy and automaticity. However, research shows word fluency and accuracy are interconnected with students' overall language and fluency probably affect the accuracy of pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). This is an indication that English language learners who struggle with pronunciation accuracy also need practice in oral fluency to boost confidence in the area of reading automaticity. In a study on single-word training, Levy, Abello, and Lysynchuk (1997) found word lists and flash cards helped struggling readers develop automaticity with words. Isolating words in practice also helped readers easily identify the practiced words in context, resulting in improved oral reading fluency.

Prosody is another aspect of oral reading fluency (Dowhower, 1991), commonly referred to as 'reading with expression'. Prosody is a general linguistic term to describe rhythmic and tonal features of speech. These elements usually cover more than one phoneme segment such as syllables, words, or larger units of speech; they are called suprasegmental features. These prosodic features involve pitch or intonation, stress or

loudness, and duration or timing. There are few clues in written language that constitute natural phrasing, one of the reasons why students may struggle with fluency (Allington, 1983). Students do not automatically know what constitutes natural phrasing, nor do teachers spend adequate time in instructing and in teaching how to master prosody. When students are provided with models of natural or conversational rhythms of language, they are able to imitate prosodic features of phrasing, stress, and intonation in their reading (Chall, 1996).

Word recognition, automaticity, and prosody seem to come naturally for some learners, and the results are good readers. But, for those who struggle at attaining goals of good reading strategies, the results can lead to experiences that result in less involvement in reading related activities (Nathan & Stanovich, 1991). Pikulski and Chard (2005) state while the construct of fluency may have been neglected in the past, reading programs in today's education need to include teachers who model oral reading fluency, automaticity, and prosody. Classroom opportunities to practice oral reading fluency demonstrating automaticity and prosody need to be part of reading curriculums to give students the tools in becoming successful readers.

### Stage 3: Reading for Learning the New Stage: A First Step

At this stage, learners attain sufficient skill in reading to transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Prior to this stage, learners needed to be guided through developmental steps to facilitate building a foundation for successful reading. Stage 3 marks the beginning of increasing amounts of expository text designed to develop reading for learning. This marks a change in the majority of school systems in the United

States where early grades focus on developing reading skills to later grades for information in forming content knowledge. Content curriculum is presented through written text and students are expected to comprehend content information through increasingly complex texts. Learners who have not mastered 'learning to read' strategies are likely to fall further and further behind in their academic performance (Chall, 1996). Therefore, it is necessary to develop the skills outlined in the first stages before moving to the next stages.

#### Stage 4: Multiple Viewpoints Stage

Stage 4 is where learners have the ability to analyze text critically. Learners are able to understand multiple points of view from the print that they read. This stage involves the previous stages. As reading fluency increases, the comprehension and reading development continue to grow.

#### Stage 5: Construction and Reconstruction Stage

The final stage in Chall's theory is construction and reconstruction. It is at this stage an individual begins to integrate one's own background knowledge and experiences with viewpoints presented by the author. The ability to synthesize viewpoints presented in texts is an essential skill for critical reading. Critical reading goes beyond being satisfied with recognizing what a text has to say and then restating the key remarks. Having recognized what the text says, a critical reader recognizes the purpose involves inferring a basis for choices of content and language. The critical reader recognizes the tone and persuasive elements involve classifying the nature of language choices. The critical reader also recognizes bias involving classifying the nature of patterns of choice

of content and language (Kurland, 2000).

Without extensive work in the oral fluency phase of reading instruction, which needs to be developed in Stage 2, learners are less likely to reach the final stages of Chall's model. Construction and reconstruction, stage 5, is when an individual should begin to synthesize the myriad viewpoints presented in texts in order to determine their own perspective and meaning on a given subject, a skill that is essential if a learner is to develop into a critical reader. Fluency is a prerequisite if learners are to succeed at the primary purpose of reading, the construction of meaning from text (Allington, 1983). Second language learners are less likely to reach the level of comprehension if interventions are not in place to reinforce and to first master oral reading fluency.

#### English Language Learners and Reading Instruction

What is appropriate instruction for those learners who speak a language other than English? According to Drucker (2003) there are some similarities between reading in a first language and reading in a second language. In daily conversations, the setting, body language, facial expressions, gestures, and intonation help all learners, including ELLs, understand meaning of what is being said. In reading, however, there are differences in sound-letter correlations from a first language that may be a reason for reading and comprehension difficulties for ELLs. In summary, while many reading strategies transfer from one language to another, it would be a mistake to think learning to read in a second language is simply a mapping process during which the reader uses the same set of strategies in precisely the same manner.

Lesaux and Greer (2003) demonstrated the need for teaching strategies to assist

ELLs with early reading success in a K-2 study of Canadian schools. Screenings were conducted on one thousand students, twenty percent identified as ELL, to identify reading difficulties and appropriate instructional interventions. One recommended intervention for ELLs included additional reading practice in fluency working with trained teachers three to four times a week for 20 minutes. Children with little or no experience with English showed gains in reading fluency. By the end of second grade, the ELLs attained reading skills similar to, and in some cases, better than their native English-speaking peers. Bilingualism was clearly not an impediment to the acquisition of literacy skills in ELLs. The findings supported the concept that all children, including ELLs, are likely to benefit from early fluency interventions in reading. Lesaux and Greer observed teacher participation throughout the study. They concluded educators must be trained and committed to monitoring early interventions for student progress as well as providing additional support for children identified as 'at-risk' for reading difficulties.

McEwan (2002) presents a classroom assessment that is simple, quick, and sensitive to the smallest incremental changes in oral reading fluency. Teachers can measure reading fluency simply by asking students to read a passage of grade level text. Accuracy and rate are scored in one minute timings and the results are determined using a readability formula (Chall & Dale, 1995). McEwan (2002) claims reading fluency rates are excellent indicators of reading abilities through the sixth grade. According to McEwan, an oral reading fluency rate of 140 correct words per minute is a rate used as an adequate pace for oral reading fluency and faster is not better. When this pace of 140 correct words per minute is reached, students do not have to concentrate on simply

reading words accurately. Attention on improving expressiveness, voice projection, and clarity of speech in oral reading can be the reading focus. Accuracy and oral fluency rates correlate to higher comprehension scores for students than if students read to themselves (Jenkins, Fuchs, Espin, van den Broek, & Deno, 2000). Fluent readers have more time to concentrate on meaning and comprehension of what they read (Calfee & Piontkowski, 1981).

Other recommendations regarding fluency in ELLs, remind educators to keep in mind many young students do not have a fully developed native language on which to base the learning of their second language. Therefore, the need to know vocabulary and grammar in the native language in order to develop second language reading skills need not be a requirement for success (DeHouwer, 1999). A strong language background in a native language seems to be more essential as a reading base for later rather than in earlier reading stages (Chall, 1996).

A study designed to examine whether the same component processes are involved in reading acquisition for children with varying levels of proficiency in English was conducted by Chiappe, Siegel, and Wade-Woolly (2002). This two-year study took place in a school in North Vancouver, Canada. Early level readers from kindergarten and first grade were followed over the course of the two year study. Children were evaluated on tasks assessing basic literacy skills, phonological processing, verbal memory, and syntactic awareness. Of the 858 participants, 131 children spoke languages other than English. The ESL group showed tremendous heterogeneity, so test results were not language specific. The ESL children had initial difficulties in phonological awareness,

syntactic awareness, and verbal memory but acquired the same basic literacy skills at the same rate as native-speaking children by first grade. The same instructional methods fostered the development of decoding and spelling for all children in the study. Furthermore, alphabetic knowledge and phonological processing were important contributors to early reading skill for children from both language groups. The results reinforced the concept that children learning English may acquire literacy skills in English in a similar manner to native English speaking children, even though their alphabetic knowledge of native English speakers may precede and facilitate the acquisition of phonological awareness necessary for reading in English. Test results indicated good instruction may be a factor in a gap for children with linguistically diverse backgrounds.

#### Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Connections

The results of these studies suggest a connection between oral reading fluency and reading success. If the ultimate goal of reading instruction is to teach children to interact meaningfully with a variety of texts, teachers need to recognize how reading fluency contributes to good reading. Explicit instruction must focus students on recognizing words, reading at a suitable rate, and understanding how to project the phrasing and expression of spoken word upon the written word (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Young children need to hear themselves read and receive feedback from adult readers in order to development independent skills in monitoring their own reading (Taylor & Connor, 1982).

Four factors are important for educators to keep in mind when working with

reading fluency and ELLs. First, there needs to be an environment of trust and respect so learners feel comfortable taking language learning risks. Second, there needs to be multiple opportunities for students to practice reading fluency. Third, students need to be guided by supportive teachers who deliberately use language students know or need to know, to ensure comprehension and growth. Finally, learners must be able to make connections between speech and the action it represents (McCauley & McCauley, 1992).

In addition to these four factors teachers need to keep in mind when working with ELLs, there is also a need to incorporate oral reading into classrooms to improve fluency. Oral reading fluency instruction seems to be a promising approach to teaching children in the confirmation and oral reading fluency stage of reading, especially those in late first and second grades, but also older children with reading problems who are non-fluent (Kuhn & Stahl, 2001). This factor is encouraging, since many ELLs enter classrooms in the United States for the first time at varying ages. The National Reading Panel (2000) conducted an extensive review of the literature and concluded classroom practices of repeated oral reading with feedback and guidance lead to meaningful improvements in reading expertise for all students. Guided repeated oral reading procedures followed in this study effectively improved oral reading fluency and overall reading achievement of those tested, including students in grades one through nine. The children who did not develop good oral reading fluency skills continued to read slowly and with great effort. Overall reading achievements, as a result, lagged behind those who improved their reading fluency.

A study of oral reading fluency and the delivery of instruction with students in

grades one through nine found fluency is more than highly proficient word reading (Jenkins, et. al., 2000). The researchers found fluency is more than highly proficient word reading. It is a combination of the method of instruction, fluency, and comprehension. In a study, relationships of word list reading with comprehension were measured at level determined as a .53, an increase of half a year. The relationship of text fluency with comprehension measured at an increased level of .83, which is just under a year's growth. The comparison demonstrated oral reading fluency was more closely related to reading comprehension, as measured by using a standardized test, than to word recognition of words drawn from the oral reading passage. All age levels benefited from oral reading practice and instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) conducted a study of elementary students' oral reading and fluency in 1992 (Pinnell, et at., 1995). They observed 1,136 fourth grade students, some being at risk, from across the United States. The general purpose of the study was to compare students as fourth graders, not to specifically compare students in a breakdown of race and gender. The study compared oral reading fluency by accuracy and rate as well as overall literacy development of expression, phrasing, and adherence to syntax. Each student read a passage from the magazine *Highlights* and a brief book text. Many passages were recorded and then evaluated. The ratings, overall, were part of the Integrated Reading Performance Record (IRPR). The results provided educators, parents, and researchers with a national data base of information about oral reading abilities and how this is related to overall reading achievement. Some of the conclusions included oral reading fluency demonstrated a

significant relationship with writing comprehension; increasing higher levels of fluency were associated with increasing higher overall proficiency; by listening to children read aloud, a direct observation of fluency can be made. The significant results of this study were young readers, especially those at risk, need many opportunities to read and from multiple forms of print; readers need to respond through writing and talking about what they read to increase comprehension; oral reading experiences are important in developing reading fluency and modeling of oral reading is needed to support reading; and, understanding the nature of fluent readers may help educators and parents provide reading opportunities for the success and enjoyment of reading in young readers.

Another example of improved oral reading fluency comes from a three-year study in a Kansas school. Included in this study were all the students in grade levels K-4 (Greenwood, Tapia, Abbott, & Walton, 2003). This study is particularly relevant to my research, since the size and setting is similar to the population of my school, where less than 10% of the students are English language learners. The study was a building-based case study of evidence-based literacy practices. This means the researchers looked at implementation, reading behavior, and growth in reading fluency. The hypothesis was practice would accelerate the levels and rates of growth in classroom reading behaviors and in curriculum-based measurement (CBM) reading fluency. Research staff measured student progress in reading by charting one minute timings with the number of errors. Of several factors measured, growth was evident in oral reading fluency. Significant to this study was the students at high risk included limited English proficient students. ELLs' final results were at or above the levels for their cohorts, or peers. Results showed a

performance-based instructional framework in which implementation of evidence-based instructional practices designed to promote reading behavior during reading instruction, did lead to important academic outcomes, such as CMB reading fluency. Findings with this study concluded teachers need supervised training and guided instruction to implement specific programs in helping ELLs become proficient readers.

Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Hickman-Davis, and Kouzekanani (2003) examined individualized instruction for second-grade ELLs. The study's purpose was to determine if reading interventions support ELL's reading progress. Twenty-six ESL learners at risk for reading difficulties were identified and given intensive reading interventions for thirty minutes a day for thirteen weeks. Oral reading fluency, phoneme segmentation fluency, nonsense word reading and reading comprehension were assessed in pre- and post tests. A comparison of ESL scores with those who did not receive interventions showed higher results for the ESL group with interventions. The interventions were effective in promoting better comprehension skills.

A study by Fitzgerald and Noblit (2000) identified similarities between the cognitive processes involved in learning to read in different alphabetic languages. The goal for ELLs in this study was to improve their reading skills by providing a systematic and explicit intervention in English. The purpose was to build reading fluency, develop phonemic awareness, develop vocabulary, promote the use of decoding, and to increase comprehension and word analysis strategies during reading. The design was used for all students. Four weeks into the study, Fitzgerald and Noblit documented the largest increase in scores were for passage comprehension and oral reading fluency. After four

months, results indicated significant gains for oral reading fluency and significant losses for phoneme segmentation fluency. This demonstrated a decrease from choppy sounds to a positive growth in fluent reading abilities. In a similar study, Grabe (1991) showed evidence that improved oral reading fluency and automatic word recognition allowed students to focus on understanding and analyzing the content of a passage. The use of repeated reading activities provided learners the chance to develop automatic recognition of English phonemes, high-frequency words, and word patterns. These activities also showed an increase in reading rates and accuracy.

McEwan's (2002) measures in studies of oral reading fluency have been found to be more highly correlated with reading comprehension scores than were the measures of a silent reading rate and comprehension. This study was with children whose reading skills varied across a broad range (Jenkins, et al., 2000). In a similar study, students who developed fluency in their oral reading, showed an improvement in their comprehension scores. Fluent oral readers, given similar knowledge of the vocabulary and concepts in the text, were better able to understand what they read better than their less fluent peers (Calfee & Piontkowski, 1981). Poor readers seem to receive instruction that emphasizes improved accuracy rather than improved rate, fluency, or syntactic sensitivity (Pearson, 1984). Schrieber (1980) made a clear case for the importance of appropriate development of fluency. Repeated readings, reading to children, and paired reading seem to have a positive impact on acquisition of oral reading fluency.

These studies demonstrate when English language learners are provided explicit skill instruction and thinking processes are made visible through modeling and active

teaching, effective reading strategies can be learned and used to improve reading comprehension. These are key components to the success of ELLs.

