

Taking a Reading/Writing Intervention for Secondary English Language Learners on the Road: Lessons Learned from the Pathway Project

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These two recipients of this year's Alan C. Purves Award reflect on their work (reported in RTE Vol. 41, No.3, pp. 269–303) on "A Cognitive Strategies Approach to Reading and Writing Instruction for English Language Learners in Secondary School" and the lessons they learned from their original research study as they tried to replicate the project in two additional districts outside their service area, to determine if the implications of their study would hold beyond the local context. The Alan C. Purves Award is given to the RTE article in the previous volume year judged most likely to impact educational practice.

At the beginning of the 2007 school year, we received this forwarded message from Chuck Ogle, a retired District Literacy Specialist for Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD) and former middle school Pathway Project teacher, who is assisting us with a new three-year research study, and we had to smile.

From: "Autumn Lovin" alovin@paramount.k12.ca.us

Date: September 18, 2007

To: cogle@cox.net

Subject: UCI

Hi Chuck,

I was just wondering when we are going to begin with UCI stuff this year . . .

I am DYING to start teaching the cognitive strategies to my students, but I thought I should wait until after they take the pre test.

Any info will be greatly appreciated.

Thanks,

Autumn

Autumn is beginning her third year as an experimental teacher in the Accelerating Academic Literacy Project, a collaborative venture between the UC Irvine/California Writing Project (UCIWP) and Lynwood and Paramount Unified School Districts, and Chuck is serving as a Literacy Coach. Funded by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), this recent grant project was mentioned in the **Next Steps** section of our article “A Cognitive Strategies Approach to Reading and Writing Instruction for Secondary English Language Learners.” It is our attempt to replicate the quasi-experimental design of the Pathway Project, the eight-year longitudinal study we conducted in SAUSD, to determine if the implications of the study will hold beyond the local context. In this reflective essay, we will focus on the lessons we learned during our implementation of the Pathway Project in SAUSD that have helped us successfully deliver professional development based on a cognitive strategies approach to literacy instruction for secondary English language learners (ELLs) in a setting that is outside our service area, and discuss some of the challenges we have faced in taking this reading/writing intervention on the road.

The Setting

Lynwood and Paramount Unified School Districts are located in Los Angeles County only 33 miles from UCI, but anywhere from an hour to two hours drive on traffic-congested freeways. Both districts have strikingly similar demographics and performance profiles to SAUSD, as Figure 1 on the following page indicates for 2004-05, the year we submitted our CPEC proposal.

We were especially interested in these districts because they have large populations of ELLs who are mainstreamed into standard English/Language arts classes just as they are in SAUSD. Therefore, these districts afforded us an opportunity to study the efficacy of our intervention and to see if we could achieve similar results with secondary ELLs in an area where we had no pre-existing relationships with teachers or administrators.

The Research Design

As with our eight-year Pathway Project in SAUSD, this project seeks to examine the extent to which providing ELLs in secondary school with declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of the cognitive strategies that research indicates successful readers and writers access when they construct meaning from and with texts will improve their reading and writing performance as based on commonly used measures and as sustained over time (Baker & Brown, 1984; Paris, Lipson, & Wixon, 1983; Pressley, 2000). We used a quasi-experimental research design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963) involving the same quantitative and qualitative measures described in our original article. However, because this project is only

