

# Florida Center for Reading Research

Accelerated Literacy Learning  
(A.L.L.)

## What is Accelerated Literacy Learning?

*Accelerated Literacy Learning (A.L.L.)* is an early intervention program for first graders performing in the lowest 20<sup>th</sup> percentile of their class in reading and writing. Similar to *Reading Recovery*, *A.L.L.* was originally designed for one-on-one instruction in a pull-out setting with a reading specialist. With the desire to serve more at-risk children and to empower classroom teachers to accept the responsibility of helping their own students, *A.L.L.* has adapted its program to include small group instruction in the regular classroom with the students' teacher. This method of providing more intensive instruction to at-risk students is sometimes called the "push-in" model. A group of three students receive daily instruction for 30 minutes in phonemic awareness, phonics, writing, fluency and comprehension, using alphabet strips, alphabet boxes, Elkonin boxes, a magnetic board with letters and leveled books. Each day's lesson follows a structured format of three main 10-minute segments: fluency development, writing, and new book reading.

Since students at-risk in reading are often a year or more behind their peers, the *A.L.L.* training teaches the concept of acceleration rather than remediation. The program goals for *A.L.L.* are to: 1) help first graders progress or accelerate to a level of average or above; 2) support and improve student's self-esteem by providing successful reading and writing experiences; 3) lower the first grade referrals for Special Education classes; and, 4) reduce the number of potential high school dropouts.

In order to have excellent teachers of reading, the authors of *A.L.L.* have the overriding belief that high quality professional development for teachers over time, coupled with in-class coaching is one of the soundest ways to ensure that students become readers. The benefits of a well-trained teacher of reading will generalize to all students, even those students most in need. Therefore, in order to employ the *A.L.L.* program in a classroom, teachers must participate in an intensive year-long training. During the training, teachers learn about detailed observation, peers demonstrate teaching, teachers analyze the teaching of others while observing videos of actual lessons, and they are taught the concept of scaffolded learning. Following the first year training, teachers return once a month for a 2-hour training session called Veteran's Training.

Given the importance of the teacher training to the success of the *A.L.L.* program, it is helpful to look further into the multiple components of its professional development. Scaffolded instruction is the essence of *A.L.L.* Through a series of prompts, reminders, clues and encouragement, teachers can directly structure learning such that the child is brought from the known to the unknown. A major emphasis of the professional development is to learn the concept of scaffolded instruction. Teachers learn about research-based practices and theories of instruction, curriculum, and cognition. In order for teachers to become experienced decision makers and observers of students, they teach students while they receive the training. They also are observed and given detailed feedback by an experienced guide. When planning daily lessons, teachers are reminded to ask themselves what the focus of their lesson is, and then to plan accordingly. All segments of the reading lesson must

be linked with that focal point. The Clinical Forum is a chance for teachers to bring their largest problem to one of the training sessions and discuss it. The teachers brainstorm and try to come up with a plan that can change the problem, pinpointing whether it is fluency, books that aren't carefully chosen, or writing. The problem is analyzed according to the assessment the teacher has of the student. Teachers also learn behavior management techniques, learning strategies, reading processes and cueing systems, book leveling, how to create academically focused literacy centers, how to take running records, and how to give the Observation Survey.

Fluency development is an essential part of the *A.L.L.* program. The authors believe it is important to give students books at their independent reading level because it is motivating for struggling readers to look and sound fluent. Therefore, the first segment of each day's lesson is dedicated to the reading of familiar books and the previous day's new book. A running record of two students is taken during this time and the third student will have his running record taken the following day. The running record is considered critical since this alerts the teacher to any problems the students are experiencing and it will be used to build the following day's instruction in word work. During the running record for one student, the other two students may be following along in their own books, they may be reading aloud at their own pace, partner reading, or doing a specifically designed word work activity with each other. Fluency development is also part of the final segment of the lesson, the reading of the new book. The goal is to read the new book three times with a minimum of two readings. First, the students take individual turns reading while the other students follow along in their own books. A second reading might be done as a choral reading, a reader's theatre, or a silent reading. This is a teacher decision based on the needs of the students.