#### Models of Oral Reading Instruction with English Language Learners

Although the basic approaches to reading instruction have been around for years, there are many unanswered questions about methods of instruction researchers continue to investigate. The National Reading Panel (2000) reviewed over 100,000 research projects, abstracts, etc., written over the past, and made recommendations in implementing reading methods, which include the need to use oral reading fluency in reading instruction. Bamford, Chau, Jacobs, Renandya, and Robb (2004) maintain a website identifying reading processes addressing reading and ELLs. This information is provided to help those who work with ELLs.

There are many scientifically-based research models designed to help teachers understand the need for oral reading fluency with ELLs. A few research methods are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Opitz & Rasinski (1998) present twelve reasons for using oral reading fluency which highlight the need for ELLs to master good oral reading skills. These include good oral reading skills for sharing information with others, 'whetting' students' appetites for reading, developing listening comprehension and vocabulary, developing comprehension, determining strategies when reading, and showing reading progress.

All students need models of fluent and proficient reading. Seeing parents and teachers read silently does not help a learner hear or perceive what is happening in the story. Therefore, parents and teachers need to read out loud, modeling the kind of

proficient reading that would like to be heard from children. Fluent oral reading for a student, often in an exaggerated style, coupled with discussion of and response to the reading should be a part of any instructional package for children who are struggling with reading. Hearing the text and watching another are also steps in helping ESL readers become proficient (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

It is important to have a child read along with an adult, such as in choral reading. Before students read aloud, time needs to be allotted to rehearse on their own before reading aloud to either an adult or other partner. Listening to children read from five to twenty minutes daily, the result can show powerful, effective growth in their reading (Hewison & Tizard, 1980). Whenever this is done, positive and supportive feedback becomes part of the necessary steps of improvement (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

In the classroom, no matter how a student practices, their oral reading progress should be used to assess reading. Listening and observing are the best ways to better understand how students approach reading (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Charting and tracking student progress will give all personnel associated with a student's learning, a means to document progress and identify gaps in reading success.

#### Oral Reading Fluency Programs

The school district where I am employed uses Reading Mastery (Engelmann, Carnine, & Johnson, 2003) as their method of reading instruction for K-8 learners. There was also a Corrective Reading program (Engelmann, Carnine, & Johnson, 1998) that had been written to accompany an earlier version of Reading Mastery (Engelmann & Bruner, 1998).

Two studies used Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading to determine the impact on student achievement (Gunn, Smolkowski, Biglan, Black, & Blair, 2005) focused on the development of decoding skills and reading fluency. For this study, about three hundred students from a test group were identified for participation and were randomly assigned to the supplemental instruction or to a no-treatment control group. About half were Hispanic with 84% who spoke little English at home. The group averaged a few more boys than girls. At the end of the 2-year intervention, students who received the supplemental instruction, the 1998 versions of Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading, showed significant reading gains.

The in-depth, detailed research concluded that the supplemental group performed significantly better on measures of entry-level reading skills, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The benefits of the instruction were still clear two years after instruction had ended, with students in the supplemental-instruction condition still showing significantly greater growth on the measure of oral reading fluency. The results showed Hispanic students benefited from the supplemental reading instruction in English as much as or more than non-Hispanic students. There were lower baseline scores in word attack, in word identification, and in oral reading, but this was assessed to the lack or little use of English at home. Also, the initial level of oral fluency was not a factor for difficulty and the study indicated teaching of English should begin as early as first grade. Results with follow-up testing two years later in the study showed positive long-term effects to support the value of supplemental instruction focusing on the development of word recognition skills for helping students at risk for reading failure. This study

determined skilled reading cannot continue without fluent word recognition if vocabulary and reading comprehension are to improve.

Reading Mastery Direct Instruction (Engelmann & Bruner, 2003) for grades K-8 uses pre-tests and places readers at reading level that specifically meets the needs of individual learners. Research does give evidence this type of a reading program benefits ELLs (Gunn, et al., 2005). As I observed ELL placements in my district's reading program, I discovered ELL students were placed in reading groups below grade level. This fact was an indication ELLs needed further support with their reading skills.

### Great Leaps

After investigating several models dealing with approaches to reading, I narrowed my selection for instructional research in oral reading fluency with English language learners to a supplemental reading program called Great Leaps (Mercer & Campbell, 1998). The school district had purchased but not used the program as a supplement to Reading Mastery (Engelmann & Bruner, 2003). Great Leaps was initially written for struggling native English speaking readers. My goal was to find out if this was a possible method to facilitate ELLs in increasing oral reading fluency. This goal was to collect data, to record results, and to document the results of the program. Research by Hudson et al. (2005) supported using Great Leaps supplemental reading program with learners who were below their grade-level in reading and comprehension goals.

An additional factor in the selection of Great Leaps (Mercer & Campbell, 1998) was that my school district had employed a national reading consultant, Debbie Jackson. Jackson had been an advisor with the school's adoption of the K-8 Reading Mastery

Program (Engelmann & Bruner, 2003). Jackson supported the use of the Great Leaps program as a supplement to assisting English language learners in oral reading fluency. She expressed an interest in my study's results, as she, too, wanted to learn if a supplemental reading program such as Great Leaps would benefit my English language learners.

From the reading research that I had read, I felt a need to supplement the regular reading class with reading instruction specific to English language learners. Consultations were made with the district's reading coordinator, the district's reading data team, the principal, and the national reading consultant. All were supportive of the study I wanted to do.

In a phone conversation with Campbell, a co-author of the program, approval and the waiver of copyright rights were granted for the use of Great Leaps for my study with English language learners. Campbell explained the program as being research-based and designed to enhance oral reading fluency of reluctant readers. Although the program was not specifically designed for ELLs, he felt the criteria of the program would meet the needs of English language learners. The results of the study were of interest to him.

Great Leaps is a program divided into four parts: sound awareness, letter recognition and phonics, high-frequency words and phrases, and stories. The areas used in this study were the high-frequency word and phrases and stories.

The list of words and phrases in Great Leaps is based on the condition that there are about 100 words that account for 50 per cent of the print in children's school books and in daily adult reading. Most of the words on the lists cannot be sounded out using

phonics. To improve reading fluency and comprehension, the research supports the need for readers to be able to quickly recognize these words on sight (Adams, 1990). The words are of high frequency in written language. Phrases of words are part of this program to promote the generalization that sight words appear in context, not in isolation, while reading (Mercer & Campbell, 1998).

The stories in Great Leaps were developed by sequencing each level with the high frequency words and phrases. Each story was designed as learner-friendly because of brevity, content, and rhythm (Mercer & Campbell, 1998). The stories were field-tested with students of all ages. The goal of the program was to observe if an increase in fluency resulted in an increase in reading comprehension based on the results of reading the stories. Fluency in this program was defined as the rate of performance that enables skills to be applied in daily activities and remembered after a significant period of no practice (Binder, 1988). Using teaching skills to produce fluency allows for the combination of fluency skills with other reading skills to perform more complex tasks, including comprehension (Haughton, 1972).

From the readings and reviews of research presently available, I concluded I wanted to study the Great Leaps approach of using oral reading fluency with my English language learners to determine if oral reading fluency would improve their reading comprehension. Specifically, I wanted to know:

What is the impact of Great Leaps on oral reading fluency for my English language learners?

The next chapter presents the methodology for this study.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to explore oral reading fluency with English language learners (ELLs) in elementary grades. The classroom observations research was part of the research to see if increasing oral reading fluency would increase reading comprehension. Another area of study was how student responses to questions about the daily activities in class and how my personal reflections about the use of the Great Leaps (Mercer & Campbell, 1998) supplemental reading program with the students would give some additional insight to the benefits of using this type of program with ELLs.

Specifically, I wanted to know:

What is the impact of Great Leaps on oral reading fluency for my English language learners?