Santa Ana Unified School District	Lynwood Unified School District	Paramount Unified School District
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 61,693 total students • Ethnic Breakdown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hispanic—92% • Asian—3% • Filipino/Pacific Islander—1% • Black—1% • Other—3% • 60% LEP • 75% Free and Reduced Lunch • API: 2004 <u>Base</u>: 628 • 9 out of 13 secondary schools in PI • CAHSEE Pass Rate for 2004-2005 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District 62% English Learners 39% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19,072 total students • Ethnic Breakdown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hispanic—90.5% • Asian—0% • Filipino/Pacific Islander—0.1% • Black—8.5% • Other—0.8% • 45.3% LEP • 70.8% Free and Reduced Lunch • API: 2004 <u>Base</u>: 600 • 1 Middle School in PI • 1 High School not in PI • CAHSEE Pass Rate for 2004-2005 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District 62% English Learners 33% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16,823 total students • Ethnic Breakdown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hispanic—83.1% • Asian—1.2% • Filipino/Pacific Islander—1.7% • Black—10.9% • Other—0 % • 43.1% LEP • 82% Free and Reduced Lunch • API: 2004 <u>Base</u>: 630 • 4 out of 5 secondary schools in PI • CAHSEE Pass Rate for 2004– 2005 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District 50% English Learners 33%
<p>Note: CAHSEE is the California High School Exit Exam. PI is Program Improvement. API is Academic Performance Index, which is scaled from 200-1000 with 800 being the target for CA schools.</p>		

FIGURE 1

three years in duration, the districts are smaller, and we wanted to expose a critical mass of teachers to the intervention, we modified our design. Instead of having one experimental teacher matched with one control teacher, we divided the group into thirds. Then, to compensate for the geographical distance between UCI and these districts and to maintain more contact with the teachers, we added a coaching component that was not present in our original study. In Year 1, one-third of the participants received the professional development and volunteered to be coached, one-third received the professional development but did not volunteer to be coached, and one-third served as control teachers. In Year 2, the teachers who were not coached in Year 1 were coached. In Year 3, the control teachers joined the experimental group and they will receive coaching this year.

The Lessons

Start small and then scale up.

In our original Pathway Project, we began with 14 teachers in two schools and scaled up over time to 55 teachers in thirteen secondary schools, reaching over 2000 students per year. This enabled us to groom a cadre of influential teachers, seven of whom were Writing Project Fellows, to provide leadership throughout the duration of the project. In Lynwood and Paramount, we had no Writing Project

teachers to rely on and less time to implement our intervention. So, we began with 25 teachers in Year 1, added 10 teachers in Year 2, and grew to 45 teachers in Year 3. Guskey (2000) postulates that “significant change in the beliefs and attitudes of teachers is contingent on their gaining evidence of change in learning outcomes of their students” (p. 7). As in SAUSD, it was very helpful to have a cadre of open-minded, well-regarded teachers see the impact of the project for themselves and for their students in Year 1 who have served as role models in Years 2 and 3.

Create a community of learners.

Teachers these days (at least teachers in California) are bristling under state mandates, the pressure of high stakes tests, and pacing charts that can sometimes be so prescriptive as to specify what they should be doing while teaching a designated skill, strategy, content standard, and/or work of literature on any given day. Winning the trust of sometimes wary teachers is essential to implementing a successful intervention. Tchudi and Mitchell (1999) note, “Too often the affective domain in secondary classrooms is pooh-pooed and dismissed as non-essential” (p. 118). Although we were delivering a cognitive strategies intervention, we recognized that building an affective climate for learning is every bit as essential for teachers as for students. Consequently, we endeavored to create the same type of community of learners with these teachers that we do in our National Writing Project Summer Institutes. In a learning community, individuals have “a sense of being valued and respected . . . They feel connected to each other; they are an ‘us’” (Kohn, 1996, p. 101). To that end, we acknowledged teachers’ expertise, seeking their input on aspects of the training and the curriculum materials, and we invited them to bring successful assignments and student work to share with colleagues during school site meeting time and in grade level groups. Our CPEC Literacy Coaches, Chuck Ogle, Pat Clark, and Sharon Schiesl, also observed all teachers’ classes once per year and visited the coaching group’s classes three times per year and wrote lengthy personal letters highlighting the elements of effective instruction they had seen and offering helpful suggestions, pedagogical strategies, and curriculum materials.

