

Florida Center for Reading Research

Early Success
Houghton Mifflin Intervention

What is Early Success?

Early Success is a reading intervention program designed for first and second graders who are below grade level. This reading intervention is to be used as a supplement to the regular classroom's basal reading program. Levels 1 and 2 each consist of 30 weeks of lesson plans. The classroom teacher, reading specialist, or Title 1 teacher teaches 30-minute, daily lessons to small groups of 5-7 students. Each lesson is structured to include work in phonics, word-learning activities, and reading fluency development. Vocabulary development and reading comprehension strategies are also addressed. Each level includes 60 books, instructional posters, a blackline masters book with take-home stories, letter cards and trays, a teacher's manual, assessments, and staff development.

The daily lessons for *Early Success* are patterned after a three-step model: rereading for fluency, reading a new book, and working with words and sentences. The lesson begins with rereading known books to develop fluency. This includes oral reading checks and individualized coaching. Students may read individually or with partners, and the teacher provides additional support with self-monitoring strategies.

The next part of the lesson is devoted to the reading of new books, with 2 readings per day. On days 1-3, Book A is read. The first reading is a read aloud by the teacher with students following along as the teacher tracks print and models think aloud strategies for decoding. This is followed by Shared Reading where the teacher again reads aloud and the students join in, as they are able. The teacher Read Aloud is gradually faded and replaced by Shared Reading and then Choral Reading. On other days, there is Partner Reading and Individual (coached) Reading. Book B is introduced and read on days 4-5, using Partner Reading and Individual Reading. This book is slightly shorter and extends some aspect of Book A. The teacher's manual gives explicit wording for modeling the decoding think-aloud strategy.



The final part of each day's lesson includes word work with phonemic awareness and phonics activities, high frequency words and word walls, and writing sentences. One particular activity is chosen for each day. Days 1 and 4 of this part of the lesson are devoted to phonemic awareness and phonics activities; days 2 and 5 are guided sentence writing in which the teacher helps students write for sounds; and Day 3 is work with high frequency words. The phonemic awareness activities during the first 3 weeks of Level 1 involve segmenting and blending of onset and rime and individual phonemes. During week 4, sound box activities are incorporated into days 1 and 4 to help develop phonemic awareness and the one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. Segmenting and blending along with phoneme manipulation provide work with target phonic elements.

Is Early Success aligned with Reading First?

An important dimension of Florida's Reading First initiative includes reviews of reading programs such as *Early Success* as possible candidates for immediate, intensive intervention. Florida created a formula, 5+3+ii+iii, to represent the various dimensions of the Reading First initiative which can be summarized as: the 5 important components of reading instruction; the 3 types of assessment to be used; initial instruction referring to the classroom's core reading program; and iii, which is the immediate, intensive intervention to be given to readers struggling to keep up with regular classroom reading instruction. It is in light of the Reading First Initiative and the immediate, intensive intervention that we review *Early Success*.

All of the major components of Reading First can be found in *Early Success*. Fluency development is addressed on a daily basis with oral repeated readings, individually, with partners, or in shared and choral response with the teacher. Each day begins with 5-10 minutes rereading familiar books. The new story is read twice daily for the first 3 days, and days 4-5 introduce a new book that is also read twice daily.

Comprehension strategies such as story prediction, retell, and questioning are incorporated as part of the reading segment. During the first weeks of instruction, the teacher does a "picture walk" through each new book (days 1 and 3 only), commenting on the various parts of each page. After several weeks (week 10 in Levels 1 and 2), this "picture walk" is gradually faded so that there is only reference to the title of the new book. Story retell happens on Day 2 for the first 10 weeks in Level 1 and the first 16 weeks in Level 2. One or two comprehension questions are usually asked after story reading and often during sentence writing. The sentences used for this writing activity are taken from or prompted by questions from that day's story, helping students to further reflect on what was read while simultaneously connecting word work to familiar text.