### Overview

This chapter describes the methodologies used in this study. This includes the rationale and description of the research design. The research paradigm is explained. Next, a discussion of data collection, the student performance, responses to questions about the program, and my personal reflection are addressed. This chapter presents information about the setting, the students, and the classroom design. The process of data collection and analysis are presented. A review of ethics addressed in this study is also included in this chapter.

## Research Design

This study was completed in the form of classroom observation research. I chose this design since the school district I worked in had a limited ELL population. Therefore, there were a limited number of candidates available for a study. Students in the study met individually, so the observation format was fitting for this study.

## Data Collection

Data was collected and charted from the timings of the word lists/phrases and stories. This was charted daily for both the word lists/phrases and the stories. The students were in class from 38 to 42 days during the eleven weeks of the study. Throughout the study anecdotal notes were recorded in the form of student responses to questions I asked. Student responses were written one to two times a week. I documented personal thoughts about the students' progress and reactions to the study by journaling on specific questions related to the students and the supplemental reading program. My journaling began as a daily activity and journal entries were recorded twice a week towards the end of the study.

## High-Frequency Words and Phrases

The first part of my research began with a daily one-minute timing using a list of high-frequency words or phrases that were part of a supplemental reading program called Great Leaps by Mercer and Campbell (1998). The words in the lesson were based on the condition that about 100 words account for fifty percent of the print in children's books (Adams, 1990). These high-frequency words are referred to as 'sight words' because most cannot be sounded out and need to be recognized 'on sight' to be able to read them

quickly. The words selected for these timings occur frequently in written and spoken language and need to be part of reader's vocabulary. The purpose of learning the words is to make word meaning instantaneous once a student knows how to pronounce the word on sight. Sight words always appear in context while reading. The goal for the students was to complete the given list in one minute with one or no errors. The task was to focus to reduce errors with the intent to make gains in grade-level reading.

The set of high frequency words and phrase lessons had the first twenty-one lessons each consisting of forty-eight words (see Appendix A). The next ten contained sixty words. The phrase lists began with lesson twelve. McEwan (2002) stated that an oral fluency rate of 140 correct words per minute is an adequate oral reading pace, so the first goal of the study was to increase speed as well as word recognition. The purpose of the accuracy and rate practice was to eventually conclude if learning high frequency words at a set pace with one or no errors would lead to improved comprehension skills for the ELLs.

Each day the students began with a cold read of the words. This meant that they did not have the opportunity to practice before seeing the sheet of words. A timer was set for one minute, and as a student read, I would mark any errors on a probe sheet that was the same as the student was reading. As the students read the probe and an error of a word was made, I would say the correct word pronunciation immediately following the error and immediately have the student repeat the correct word before continuing. Results of the amount of time and the number of errors were then marked on a chart (see Appendix B). Only one lesson was timed each day, and if the goal of one minute with

one or no errors was reached, a lesson with a new group of words was introduced the next day. If a lesson was not mastered according to the established criteria, the students had the opportunity to practice on the lesson, preferably with a family member, and to be ready to master that lesson during the next class. This procedure continued until that specific lesson was mastered. The next lesson, or probe, would be introduced at the next class. Folders were used to keep practice sheets together. The progress charts were kept in the ESL classroom.

### Stories

The second part of the study was designed to read the short stories that were a part of Great Leaps supplemental reading program (Mercer and Campbell, 1998). These stories were field tested with students of all ages. The stories contained topics with a moral value or principle. The K-2 program began stories with thirty-five words and progressed to one hundred sixty-five words over forty-seven lessons (see Appendix C). The predetermined reading levels of the stories progressed from preprimer to a second grade level. Stories were introduced as a cold read and completing one minute timings with one or no errors was considered mastery. Student placement for beginning the stories was determined by a pretest, which consisted of prereading a story.

The daily results of story progress were charted on a chart similar to the chart used for words and phrases (see Appendix D). As a story was mastered according to the reading criteria, a new story was introduced at the next class. If not mastered, the students were able to take the story with them and practice for mastery at the next class.

This continued until each story was at the Great Leaps mastery level. If a story was mastered, a new story was introduced at the next class.

### Student Responses to Questions

Student input is essential for motivating students. Other affective variables, such as attitude, beliefs, perceived task control, and perceived competence may determine the outcomes of reading among ELLs (Gee, 1999). Therefore, I developed a series of questions to help students identify a need for understanding the purpose of the task of reading. The individual students would respond to these questions and the responses were used as a form of self-evaluation and analysis of the program. Student responses were written in a notebook and each entry was dated. The questions included:

- What are your feelings about the program?
- How do feel when you pass/not pass a lesson?
- As you orally read words/phrases and short stories, are you feeling more or less confident about reading?
- Do you think daily practice helps? How do you know?
- Is this practice in ESL class making a difference? How or why do you think this is happening?

The goal of student responses was to be informal and to allow the students the opportunity to be honest in their responses to the questions.

### Personal Reflections

In addition to having the students respond to questions, personal growth in teaching instruction happens when teachers are involved in responding to daily activities,

too (Peck & Westgate, 1994). It was in the early 1980's when educational research began paying attention to 'reflective teaching'. This approach to teaching is a systematic way with a view to develop and to further improve classroom practices. Reflective teaching is designed to go beyond simply thinking about teaching on an occasional basis and to become oriented towards one's own reflections in which inquiry and problem solving are focused. Therefore, to become an effective teacher, I asked myself and wrote down thoughts about these questions after students finished their classroom activities:

- What observations am I making about the students: physical reactions/attitude/body language?
- Is there a difference in classroom interest with ELLs as we continue Great Leaps activities compared to previous lesson plans?
- What happens to students (body language, oral responses, etc.) when one-minute timings are mastered?
- What makes the program a success—the program itself, the individualized attention, and/or the increase in confidence?
- Is the Great Leaps program really doing what it is designed to do—improve oral reading fluency so more time is used to concentrate on reading comprehension?
- What is the classroom reading teacher observing—better reading skills, improved behaviors and attitudes, more individualized reading?

## Participants

### Setting

The setting for this study was a K-12 public school district, found in rural southwestern Minnesota. Grades K-4 were in their own building, separate from the middle/high school. Class sizes averaged about 100 students. The second language population was small, no more than three students per grade, and some grades had no ESL students. The majority of English language learners had Spanish as their first language.

### Students

The English language learners in the district were proficient in basic interpersonal skills, (BICS) but their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Collier & Thomas, 1989) lagged behind their peers. Studies have shown that the cognitive academic language proficiency needed to acquire information in content, may take learners from 7 to 11 years to reach academic standards of peers (Cummins, 2000). Therefore, a reading supplement to help students meet or exceed reading abilities of their peers became a goal for this study. Home language surveys, testing, classroom teacher observations, and/or parental request were included in identifying the school district's ELLs.

Two ESL siblings, a third grader and a fourth grader, were selected for this classroom study. Jane, the pseudonym for the third grade girl, and Avery, the pseudonym for the fourth grade boy, each lagged behind their grade level in reading. Testing by the school's reading director indicated both students were reading at 1.5 reading level, or the

equivalent of the middle first grade (Chall & Dale, 1995). This was significantly below their peers, so it was important to use an intervention to see if increasing oral reading fluency reading levels would improve their reading comprehension.

The students for this study had enrolled in the school district at the beginning of the academic school year. Both students, and three older middle school-aged siblings, had been enrolled in several different school districts within the United States during previous years. The change from schools to schools with variations in educational settings may have also been a contributing factor to the lower than grade level performances of the students in the study, but this informal observation was not used as preliminary documented evidence in this study. All of these family siblings were born in the United States and spoke and understood Spanish and English. Neither Jane nor Avery was able to read or write in Spanish.