When Autumn emailed Chuck because she wanted to find out the start date for the Year 3 CPEC Project, she did so because she had established a positive relationship with Chuck through his visits as her Literacy Coach. At our Kick-off meeting in October, we asked Autumn to explain why she was DYING to get started with the cognitive strategies intervention. She wrote the following:

I can’t wait to get started because I feel that the sooner I am able to start teaching my students to use their cognitive strategies “tool kit” the more productive their year will be. The lessons are so well organized and easy to teach; it actually makes my job easier and they love it! My students really get excited about all the hands on activities as well as learning to write better. It makes them more confident when they feel like they really

can write a great essay. I want to be able to expose this year's group to as much of the material as possible because it really makes a difference in their reading and writing skills.

One reason Autumn is especially invested in the intervention is that she contributed important ideas to the design of the curriculum materials. At one of our meetings, she shared how she had taken the Cognitive Strategies Sentence Starters we described on page 280 of our original article and combined them with booklets and visuals we designed for student-led discussions. We took her prototype and made class sets for every teacher. This leads us to our next lesson learned . . .

All of the principles of instructional scaffolding in the classroom apply to professional development.

Ownership: Just like students, teachers need to have buy-in and a sense of purpose as they implement what they are learning;

Appropriateness: The tasks teachers are asked to undertake must build on their existing knowledge and research-base while challenging them to stretch;

Structure: The intervention/learning/teaching materials must be clear, useful, well organized, and presented in a way that not only guides teachers through their implementation but also enables them to apply the concepts in other contexts;

Collaboration: Teachers need ongoing opportunities to collaborate and to co-construct the intervention;

Internalization: The goal is increasingly to transfer the control for the intervention over to the teachers as they weave the intervention into the fabric of their teaching and apply and implement strategies independently. (Adapted from Langer and Applebee, 1986)

Establish tangible outcomes but don't promise more than you can deliver.

Because our original Pathway Project demonstrates that it takes time to show growth in student reading and writing ability and especially to show transfer effect to high stakes tests (Olson & Land, 2007, p. 291), we have made it a practice to set tangible goals in terms of student outcomes but not to set the bar beyond what we could reasonably expect to achieve. For example, based on the Pathway results, we felt confident that we could state in our CPEC grant proposal that if teachers "faithfully" implemented the intervention, they could expect students to gain the

equivalent of one-half a letter grade from their pre test to post test on the Assessments of Literary Analysis in a given year (Olson & Land, 2007, p. 288), that their students would not only grow more but write significantly higher post tests than control students, and that their students' standardized test scores and on-demand writing scores would show an "upward trend" in Years 2 and 3 of the project exceeding that of the comparison group.

With that said, one of the most essential lessons we learned was . . .

It is important for professional developers to have high expectations of teachers and for teacher to have high expectations for their students.

Increasingly, school districts are looking to highly prescriptive "teacher proof programs" to solve the problem of underperforming students. But these programs, especially those designed for ELLs, often offer a reductionist curriculum focusing on skill and drill. Many teachers of struggling students avoid teaching and requiring students to write analytical essays because they feel the skills required are too sophisticated for the population they serve. Yet, 20 states have established high-stakes exams that assess higher-level-reading and writing abilities (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2003). A panel of distinguished researchers convened by the Educational Alliance at Brown University to explore promising practices for ELLs concurred that ELLs are most successful when teachers have high expectations and do not deny their students access to challenging academic content (Coady, Hamann, Harrington, Pacheco, Pho, & Yedlin, 2003). Our original Pathway study not only reinforces this recommendation, but also found that considerable academic advancement is possible for ELLs year after year when such strategies are implemented.

Large-scale professional development/research studies in school districts require administrative support.

No large-scale professional development undertaking, particularly one that involves research, data collection, and management of the master schedule for teachers or students, can be successful without administrative support at the school site and at the district level. One of the challenges we have faced in implementing a study in an area where we had no long-standing prior relationship (as we did in SAUSD where we had a 20 year history of collaboration) is in convincing busy administrators to keep the students participating in Year 1 of the study together as a cohort and placing them in the classroom of the UCI/CPEC teacher at the next grade level in Year 2, and doing so again in Year 3. As a result, the fidelity to the Pathway model across schools has been uneven in terms of the number of second year students who remained in the program. Additionally, teachers across schools received differing amounts of administrative support as they implemented the intervention strategies and materials. Some teachers were encouraged to weave the intervention into their classrooms and to make modi-

fifications to their pacing charts, when necessary; others had to fit the intervention into an already full teaching schedule. Hence, the fidelity across teachers in implementing the key components of the intervention also varied.