The third part of each day's lesson, Working with Words and Writing Sentences, follows an appropriate developmental hierarchy by providing students with instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, and high frequency words. Students receive varied opportunities to develop phonemic awareness and phonics skills: through oral exercises in segmenting and blending; through sound box activities designed to promote the sound-letter connection; by making words, in which students focus on how letters go together to make words, on how changing one letter can create a new word, and on word parts or letter patterns; and finally, by writing sentences, focusing on sounds in words. In terms of phonics, only vowels are taught explicitly, with the assumption that the students are receiving sufficient instruction in the letter-sound correspondence of consonants within the regular reading program. During the new book reading, the teacher always models a decoding think aloud strategy for the students. Although modeling strategies is a good technique, this decoding think aloud strategy could be more concise so instructional time is maximized.

There are some possible concerns in using *Early Success* as an immediate, intensive intervention. In the framework of Reading First, explicit instruction in vowels and consonants should be evident in an intervention, especially at the first grade level. Students could benefit from a few extra minutes of instruction in letter-sound correspondence during each day's lesson using the Alphafriend cards. The consonants could be taught explicitly in conjunction with the excellent phonemic awareness and phonics activities that each card provides. The lessons in *Early Success* are structured

such that instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, and word work occurs at the end of the lesson rather than immediately preceding the reading of the new book. In order for a struggling reader to experience more success during the reading of the new book, it is helpful to have work in phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle come immediately before the new book reading. This sequence would enable students to link the word work to the story being read, allowing them the opportunity to apply these skills to the new text reading. Many difficult phonic elements are introduced in the leveled books within the first few weeks of instruction rather than carefully pacing the amount of new material brought into the beginning lessons. This is a potential problem for readers who struggle to acquire new information quickly and who have not yet internalized sufficient decoding strategies.

Vocabulary instruction is addressed in several ways. *Early Success* will often group words for classification or give the meaning of a word. Following a decoding strategy, the teacher asks if the word makes sense in that sentence, or a word meaning might be clarified. As part of the word making activities, a defining context for a word may be given. Finally, while writing sentences, the teacher will usually prompt the students about the story just read, thus motivating the students to write with words from that particular reading. *Early Success* recommends some excellent word building routines, such as word webs, word sorts, and synonym and antonym work. However this is recommended for work outside of the lesson rather than incorporating it as part of the actual lesson.

Professional development is offered with a variety of options. A Staff Development Video comes with the program and demonstrates strategies teachers will use during a lesson. A half-day training also comes with the program. Monthly 2-hour staff development sessions are strongly recommended so that the teachers may discuss and share information about effective teaching practices. For an extra cost, the teachers may attend a 1-day Early Intervention Institute. On-line staff development is also available.

Research Support for Early Success

The *Early Intervention in Reading Program (EIR)*, which is the predecessor to and research base for *Early Success*, has been developed and evaluated over a 12-year period. The entire research report focusing on grade 1 and 2 is available at: www.eireading.com. In this review, we will focus on the research for grade one.

The first study was conducted in 1989-90 in a large midwestern city with 20% of students on subsidized lunch (Taylor, Short, Frye, & Shearer, 1992). Twelve teachers at four schools were randomly assigned to the *EIR* or non-treatment control condition. In addition to their regular reading instruction (literature-based program with students heterogeneously grouped), 31 low-achieving readers received *EIR* instruction for 20 minutes each day and 28 low-achieving students received extra time reading to and reviewing skills with the teacher. After controlling for fall raw scores on the Gates-MacGinitie Readiness Test, the *EIR* students had significantly higher mean raw scores than the control students on the reading comprehension subtest of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test administered at the end of the year. Further, 67% of the students in the *EIR* group were reading on at least a preprimer level at the end of first grade and approximately 50% of them were reading on at least a first grade level at this time. Thirty-six percent of students in the control group were reading on at least a preprimer level at the end of first grade and approximately 20% were reading on at least a first grade level at this time.



The following year, another study took place in two other school districts in the midwest and results were reported in the same article as the first study (1992). In this study, there were four teachers from two schools who implemented *EIR* and four teachers from two other schools who did not implement *EIR*. The *EIR* program was used in the same manner as described above. At the end of the year, students read from an informal reading inventory (Roe, 1989) and were given a score for the highest level at which they could read with at least 93% accuracy (e.g., non-reader=1.0, preprimer=1.3, primer=1.6, end of grade=1.9, second grade=2.5, third grade=3.5). After controlling for students' fall scores in phonemic awareness (Taylor, 1990), it was found that the *EIR* students had higher reading scores than the control students. The *EIR* students' mean (unadjusted) reading level in the spring was 1.9 as compared to 1.3 for the control students. Because of the small sample size, no statistical comparisons were made between groups, although one could argue that a difference in grade level of six months between the experimental and control student is likely to be educationally meaningful.