### Classroom Design

Due to the small number of second language learners in the school district, a limited amount of time was scheduled for ESL instruction. Linquanti (1999) compared different models for fostering academic success in ELLs where the ESL populations were small. Schools with small numbers of ELLs need to be flexible. This was true in the district where I worked. Not only were there small numbers of ELLs, my position was part-time as the instructor for the K-4 English language learners.

Linquanti's model (1999) showed an immersion program, where students are in class with native speakers, plus a pull-out, where individual reading strategies such as oral reading fluency were addressed outside of the classroom with the ESL teacher, were

beneficial to ELLs' reading success. This design was the model used for my district's ESL program.

Each individual or a small group of English language learners met daily in a room used specifically for English language learners. The average amount of time learners received instruction was about 20 minutes daily. Jane and Avery met daily with me during their individually scheduled times. When working with individuals who are struggling with reading, privacy is essential (Optiz & Rasinski, 1998). This type of classroom setting, where I could work individually and in a room away from the traditional class, provided for an adequate room setting for using the Great Leaps program (Mercer & Campbell, 1998).

#### Analysis Procedures

There were some procedures or methods in the supplemental reading program that use numerical terms, or the results of daily one-minute timings of reading fluency/phrase lists and stories used in this study. Statistics included testing and documentation of reading levels prior to the study. Results of the student's daily work were charted. Assessment and observation of the data supported the importance of this study.

The concluding results of this study showed multiple forms of evidence, or a triangulation of measurement and observation (Brown & Rodgers, 2004). Materials used in the study, the Great Leaps (Mercer & Campbell, 1998) reading supplement, were research based. The initial placement of the students in my research was the Great Leaps K-2 program. The series continues to an adult reading level. The results of this study helped in evaluating the importance of using oral reading fluency with second language

learners. The figures and tables of the data are presented in Chapter 4.

### Ethics

Ethical considerations were important in this research. The following includes the list of procedures followed to protect the students in their right to privacy, informed consent, and their protection from deception.

1. School—signed letter from elementary principal granting permission to conduct research in the school setting based on Hamline’s capstone guidelines.
2. Parents and students—oral conversations and signed consent letters permitting use of students’ data collected in the research and anonymity of the students’ identities.
3. Hamline University—submission and approval of human subjects review.
4. Authors of Great Leaps—oral permission via phone conversation from Kenneth Campbell to use Great Leaps materials and to publish results as part of capstone.

The next chapter presents data of this study.

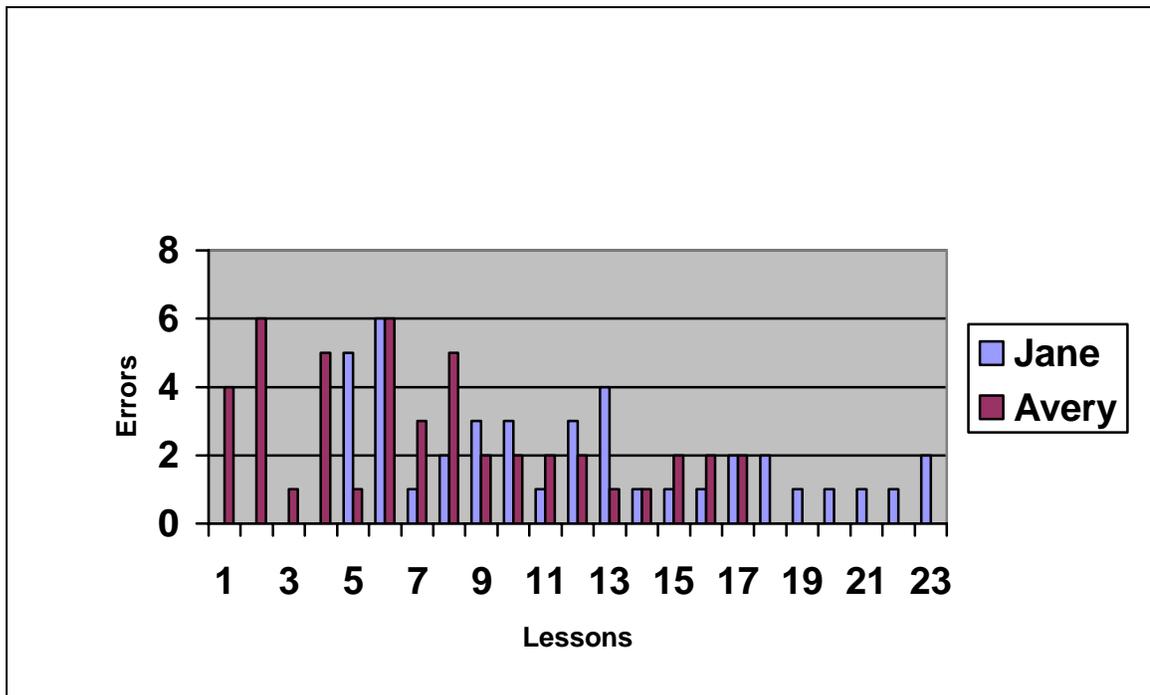
## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the data collected for measuring oral reading fluency through Great Leaps (Mercer & Campbell, 1998) assessments using high frequency words/phrases and stories. Information from the responses to questions asked the students about the program during the study and responses to my personal reflections during the study is also presented. This study investigated the influence of oral reading fluency skills using a supplemental reading program, called Great Leaps, with two English language learners in a rural elementary school in southwestern Minnesota over an eleven week period. The research question was: What is the impact of Great Leaps on oral reading fluency for my English language learners?

### Presentation of Results

Figure 4.1 shows the progress of Jane and Avery over the eleven week study using high-frequency words and phrases from the supplemental reading program called Great Leaps. Figure 4.1 compares the errors each student made in respect to where they began the lessons.

Figure 4.1. Lesson Results for High-Frequency Words and Phrases.



During the eleven week study, Jane was in class 38 days and Avery attended 42 days. Missed days were due to sickness, family emergencies, national testing required to be done in classroom settings, and the end-of-the-year field trips.

The initial test for placement from the Great Leaps supplemental reading program for high frequency words and phrases identified Jane and Avery as emergent, or beginning readers, which was lower than the 1.5 classroom reading level (Chall, 1995) determined by the reading coordinator. Since the two testing outcomes were somewhat similar, Avery began the Great Leaps program with lesson one, and Jane began with lesson five. These lessons were in the emergent reader category.

The results of the oral reading of high-frequency words and phrases show Jane completed 19 lessons in the 38 days she was in class. Nine lessons were mastered on the

first reading. Avery completed 17 lessons in 42 days. He mastered four lessons on the first attempt. All readings were completed within the one minute time limit, whether the errors were below mastery of one to no errors per reading. There were 48 words in lessons 1-17 and increased to 60 words in the following lessons. Words and word phrases changed with each lesson. If the one to no error limit was not met within the one minute time limit for the lessons, a lesson was to be practiced outside of class and then reread for mastery during the next class. Jane reduced her errors and was more consistent with mastery as the lessons progressed as the difficulty of the words increased. This may possibly be due to her concentrating more at the task of orally reading words and or phrases. Avery often had just two errors, requiring him to reread the list of words. Therefore, the number of lessons mastered was less than the number Jane mastered on the first attempt.

The word and phrase lists results did not reflect a correlation with comprehension since there were no questions to ask. Pikulski and Chard (2005) show, however, if sight words can be read with fluency, less time is needed for constructing the meaning of texts and more time can be used in concentrating on comprehension of stories.