Preliminary Results

Despite the uneven fidelity of implementation, our first important finding is that the cognitive strategies approach appears to yield significant growth in the new districts. Table 1 shows the results for 2005-2006, the first year of the intervention.¹

TABLE 1. Overall Effect¹ for Cognitive Strategies Intervention on Assessments of Literary Analysis² in Lynwood and Paramount School Districts Grades 8-12, 2005-2006

	Treatment (N=309)	Control (N=169)	Difference	Significance
Pre Test Mean (N)	5.95	6.01	-.06	n.s.
Post Test Mean (N)	6.69	5.56	1.13	p.<.0001
Difference	.74	-.44	1.18	p.<.0001
Significance	p.<.001	p.<.002		

1. Significance probabilities here and in Table 2 are derived from a repeated measures analysis of variance.

2. The Assessments of Literary Analysis are in-class essays written in response to literature. These are holistically scored on a 1-6 scale. Essays are double scored without scorers knowing when the essay was written or at what grade level. The two scores are summed. Thus, the means reported are on an 11 point scale, "2"- "12." Two forms of the assessment are administered each year such that one half of the students in both the treatment and control groups receive one form as the pre test and the other as the post test. The other half of the students receive the assessments in reverse order to control for possible differences in task difficulty. All paper scores that differ by more than 1 point are scored by a third reader.

The treatment group, which received the cognitive strategies intervention, began the year with slightly lower performance on their response to literature essays than the control group. However, they ended the year with significantly higher post test scores and a significant gain, whereas the control group actually had significantly lower post test scores. The average difference between treatment and control group gains over this school year is 1.18, which compare very favorably with the average difference of .56 for students at the same grade levels in the eight-year-long Pathway Project study. One explanation for the difference between the two studies may be that control group students in the eight-year study did show gains on the post tests whereas control students in the replication study showed no improvement in the first year.

Year two results from the replication study are shown in Table 2. Again, the treatment group gains were significantly higher than those for the control group, although the average difference of .54 is more in keeping with findings from our earlier study.

TABLE 2. Overall Effect for Cognitive Strategies Intervention on Assessments of Literary Analysis in Lynwood and Paramount School Districts Grades 9-12, 2006-2007

	Treatment (N=370)	Control (N=177)	Difference	Significance
Pre Test Mean (N)	6.01	5.68	.33	n.s. (p.<.07)
Post Test Mean (N)	6.47	5.59	.88	p.<.0001
Difference	.46	-.08	.54	p.<.002
Significance	p.<.0001	n.s.		

A second important finding emerging in our CPEC study that is consistent with our study in SAUSD is that students who remain in the program for multiple years have higher pre test scores than first year experimental or control students as well as higher post test scores in subsequent years in the program. In other words, the duration of the intervention matters. Table 3 indicates the difference in performance between students who joined the CPEC project in Year 2 for the first time and students who were in a CPEC experimental teacher's class for the second year in a row.

TABLE 3. Assessments of Literary Analysis Scores by Student Years of Participation – 2006-2007

Group	Number of Students	Pre Test	Post Test	Difference
Control	177	5.68	5.60	-.08
First Year Student	342	5.78	6.27	.49
Second Year Student	56	7.14	7.18	.04

Note: 14 pairs of student pre tests and post tests per class were randomly sampled for scoring.