The writing segment of the lesson is the vehicle for instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics and sentence writing. The authors of *A.L.L.* consider phonemic awareness paramount to a student's success in reading. Activities with Elkonin boxes and counters are used to develop phonemic awareness. Later, students push letters into Elkonin boxes to help establish one-to-one correspondence between sound and print. Letter-sound correspondences are taught by framing letters on an alphabet strip or by using the consonant, vowel and digraph charts on the wall. A magnetic board with letters is used for phoneme manipulation activities, phonics instruction and word building. Work with word families is done with the magnetic board. Phonics instruction is not systematic in the sense that a specific, prearranged sequence of letters is taught to the students. However, because of the completeness of the daily running record, the teacher is aware of what the student does and does not know and can therefore adequately plan instruction to teach the unknown the following day. The teacher has a special alphabet chart that allows her to keep track of what letters and digraphs are causing problems for her students. Simple sentence writing is also part of the writing segment. The sentence is often based upon a story just read, or the teacher may prompt the students to generate a sentence using words that may come up in the new story. A specific word in the sentence may be sounded out with use of an Elkonin box, and spelling patterns and meaning will be discussed. Next, with sentence strips the teacher has prepared, each student cuts apart the sentence and says each word as it is arranged in the correct order. Work at the word level and the phrase level help students to see how reading and writing are connected.

Vocabulary instruction is varied and occurs in all segments of the lesson. Words crucial to the meaning of that day's story are pretaught. During the writing segment, the teacher might present a topic that would encourage discussion of the vocabulary

that will appear in that day's story. They may write the word, explore its meaning or analyze it structurally. Vocabulary is examined during the "book walk" preceding the reading of the new story. The teacher might have the students frame a potentially problematic word with their fingers. They will say the word and talk about its meaning. She may also have them "look through the word," noting all of the letters in the sequence, looking for patterns or other structural elements they recognize.

A tactile/kinesthetic approach is taken with sight word instruction. Students use a magnetic board, or use a paper where they write the word in all four corners. They write the word as tall as they can, as tiny as they can, they may write it in sand, or they might use sticky pipe cleaners to form the word. They also use games such as "sight word toss."

Comprehension is an important component of the *A.L.L.* program. Books are chosen with both narrative and expository text. Questioning, story prediction ("book walk"), and story retell are used as comprehension strategies. As students become more proficient readers and the stories are more developed, they discuss story grammar, or the important parts of the story. Students are also taught to be strategic readers by asking themselves questions that address meaning, grammar and phonics: "Does it make sense? Does it sound right? Does it look right?"

*A.L.L.* follows a specific correction procedure. When a mistake is made in reading, the student is not immediately stopped. Instead, the teacher waits until they finish the sentence or are ready to turn the page and says, "I don't think something sounded quite right." Often the students will be aware of their mistake and return to the word. The teacher then asks them what they can do or what they can try. The response includes looking at the picture or "looking through the word" and figuring out patterns they recognize. The sentence or paragraph is then reread to ensure meaning and fluency.

Leveled books are used for the *A.L.L.* program. During the training sessions, teachers learn how to level books. Initially though, new teachers to the training will be given leveled books to use. Eventually the teachers become more competent at choosing an appropriate book for that day's lesson. When choosing books, teachers are taught to consider the students' backgrounds, interest level, and what phonic elements they know. To be a well-prepared teacher, it is essential for teachers to choose appropriate books that include that day's phonics and sight word instruction, ensuring that the focus of the lesson is maintained. One of the features of the *A.L.L.* training session discussions includes observations of teachers' videotaped lessons. There the teacher will be asked her rationale for having chosen a particular book.

Although the *A.L.L.* program has many similarities to Reading Recovery, there are also several important differences. First, instruction occurs in groups of three rather than one-on-one. Second, classroom teachers do the teaching, making them more responsible for their struggling readers. Third, *A.L.L.* is more flexible. If a lesson seems to need 40 minutes rather than 30, the teachers are encouraged to give that extra time. When the new book for that day seems too difficult and frustrating for the students, teachers are to stop the reading and return to the writing or fluency segment of that lesson. If one of the three segments of the reading lesson appears to need more time, it is important to give the time rather than rigidly adhering to the prescribed format. Finally, an extra 2-minute spot is given to word work immediately preceding the fluency segment of the lesson, and phonemic awareness is the focus of this time at the beginning of the year. As the students progress, they work with word families and then with sight words.

To successfully reach more students struggling with reading, the authors of *A.L.L.* encourage multiple approaches. They encourage a school to have all of its teachers trained according to their professional development plan. In addition to the *A.L.L.* push-in model, they recommend that a Special Education teacher provide instruction in groups of three or one-on-one throughout the school day for those students who struggle more profoundly with reading.

### Is Accelerated Literacy Learning aligned with Reading First?

*A.L.L.* appears to incorporate the critical components of reading instruction, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Because of the unique aspect that *A.L.L.* is a method built on teacher training, it was not possible to look at actual materials. Rather, our review required us to develop a deep understanding of the completeness of the teacher training and the 30-minute lesson, and this was accomplished with the kind cooperation of one of the authors. It was also helpful to read the research articles that have been published about *A.L.L.*

### Research Support for A.L.L.

Two professors, Susan Homan and James King, at the University of South Florida developed *Accelerated Literacy Learning*. Currently, eleven Florida counties have schools participating in *A.L.L.* To date, the *A.L.L.* program has been reviewed by an outside evaluator and results have been reported by the authors of the program.