The second part of Great Leaps (Mercer & Campbell, 1998) consisted of reading short stories in one minute with one or no errors. Table 4.1 shows Jane's daily progress in story reading and Table 4.2 shows Avery's progress in reading stories. These stories were normed from a preprimer reading level to a level two reading level in this Great Leap's program. There were nine preprimer and nine primer stories to master and fifteen each of level one and two if all story lessons had been mastered. During the eleven weeks, Jane and Avery were introduced to and each mastered 22 stories.

Table 4.1

*Jane's Story Progress*

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<u>Week</u>	<u>Number of Stories</u>	<u>Number of Attempts</u>	<u>Number of Words</u>
1	2	3	35
2	1	2	50
3	3	5	70
4	4	4	81
5	2	3	77
6	2	4	80
7	1	4	94
8	2	4	102
9	1	3	95
10	3	4	91
11	1	2	110

---

Table 4.1 shows the growth in story reading by Jane during the eleven weeks of the study. Jane read a total of 22 stories and accomplished this in 38 days. Throughout the study, Jane mastered eight story lessons on the first reading attempt. All lessons were read within one minute allowance, but errors required further practice and rereads. Although it was not part of the program, Jane mastered one story in 28 seconds.

Table 4.2

*Avery's Story Progress*

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Week	Number of Stories	Number of Attempts	Number of Words
1	2	3	35
2	1	3	50
3	3	5	52
4	4	3	85
5	2	4	95
6	2	5	81
7	1	4	78
8	2	4	102
9	1	5	103
10	3	4	91
11	1	2	110

---

Table 4.2 shows the growth in story reading by Avery during the study. Avery read stories on 42 days and completed 22 stories. Avery mastered six lessons on the first reading. Avery read all stories within the one minute timing, reading one in 34 seconds.

The number of words in a lesson fluctuated from story to story, meaning some stories would sometimes have fewer words than in a previous lesson. At the completion of stories read by Jane and Avery during the study, each improved their reading rates from the initial story word rate of 35 words per minute to mastery of an oral reading rate of

110 words per minute on the final story. These increases reflected mastering nine preprimer lessons, nine primer lessons, and four grade-level one reading lessons for Jane and Avery. If each had been in class every day during the eleven weeks, this trend in gains, noting Jane mastered eight lessons on the first try and Avery mastering six lessons on the first try, suggests levels of oral fluency may have been much greater, since more lessons may have been introduced and mastered during this time period.

In addition to gathering data about reading fluency growth from Great Leaps, students were asked several questions about the Great Leaps program and their feelings about reading. Questions were asked of the students once or twice a week and I wrote their responses in their respective journals.

Jane began by noticing she was quick with the readings, having a lot of extra time before the one minute limit was reached. Her errors were high, and she was soon expressing a dislike of the stories and did not want to do them. She displayed through actions and verbal expression dissatisfaction with her reading of the words and stories, calling the process boring, boring, boring and wondering why she had to do the readings. She said that it was too hard, she was going too slowly, and she was trying to get a lesson finished in one minute. As the weeks went on, Jane continued to show gains in mastering the word/phrase lists and stories. She started to become more confident about her abilities. She began to realize the progress and gains she was making by looking at the charts for both the words/phrases and stories. Her comments alluded to just kidding about the reading being hard to saying the reading was becoming easier each time. She expressed facts that she practiced in the car and it was fun to read to her family. She was

okay with the homework that required practicing lessons not mastered the first time. Towards the end of this study, Jane's final response to whether the practice in ELL class was making a difference was, "I really love to read, now." This was the documented change in Jane's attitude as she witnessed her gains in oral reading fluency during the eleven weeks of Great Leaps instruction.

Avery's reaction to beginning the Great Leaps program was one of wanting to work with the program every day. He expressed a need for help in reading and initially felt the program was a good one. As he would finish a timing, he would identify that the words he missed seemed to be the same ones. He said he tried to correct words as he read and said that the program was a good thing to follow. He wanted to keep going. Avery also felt more confident if he slowed down, because the number of errors decreased. A personal goal of Avery's was to practice during his regular reading class. He began using the strategy of reading in chunks to speed up fluency, as that was a suggestion his reading teacher had made. He used meta-analysis in describing his reading abilities, and data showed his oral reading skills were increasing. Avery realized, in his words, that he was getting good at reading. He was able to use a connection strategy to the words he read. The reading words were some of the words found in his spelling lessons. These reflective comments revealed Avery had a long-term goal, that of being a better reader. Although he took more attempts in mastering the oral reading skills, success happened.

As this study progressed, I also wrote about my observations and thoughts regarding the lessons. The first journal entries were daily and trailed off to two per week.

The goals of my journal were to discover what effect using a program such as Great Leaps had on my teaching presentations, interactions, and management with ESL learners.

I wanted to implement a program for the elementary learners that would assist them in reaching or surpassing their peers at reading. The Great Leaps program became a tool for my study to see if it would make a difference in oral reading fluency. At the beginning, I wrote that Jane and Avery expressed the program would be something useful and the lesson mastery was successful. Jane approached the lessons, as time passed, as something she did not want to do. She got frustrated and needed to feel more confident. My observation was to give her more wait time before beginning a timing. This resulted in her becoming more agreeable and lesson mastery continued. Jane added 'stars' to her papers, showing small incentives were important to her. Avery would have more errors, but his reaction was more positive. He would work harder at passing the next time. Avery would have a wide smile on his face when he made progress. He appreciated verbal praise. The observations of these two helped me realize students do not have the same attitudes to learning, no do they approach and reach the same goal in a similar manner. For one learner, lesson may need modifications, such as more wait time or the use of material incentives as rewards. Verbal praise for a job well done is what matters to another.

Another area I wrote about was how the students reacted to practicing for a reread. Jane reported she would rather practice with family members other than with her brother Avery. Avery chose to practice during reading class and not practicing at home.

As the study progressed, both stated that they were too busy or would forget to practice outside of class. These factors showed each preferred different places to study, but study outside of class was not a priority. I wrote practice time needed to be provided during ESL class. Networking with parents about the importance of reading practice and homework needs to continue.

I also wrote in my journal that having individualized class time removed what seemed to be a barrier of being inferior for not being at grade level reading with the student's peers. I had the opportunity to document both students needed additional instruction with words where there were p/d letter reversals and r-controlled words. I also concluded that using an oral fluency program for a longer period of time would benefit ELLs in reading for success.

The Great Leaps program did meet my expectations. Jane and Avery made progress as shown by the data. They learned how to focus and to be ready for one minute readings. Their ability to verbally express facts about each story was evidence they comprehended details from the stories. This was the goal of this study.

In the next chapter, I will conclude this capstone by discussing the significance of this research.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The research of my capstone addressed the topic: What is the impact of Great Leaps on oral reading fluency in elementary English language learners? This study included classroom observations of two elementary students using a supplemental reading program called Great Leaps (Mercer and Campbell, 1998) designed to increase the oral reading fluency of learners. Student reflections through individualized questioning and my personal reflections about the program were included in the study. The investigation of literature focusing on this topic of oral reading fluency, especially with second language learners, was used for background information and support of this study.

### Findings

This study investigated the impact of using Great Leaps to improve oral reading fluency with elementary English language learners over an eleven week period. The data collected during the study produced evidence that the practice of oral reading did increase the fluency of the learners. The study also documented evidence showing personality does influence learning behaviors. Jane, who began the study with an apprehensive attitude and an unwillingness to participate, expressed a more positive attitude and a love for reading as the study progressed. This change in attitude was apparent only after she could see her progress in reading fluency from the daily charting

of one-minute timings in words/phrases and stories. Avery expressed a relaxed and reflective attitude. He felt a need for improving his reading from the beginning of the study and used concepts such as chunking words into phrases in helping him make meaningful changes and growth in oral reading fluency. Scores indicated it took longer for him to make gains, but success happened.