One school in a rural community in Wisconsin carried out another study using two *EIR* classrooms and one control classroom. After controlling for fall phonemic awareness scores (Taylor, 1990), it was found that the *EIR* students had a higher mean reading level score in May than the control students. The mean reading level score for *EIR* students and control students was 2.1 and 1.4 respectively. It is not known if this is a statistically significant difference, although, again, it appears as though it might be an educationally meaningful difference.

David Chard (1997) of University of Oregon conducted an outside evaluation of *EIR* in 27 schools in Springfield, Massachusetts. Houghton Mifflin has published this final evaluation report. The study compared four primary programs: Springfield *EIR*, Other, Open Court, and Early Success. Seven measures were developed, and then administered by teachers and support staff early in the school year, mid-way through the school year, and at the end of the early intervention programs. Each measure focused on an element important to reading instruction: letter-name; letter-sound; segmenting; blending; dictation; word reading; additional words (writing words the student knows how to write). Because student scores were not equivalent at pretest and both the Other Programs and Open Court conditions contained small numbers of students, pretest scores were used as a covariant to provide a more accurate analysis. The group receiving Springfield *EIR* had the highest adjusted mean on each measure. Given this finding, the researcher decided to use Springfield *EIR* as the standard against which to compare the other three programs. Removing Springfield *EIR* from the comparison, *Early Success* outperformed students receiving Other Programs or Open Court on all measures except dictation and additional words. There are many limitations to the findings of this report. First, data were collected by teachers and support staff and discrepancies in test administration occurred. Second, it is very unusual to compare the effectiveness of a curriculum delivered to a whole class (Open Court) with one delivered as a supplemental intervention to small groups of children. With this design, differences in outcomes between interventions are likely to be the result of differences in instructional group size rather than differential effectiveness of the instructional methods.

In conclusion, *Early Success* incorporates what we currently know from reading research in terms of including the five essential components of reading instruction. It also addresses characteristics of effective early reading intervention programs: delivered daily to small groups; fast paced; scaffolded instruction; and strong

professional development. There appears to be beginning levels of empirical research support for the use of *Early Success* as an intervention for struggling readers. The next step in determining the efficacy of the program is to conduct more independent evaluations of reading growth across a variety of measures using appropriate comparison groups. From the research reported, it is not clear whether this intervention is sufficiently powerful to help the majority of children at risk for reading difficulties attain grade level performance by the end of first grade.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Early Success*:

- Intervention is daily in a small group setting.
- Lessons are highly structured.
- Fluency development is given high priority.
- Sound box activities provide an excellent means for developing the one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds.
- Students are taught to monitor their thinking process with specific steps.
- Sentence writing twice a week is tied to the story being read and targets some of the vowel sounds of that week. Students are encouraged to look at the word wall to incorporate high frequency words.
- In Level 2 there are helpful think aloud strategies for analyzing multisyllabic words.
- Weekly oral reading checks will provide teachers with useful information to inform instruction.

Weaknesses of *Early Success*:

- Consonant sounds are not explicitly taught with the assumption that the students receive adequate instruction of these elements within the regular reading program. In terms of Reading First schools, explicit instruction in all of the consonants and vowels should be evident in an intervention.

Which Florida counties have schools that implement Early Success?

Bay County	850-872-7700
Brevard County	321-631-1911
Broward County	954-765-6271
Collier County	239-254-4100
Dade County	305-995-1428
Duval County	904-390-2115
Escambia County	386-437-7526
Hillsborough County	813-272-4050
Marion County	352-671-7702
Orange County	407-317-3202
Osceola County	407-870-4008
Pasco County	813-794-2648
Pinellas County	727-588-6011
St. Johns County	904-826-2100

For More Information

<http://www.earlyinterventioninreading.com/>

References

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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.

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