

What Works Clearinghouse



Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs

Program description

This WWC report examines the effect of *Instructional Conversations* and *Literature Logs* used in combination. The goal of *Instructional Conversations* is to help English language learners develop reading comprehension ability along with English language proficiency. *Instructional Conversations* are small-group discussions. Acting as facilitators, teachers engage English language learners

in discussions about stories, key concepts, and related personal experiences, which allow them to appreciate and build on each others' experiences, knowledge, and understanding. *Literature Logs* require English language learners to write in a log in response to writing prompts or questions related to sections of stories. These responses are then shared in small groups or with a partner.

Research

Two studies of *Instructional Conversations* and *Literature Logs* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards with reservations.¹ The two studies included over 200 Hispanic English language learners from grades 2–5. The two studies reviewed for this report assess program impacts

in two different contexts; one focuses on the short-term (use of the intervention over a few days) and the other focuses on the long-term (use of the intervention over a few years) with the intervention delivered as key components in a broader language arts program.

Effectiveness

Instructional Conversations and *Literature Logs* was found to have potentially positive effects on reading achievement and English language development.

	Reading achievement	Mathematics achievement	English language development
Rating of effectiveness	Potentially positive effects	Not reported	Potentially positive effects
Improvement index²	Average: +29 percentile points Range: +24 to +33 percentile points	Not reported	Average: +23 percentile points Range: +21 to +24 percentile points

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.
 2. These numbers show the average and range of improvement indices for all findings across the studies.

Additional program information

Developer and contact

The *Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs* intervention was developed by William Saunders and Claude Goldenberg and is available from the publisher, the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE). Address: Graduate School of Education, 1640 Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-1670. Email: crede@berkeley.edu. Web: <http://crede.berkeley.edu/research/crede/research/llaa/1.5pubs.html>. Telephone: (510) 643-9024.

Scope of use

Information is not available on the number or demographics of students, schools, or districts using this intervention.

Teaching

This WWC report focuses on a specific approach to combining the *Literature Logs* and *Instructional Conversations* used in the Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) and Saunders (1999)³ studies. In the Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) study, the instructional components were used on alternating days with the same story. For the

Literature Log component, teachers assigned entries for different segments of readings. English language learners were then asked to write about personal experiences relevant to a character in the story, provide a detailed description of an event that occurred in the story, and evaluate a theme from the story. They wrote in their logs independently and then participated in a discussion led by the teacher comparing their own personal experiences to those of the character in the story. For *Instructional Conversation* lessons, the teacher facilitated discussions with English language learners in small groups about the content of the story. They participated in discussions for approximately 45 minutes per week. The discussions provide an opportunity for teachers to assess story comprehension and assist in broadening English language learners' understanding of the story content and themes.

The two studies reviewed in this report used the intervention in different ways. In the Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) study, *Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs* was used as a short-term intervention and delivered within four days. In the Saunders (1999) study, the intervention was delivered as a key component of a broader language arts program delivered from grades 2–5.

Research

Cost

No information is currently available on the cost of the intervention. Two studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of *Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs*. One study (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999) was a randomized controlled trial that met WWC evidence standards with reservations due to differences between groups in the amount of instruction provided.⁴

The other study (Saunders, 1999) was a quasi-experimental design that met WWC evidence standards with reservations.

Saunders and Goldenberg's (1999) short-term study matched 58 students from two fourth grade and three fifth grade classrooms on language and reading proficiency and randomly assigned them to either the intervention or comparison group within each classroom.⁵ Thirty-two of these students were English language learners and are the focus of this intervention report. The intervention group was

3. In addition to *Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs*, Saunders (1999) included 10 common instructional components in the experimental group and employed them over a five-year period. Readers may want to view the results of this study and Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) separately in order to judge the effectiveness of the *Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs* alone versus in combination with a variety of other more common instructional components.
4. The study reported a confound between the intervention and the amount of instructional time because students in the intervention condition had more instructional time than those in the comparison group. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether the observed group differences resulted from the difference in the amount of instruction or type of instruction.
5. Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) included two additional study groups (*Instructional Conversations* only and *Literature Logs* only). The results pertaining to these groups were not reviewed in this intervention report.