Two additional findings thus far concern the coaching component of the CPEC project and a carry-over effect. In Year 1, students in the classes of the ten teachers who received coaching had higher gains on the Assessments of Literary Analysis than students in the classes of 15 non-coached teachers in the UCI/CPEC project. The differences between fall 2005 pre test scores and spring 2006 post test scores were as follows:

UCI/CPEC Coached	+0.92
UCI/CPEC Non-Coached	+0.64
Control Teachers	-0.44

The difference in gains between the coached and non-coached UCI/CPEC teachers is not statistically significant ($p < .21$). However, the difference between the two groups was big enough that had there been larger numbers of teachers participating the effect would have been significant. Students in the classes of coached teachers also had higher post test scores (7.13) as opposed to students of project teachers not in the coached group (6.38) versus students who were in the control group (5.54).

In Year 2, as Table 4 indicates, the students of second year CPEC teachers coached in the project in Year 1 had the highest pre test scores and the highest post test scores of any students in the study followed by second year students of CPEC teachers who joined the project in 05-06 but did not receive coaching until 06-07. Second year students in teachers' classes who were new to the CPEC Project in 06-07 had the lowest post test scores of the three groups but still showed growth and had higher pre test scores than the first year students of new and second year CPEC teachers coached in 06-07. When we compared the performance of students of these CPEC teachers who were coached in 06-07 with the performance of students of control teachers, the difference in gains was statistically significant (.54 versus -.08, $p < .0002$). This result suggests that coaching can have a positive impact. Therefore we have added 15 coaches (one per secondary school) to our most recent study in SAUSD.

TABLE 4. Assessments of Literary Analysis Scores by Teacher Level of Professional Development and Student Years of Participation – 2006-2007

Group		Number of Students	Pre Test	Post Test	Difference
CONTROL (N=14)		177	5.68	5.60	-.08
First Year Teacher in CPEC Project, Coached 2006-2007 (n=11)	First Year Student in CPEC Project	142	5.64	6.12	.48
	Second Year Student in CPEC Project	11	6.27	6.55	.27
Second Year Teacher in CPEC Project, Coached 2006-2007 (n=11)	First Year Student in CPEC Project	131	5.60	6.28	.68
	Second Year Student in CPEC Project	21	6.76	7.05	.29
Second Year Teacher in CPEC Project, Coached the Previous Year, 2005-2006 (n=7)	First Year Student in CPEC Project	68	6.43	6.59	.16
	Second Year Student in CPEC Project	24	7.88	7.58	-.29

A new phenomenon we noticed for the first time (with the exception seniors in the eight-year Pathway Project who often had “senioritis” and underperformed on the post test) is something we are calling “assessment fatigue.” We learned of

this when we saw notes on some of the papers that said things like, “I’m really tired of taking tests, so this essay may not be that great.” This may account for the slight, but not statistically significant, decline in the second year students’ performance in the classes of second year teachers coached in Year 1, who began the year highly motivated and wrote lengthy, high-scoring pre test essays and wrote strong but less elaborated responses on their post tests that received similar or lower scores. Nonetheless, all second year students (who had significantly higher gains in Year 1), started out with significantly higher scores than new treatment group students in the fall of 2006 (5.78 vs. 7.14, $p < .0001$). This would seem to indicate a strong, positive carryover effect. Treatment group students gained and the gains held up over the summer.

On the Road and Back Again

As we enter the third and final year of implementing our cognitive strategies intervention in Lynwood and Paramount, we have launched a new research study in SAUSD, which is being funded by the U. S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (IES). This is a 3-year efficacy replication field trial (after an initial year devoted to the development of measures) with 104 teachers randomly assigned to treatment and control conditions. In the Pathway Project, although we coded teachers and students for the number of years they participated in the study, we did not control for teacher variables such as gender, age, years of teaching experience, training in ESL, qualification status with NCLB, and measures of self-efficacy. In the replication trial, we will control for these measures as well as collect classroom observational data to capture the fidelity of teachers’ implementation of the intervention and the quality of teacher practice and the use of cognitive strategies in the classroom.

The lessons learned not only in the original Pathway Project but during the time we took this intervention on the road will guide us as we bring the intervention back to SAUSD to serve new teachers and those veteran teachers who have not been involved in the intervention previously.

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