One study, which will appear in a peer-reviewed journal, described the implementation of *A.L.L.* as well as the impact it had on student learning (King & Homan, in press). The participants in this study were 14 primary teachers and 27 students determined to be in the bottom 20% of students in their classrooms in terms of reading proficiency. The teachers participated in the extensive *A.L.L.* teacher training which included each component described in the first section of this report. The 27 students received *A.L.L.* instruction within the classroom in small groups of 3. Pre and post data from the Observation Survey (Clay, 1993) and for running records were reported. At the end of the academic year, data were compared from three groups: (a) *A.L.L.* students who received services for a minimum of 40 lessons or who became proficient readers; (b) students identified as "average" by their *A.L.L.* teacher (N=7); and, (c) students identified as needing the *A.L.L.* program but unable to be served in the program (N=5). At the end of the program, the *A.L.L.* students were performing at



levels as high as, or higher than, the average children on each of the six subtests on the Diagnostic Survey. The Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver, 1997) was also used to determine word accuracy and comprehension. Results from this assessment illustrated that students who received *A.L.L.* instruction were reading at book level 20, which is considered to be the end of first grade readability, and comprehended at levels higher than the average children. Although this study suggests that *A.L.L.* can accelerate at-risk students to average literacy performance, it is important to note that there were some limitations: teachers who had taught the children collected the data, statistical comparisons between groups were not possible due to the small sample size, and the more at-risk students formed the comparison group.

*Accelerated Literacy Learning* has been evaluated in multiple Florida counties using similar research designs and measures as the study described above and the authors of the program have reported similar results. In addition, the results of a survey of teachers regarding the professional development of *A.L.L.* has been reported

(Brashears, Homan, & King, 2002). A total of 127 teachers in six districts who had participated in *A.L.L.* were sent surveys with 72% being completed and returned. Teachers noted that the professional development for *A.L.L.* was valuable in helping them to be a more effective literacy teacher.

In sum, the instructional content of *A.L.L.* incorporates research based reading practices. There is a beginning level of research that suggests that *A.L.L.* can accelerate at-risk readers to the level at which their average peers are performing in terms of literacy proficiency. Currently, teachers are employing *A.L.L.* with the lowest 20% of students and the analysis of this data is on-going. The next steps, in terms confirming the efficacy of *A.L.L.* would be to conduct a study that employs random assignment to instructional and appropriate control groups using standardized measures of reading to evaluate student outcomes.

### Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *A.L.L.*:

- The strong professional development required to implement the program will increase the possibility of having excellent teachers of reading.
- As a result of the professional development training, teachers should become better observers of their students and better decision makers concerning student behaviors, thus greatly increasing the possibility of reaching all students.
- The push-in model allows the student to stay in his own class, with his peers, and his classroom teacher takes the responsibility for his success in reading.
- The 30-minute lesson meets daily, is highly structured, explicit and provides many opportunities for fluency development.
- Word work activities are varied and multi-sensory.
- Multiple comprehension strategies are employed during the entire lesson.
- Consistent use of strategy instruction should increase the chances of students becoming more independent as readers.

Weaknesses of *A.L.L.*:

- None were noted.

### Which Florida counties have schools that implement *A.L.L.*?

Brevard County	321-631-1911	Pasco County	813-794-2648
Broward County	954-765-6271	Pinellas County	727-588-6011
Charlotte County	941-255-0808	Sarasota County	941-927-9000
Collier County	239-254-4100	St. Lucie County	772-468-5021
DeSoto County	863-494-4222		
Hillsborough Count	813-272-4050		
Manatee County	941-708-8770		
Osceola County	407-870-4008		

### For More Information

[homan@tempest.coedu.usf.edu](mailto:homan@tempest.coedu.usf.edu)

[king@tempest.coedu.usf.edu](mailto:king@tempest.coedu.usf.edu)

## References



Beaver, J. (1997). *Developmental reading assessment*. Parsippany, NJ: Celebration Press.

Brashears, R., Homan, S., & King, J.R. (March, 2002). Teacher training in early literacy intervention: Teachers' views of accelerated literacy learning. *The Florida Reading Quarterly*, 38 (3), 12-19.

Clay, M. (1993) *Reading Recovery: A guidebook for teachers in training*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

King, J.R. & Homan, S.R. (in press). Early intervention in literacy: An in-class model for teachers. *Reading Research and Instruction*.

Lead Reviewer: Michelle Wahl, M.S.

Date Posted: January, 2003

Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

For more information about FCRR go to: [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org)