Specific comprehension questions to check for understanding of each story were not part of the Great Leaps program. As the number of words increased, so did the reading level. Jane and Avery increased from a preprimer level to level one. To check to see if the students understood and comprehended the stories, I asked some basic, factual questions about the individual stories after each had been read. This became the informal method used to check for comprehension. The anecdotal findings during this study were that Jane and Avery were able to successfully answer all the daily oral comprehension questions asked about the stories. Further growth in comprehension was also informally noted, as each could share specific details about the individual stories. They could relate concepts identified from the stories read to other subject areas. Jane and Avery discussed the themes and looked for meaning in the stories they read. They compared them to other relevant stories they had read in other settings. These steps identified that Jane and Avery were reading for learning, a goal of reading success.

### Reflections

Writing a capstone involves a tremendous amount of planning, thinking, and organizing research data. The literature read and research conducted in oral reading fluency provided information to help me realize this reading skill is an important reading

factor for ELLs. When teachers make fluency a major focus and when instruction and materials are engaging, students can accomplish the major goal of reading instruction, which is comprehension (Worthy & Broaddus, 2002). This factor, along with giving students the ability to read independently, will not only increase ELL's learning but also lay the foundation for lasting reading enjoyment.

As I reflected over some of the questions that I had originally posed at the onset of this study, I was able to discover some relevant answers to these questions as I completed the study. Beers (2003) makes a point about the rewards of reading instruction. When educators become better teachers of reading, students become better readers. Beers states improving student's reading rate does not automatically mean a student's attitude toward reading will improve or that comprehension will immediately show gains, but as improvements in oral fluency reading rates increase, the attitude and comprehension will show progress. This research demonstrated that with motivation, purpose for practice, and continued growth, learners did improve their reading skills.

Physical reactions of both students changed over time. Jane and Avery came into class and established a routine. Each would focus on the daily task of orally completing two timed readings and charting the results. They were eager to chart their accomplishments each day, and rewards, except for the verbal praises, were not needed to motivate them. Mercer and Campbell (1998) had prefaced the use of the program by stating that it is often powerful to reward the student with a small prize that was of value to a student. Jane and Avery expressed these incentives were not necessary. Genuine praise earned for working hard was the support each appreciated. It is important to

remember that in addition to following reading strategies of a reading program, students need encouragement to become strategic, successful readers is necessary (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). These visual and verbal observations of the students answered my questions of whether the lessons helped the students' willingness to engage and continue with the program. The students were excited to be working towards the goal of becoming successful readers.

The benefits of the individualized attention for both helped to pinpoint areas of concern and areas of progress. Automaticity and prosody increased, which are factors that lead to better comprehension skills. Concentration, self-motivation, and a desire to keep reading were benefits that resulted for these reading students.

I documented and was also able to share reading concerns observed in reading practice with the classroom reading teacher. Jane and Avery were in the same reading class. As timed readings progressed, some weaknesses in primary areas that Chall (1996) recognized as important in reading success surfaced. Specific letter and sound weaknesses surfaced as the students progressed in the study. Reversals, such as 'on' for 'no'; 'bad' for 'dad'; and vowel-controlled 'r' words were areas where a need for additional instruction and practice for both Jane and Avery. If individualized time had not been used, these areas necessary for reading success may not have been identified.

I also was able to share the data of the student's oral reading progress with the classroom reading teacher. She stated she had not observed much change in the student's reading but felt the length of time spent implementing the program was not long enough to adequately observe additional reading progress in the traditional classroom. She did

comment that Avery seemed to be more focused in daily reading exercises during the weeks of the study.

The main question for my study was whether a supplemental reading program such as Great Leaps (Mercer & Campbell, 198) would increase oral reading fluency for ELLs. The design and used of the Great Leaps program showed promise for these students. There was a twenty-two lesson mastery achievement for both students. As learners in grades three and four, results of the study indicated there needs to be continued supplemental support with reading strategies to help ELLs reach or surpass the reading levels of classroom peers for reading success. However, more time was needed to observe the long-term benefits accomplished during the few days Jane and Avery attended class during this study.

### Implications

This study was designed to find a method or methods to help English language learners improve their reading/comprehension abilities. The focus developed into other benefits for the individual students. Oral reading fluency increased for both learners in this study. It was through daily discussion and journaling I observed students were making gains in independence by becoming self-motivators and used self-guidance in the reading process to accomplish individual success. Concentration and staying on task during one minute timings further developed the reading skills of increased concentration and focus. Self-esteem and confidence were also observable characteristics of the students as reading success increased.

It became evident from these observations reading success fills gaps not only

in reading abilities but also plays a big part in students' personal achievements. Giving students the opportunity to read and to have access to a text-rich environment with good materials to read promotes the habit of reading and fosters the interest to continue reading throughout life (Ballard, 1997). These components of reading education became evident in this study.

### Limitations

The greatest limitation of this study unequivocally became the need for more time—time for measuring and comparing growth results in reading in other academic areas; time to collaborate with administrators and teachers of these students to show the benefits of taking time to practice students' oral reading skills; time to connect home to reading for individual and family reading success; and time to allow the students to enjoy the seeds planted within them from increasing oral reading fluency to more enjoyment in their leisure-time reading.

I had a limited number of ELLs for this study. The two participants, using a pull-out model as the method of instruction, with support and guidance, were on track to succeed in making reading gains to eventually help them reach and/or surpass their peers in reading abilities. Mercer and Campbell (1998) suggested using the supplemental program for a year. Based on the gains in oral reading fluency during this study for eleven weeks, a year's work in the program would have seen additional success in reading.

My initial intent was to have each student write in a daily journal, answering questions about the program, their reactions to the program, and their feelings toward

reading. Due to the amount of time allotted for instruction, I became the scribe for the students instead of having them do the writing. An advantage of the scripting process was students did not have to feel that a peer group was judging them in what they had for responses since their class was individualized. However, it did not give them the time to practice writing skills, a technique that could have been used to access growth in writing.

Another part to the program I felt could have been added was comprehension questions for the stories in Great Leaps. Charting scores focusing on comprehension may have been another indicator for reading to learn for the students.

The limited amount of daily time available to work with ELLs seemed to make it difficult to follow up with reminders to students and their family about of the importance of reading practice at home. The design of Great Leaps was to have students practice lessons not mastered outside of class. As we concluded the study, I realized a beneficial component may have been charting the number of practices and with whom the students read to when they read outside of class. This component may have given the learners another purpose for reading practice—that of letting their families see the amount of time spent reading with their children.

#### Further Research

From this small, but important study with English language readers, I recommend all educators make time to collaborate with those who touch the lives of ELLs. Instructional support programs must work to enhance the likelihood that participating students receive larger amounts of appropriate instruction across the school day (Allington, 2001). This includes those directly involved in the reading programs of

each school, from administration, reading and curriculum coordinators, reading teachers, classroom teachers, aides, school and public librarians, and family members. Pinnell et. al (1995) suggest fluency may be an issue that goes well into the high school years, especially among students from diverse backgrounds. If teachers and school leaders are truly committed to leaving no child behind in reading, then all must actively pursue the goal of reading fluency in elementary and middle school classrooms. Existing scientific research on reading fluency indicates oral fluency is an important factor in reading education and should be part of any comprehensive and effective reading curriculum.

Krashen (1993) reviewed over one hundred years of the field of reading. The research reviewed emphasized modeling of reading and demonstrating techniques strengthened students' interest in reading. A print-rich environment at homes, in classrooms, and in libraries also needs to be given greater emphasis as resources for reading growth and enjoyment for ELLs (Pucci, 1998).