Research (continued)

compared to the comparison group on multiple reading achievement and English language development measures.

Saunders (1999) conducted a longitudinal study of the effects of a transitional bilingual program on Hispanic English language learners. The program featured *Instructional Conversations* and *Literature Logs* as two key components integrated with a reading language arts curriculum, and was provided to English language learners from grades 2–5. Ninety English language learners from five program schools and 90 English language learners from five matched neighboring schools were randomly selected from the pool of eligible students⁶ to participate in

the study at the beginning of the second grade. From the 125 English language learners who remained in the study through the end of fifth grade, 84 were randomly selected and matched within subgroups⁷ based on first grade Spanish reading and language scores to form the analytic sample. The analysis compared the 42 English language learners in the intervention group and the 42 English language learners in the comparison group on multiple reading achievement and English language development measures. Instruction and assessment for these fifth grade English language learners were in English and the focus of this report is for that grade only.

Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of English language learner interventions addresses student outcomes in three domains: reading achievement, mathematics achievement, and English language development.

Reading achievement. Saunders and Goldenberg (1999) found that *Instructional Conversations* and *Literature Logs* had statistically significant positive effects on both measures of factual comprehension and interpretive comprehension. The WWC was only able to confirm the statistical significance of the factual comprehension measure. Saunders (1999) reported a statistically significant difference favoring the fifth grade intervention group on performance assessment. The WWC confirmed the statistical significance of this finding. In both studies, the intervention had statistically significant positive effects on reading achievement according to WWC criteria.

English language development. Saunders (1999) reported a statistically significant difference favoring the fifth grade

intervention group on English language development. The WWC, however, was not able to confirm the statistical significance of this finding. In this study, the effect of *Instructional Conversations* and *Literature Logs* on English language development was substantively important.

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as: positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings (as calculated by the WWC⁸), the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

6. All students in the analysis sample were English language learners.

7. Subgroups were formed based on whether the student qualified and began transitional language arts in fourth or fifth grade. This report does not separate findings by subgroup and instead focuses on findings based on the overall sample.

8. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, where necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See the [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of *Instructional Conversations* and *Literature Logs*, corrections for multiple comparisons and clustering were needed.

**The WWC found
*Instructional Conversations
and Literature Logs* to have
potentially positive effects
for reading achievement**

**The WWC found *Instructional
Conversations and Literature
Logs* to have potentially
positive effects for English
language development**

Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is entirely based on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analysis. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results. The average improvement index for reading achievement is +29 percentile points across the two studies, with a range of +24 to +33 percentile points across findings. The improvement index for

English language development is +23 with a range of +21 to +24 percentile points across findings.

Summary

The WWC reviewed two studies on *Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs*. One of these studies was a randomized controlled trial that met WWC evidence standards with reservations due to differences between groups in the amount of instruction given. This study focused on the short-term impacts of the intervention. The other study was a quasi-experimental design that met WWC evidence standards with reservations. This study focused on the long-term impacts where the intervention was administered within a language arts program. Based on these two studies, the WWC found the intervention to have potentially positive effects on reading achievement and potentially positive effects on English language development. The evidence presented in this report is limited and may change as new research emerges.

References

Met WWC evidence standards with reservations

Saunders, W. M. (1999). Improving literacy achievement for English learners in transitional bilingual programs. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 5(4), 345–381.

Saunders, W. M., & Goldenberg, C. (1999). Effects of instructional conversations and literature logs on limited- and fluent-English-proficient students' story comprehension and thematic understanding. *Elementary School Journal*, 99(4), 277–301.

For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC *Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs* Technical Appendices](#).