Ideas encouraging a love of reading among English language learners at elementary and middle school level is a factor in reading success (Gee, 1999). Gee states by emphasizing the crucial nature of affective variables in reading, not only in determining attitude toward reading but also for increasing comprehension. In addition to attitude, these affective variables include motivation, beliefs, perceived task control, and perceived competence. Gee suggests enhancing affects by having more open tasks in which students have opportunities for choice, challenge, and control in organizing and planning, collaborating, and connecting to the world beyond the classroom. Gee states allowing students to choose what they read for leisure and helping them to learn how to

choose wisely will boost motivation and reading comprehension. In the learning classroom, Gee stresses a low-risk environment in which teachers act as facilitators and role models in oral reading rather than just evaluators, having classmates who are supportive, and allowing time and space for students to read and to share with one another about their reading will only advance the reading comprehension and motivation of English language learners.

Reading continues throughout life. Research in the importance of oral reading fluency in elementary ELLs will continue to be addressed. Questions about the importance of oral reading fluency in reading will have answers guided by the ongoing work of researchers, teachers, and learners. This study was only a starting point for investigating and developing methods to facilitate the reading success of ELLs. Personally, keeping up-to-date with research that parallels what I have already found by pursuing this topic about the importance of oral reading is a goal I will continue to pursue as I work with ELLs. The research and literature covered in this study clearly shows oral reading fluency and the English language learner is a topic that will open doors for educators to continue to explore.

APPENDIX A

GREAT LEAPS HIGH FREQUENCY WORD LIST

Great Leaps K-2 High-Frequency Words

Soundable words

<b>its</b>	<b>did</b>	<b>just</b>	<b>get</b>	
<b>did</b>	<b>its</b>	<b>get</b>	<b>just</b>	
<b>man</b>	<b>work</b>	<b>word</b>	<b>must</b>	
<b>word</b>	<b>man</b>	<b>must</b>	<b>work</b>	(16)
<b>well</b>	<b>help</b>	<b>off</b>	<b>went</b>	
<b>off</b>	<b>well</b>	<b>sent</b>	<b>help</b>	
<b>just</b>	<b>get</b>	<b>word</b>	<b>must</b>	
<b>off</b>	<b>went</b>	<b>did</b>	<b>its</b>	(32)
<b>work</b>	<b>man</b>	<b>help</b>	<b>well</b>	
<b>its</b>	<b>did</b>	<b>man</b>	<b>word</b>	
<b>well</b>	<b>off</b>	<b>get</b>	<b>just</b>	
<b>must</b>	<b>work</b>	<b>went</b>	<b>help</b>	(48)

APPENDIX B

GREAT LEAPS WORDS/PHRASES CHART

# Great Leaps Reading Progress Chart

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **ID:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_ **School:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Section:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_

	Date			Date			Date			Date			Date					
	M	W	F	M	W	F	M	W	F	M	W	F	M	W	F			
200																		
100																		
50																		
20																		
10																		
5																		
2																		
1																		

Floor \_\_\_\_\_

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
<b>S.</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/
pg.#	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
<b>M.</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/
pg.#	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
<b>T.</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/
pg.#	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
<b>W.</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/
pg.#	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
<b>T.</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/
pg.#	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
<b>F.</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/
pg.#	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
<b>S.</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/
pg.#	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

APPENDIX C  
GREAT LEAPS STORY

## Great Leaps K-2 Stories

### On and On

The sun will rise. The sun will set.  
The leaves will fall. The grass will grow. (19)

The cows will moo. The ducks will quack.

The dogs will bark. The roosters crow. (35)

Summer is hot. Summer is free.  
In summer we have storms. (47)

With fall, the leaves come blowing down.

Soon winter blows cold. (59)

But spring comes soon.  
Eggs will hatch. The birds will fly.  
And on and on. The river flows. (77)

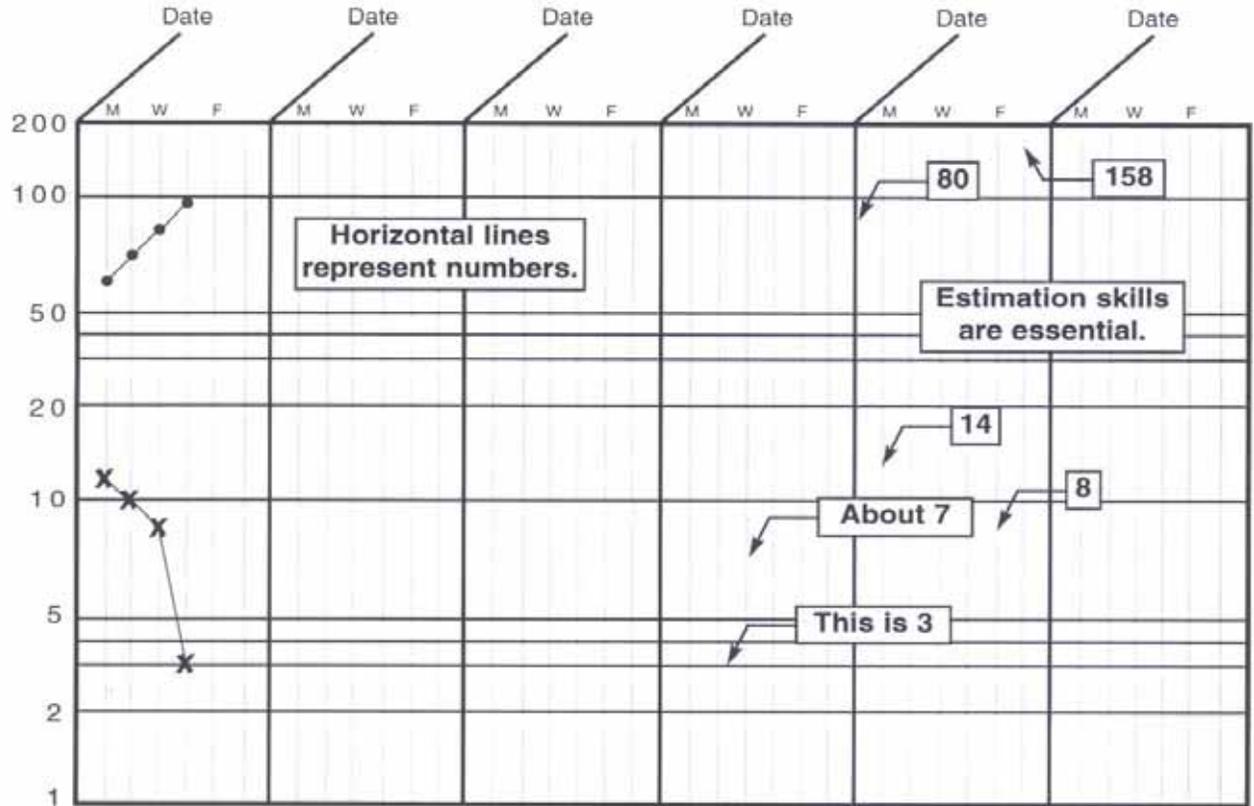
APPENDIX D  
GREAT LEAPS STORIES CHART

## Great Leaps Reading Progress Charting Help

### Charting Numbers

Have dots placed on the intersection of the number and date line to represent the total number; Have x's represent the errors.,.

Connect the dots or x's of the adjacent data. Do not connect missed days.



**Recording raw data:**  
 Insert total number of words or sounds per minute/errors by the correct day

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
S.	pg.# <input type="text"/>					
M.	56 / 12 pg.# 182	pg.# <input type="text"/>				
T.	62 / 10 pg.# 182	pg.# <input type="text"/>				
W.	74 / 8 pg.# 182	pg.# <input type="text"/>				
T.	95 / 3 pg.# 182	pg.# <input type="text"/>				
F.	pg.# <input type="text"/>					
S.	pg.# <input type="text"/>					

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