Language in Action:

The Impact of an After-School Program on the English Language Development

of High School Students in Los Angeles Unified

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Abstract

The **Beyond the Bell Branch** of the **Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)** operates California's largest after-school program consortium, which includes programs at 73 high schools serving approximately 85,000 students annually, of which 15% are English learners (ELs). Beyond the Bell initiated the ***Language in Action*** program as part of the broader after-school program to help EL students reach academic and linguistic proficiency while attending high school. *Language in Action* provides opportunities for ELs to practice language through engagement in authentic social interaction, service-learning projects, and peer-mediated collaborative learning. Using a quasi-experimental, matched-pair design, the impact of Beyond the Bell after-school programs on the literacy development of ELs was examined at 53 Title 1 high schools in LAUSD. The outcome measured was the performance of students designated as ELs on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) in between the 2010-11 and 2013-14 school years. Outcomes for a treatment group of 695 ELs who were frequent program participants were statistically compared with those of carefully matched control groups of EL non-participants. Changes were measured between each student's baseline school year prior to program entry and an outcome school year. In summary, mean increases in CELDT score points were significantly greater than matched control groups within a 99% confidence level for one- and two-year EL participants. These findings support after-school service-learning and peer-mediated collaborative learning as effective instructional approaches for second language development.

Language in Action: The Impact of an After-School Program on the English Language

Development of High School Students in Los Angeles Unified

Background

English learners (ELs) are students who come from homes representing a diversity of ethnic backgrounds where English is not the primary language. ELs are also the fastest-growing segment of the United States' student population (London, Gurantz & Norman, 2011). In fact, approximately 4.4 million students (9.2%) in U.S. public schools are classified as ELs (NCES, 2015). California's public schools serve the largest population of ELs at approximately 1.4 million (23%) (NCES, 2015). This number represents a major increase in California's EL population since 1985, when only 8% of students in the state's public schools were learning English as a second language (Williams, et al., 2007). California's EL population is expected to grow even larger, as 57% of California children between birth and age 5 live in homes where English is not the primary language (Zepeda, 2013).

Besides the growing numbers, large disparities in academic achievement exist among EL students and non-EL students on standardized tests of reading and math (NCES, 2013). Results from the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading showed a 39-point gap between the scores of EL and non-EL fourth graders and a 45-point gap for students in the eighth grade. NAEP math assessments in 2013 showed a 25-point gap between EL and non-EL students in the fourth grade and a 41-point gap in the eighth grade. The NAEP is the largest and most established national assessment of performance in core subjects. This assessment yields a standardized scale score between 0 and 500 points in reading and math for each test taker at the fourth and eighth grade levels.

Factors suspected to contribute to the underachievement of English learners include:

Teacher Preparation: Few teachers feel adequately prepared to teach ELs. This is because few teacher preparation programs require courses in EL instruction, and most practicing teachers receive very little professional development to help them meet the needs of ELs (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008; Harper & de Jong, 2009).

Academic Language: ELs acquire English fluency for social conversation more readily than for academic conversation needed for success in the classroom. Academic conversation skills include elaborating and clarifying, offering supporting ideas or examples, building on ideas of others, paraphrasing, and synthesizing conversational points (Ranney, 2012).

Oral Practice: To develop academic language, ELs need sufficient time for oral practice. Opportunities to practice speaking English, especially in an academic context, are essential to the literacy development necessary for succeeding in the classroom. Despite the importance placed on oral practice by language development experts, ELs have very little time to talk with their peers during the regular school day. The average EL gets fewer than 90 seconds per day for practicing oral English skills in a structured classroom setting (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2005; Zehr, 2009).

Isolation from English-fluent Peers: ELs get even less time to interact with English-fluent students in a classroom setting. ELs are often grouped together into an isolated cohort during the school day with little time to interact with English-fluent peers. This can impede feelings of belonging among their peers on campus and can ultimately lead to disengagement from school altogether (Bhattacharya & Quiroga, 2011).

English Language Development in After-School Programs

In 2013, an estimated 8.4 million students attended after-school programs at elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the United States (Afterschool Alliance, 2013). As roughly 70% of after-school program participants were students from high-poverty families, policymakers and youth advocates hoped that these programs could provide academic support to "partially compensate for the inequities that plague our nation's schools and play a role in efforts to narrow gaps in achievement between more and less advantaged students" (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009, p. 6). Over $1 billion of federal funds have been invested in these programs annually (CDE, 2012a; Dynarski et al., 2004), with an additional $550 million of state funds invested in California (CDE, 2012b).

After-school programs offer both the extended time and flexible learning environment that can be used to complement regular day EL instruction. California schools serving large EL populations are more likely to receive public funds to operate after-school programs. This is because a majority of California ELs are low-income, qualifying for free or reduced-priced meals (FRPM). Schools serving student populations of which 40% qualify for FRPM, identified in many states as Title I, are prioritized for receiving state and federal after-school funds. The poverty rate among California ELs ranges from 74% to 85%, compared to 21% among schoolchildren statewide (Rose, Sonstelie, & Weston, 2012), making them more likely to qualify for FRPM.

Eighty-five percent of California ELs speak Spanish as their home language (CDE, 2014). Hispanic students are more likely than White students or students of other ethnicities to participate in publicly funded after-school programs within the United States. Within the Hispanic population, 29% of students attend after-school programs compared to 12% of White

students (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). This is partially explained by the fact that Hispanic students have been three times more likely to qualify for FRPM (NCES, 2007).

The Afterschool Alliance's June 2011 policy brief, titled *English Language Learners: Becoming Fluent in Afterschool,* specifies ways in which after-school programs may offer an ideal context for English language development, which includes the following:

- extended time for direct language instruction,

- homework assistance to support regular day instruction,

- low student-staff ratios, which allow for personalized instruction where individual needs of ELs are more readily identified and addressed,

- low pressure opportunities for oral language practice in a safe, informal environment while playing games or engaging in hands-on learning activities, and

- opportunities to learn about American culture or backgrounds of other students through music, dance, drama, cooking, or celebration of cultural holidays and events.

After-school programs can offer less-intimidating, learner-centered, direct language instruction without the pressure of grades and standardized tests. Informal opportunities for authentic English conversation during after-school activities are even more beneficial for ELs, given the lack of time for oral practice in structured class settings during the regular school day. Even without direct language instruction, after-school program outcomes include higher regular school attendance for ELs and higher rates of reclassification, even when activities do not focus specifically on English (Newhouse, 2008).

Service-Learning and Peer Mediation as Instructional Approaches for ELs

Service-learning has become popular in schools across the nation. Different from traditional community service, service-learning infuses academic learning into hands-on service

projects (Furco, 2002). Although not originally used in EL programs, service-learning has emerged as an effective instructional approach for second language development (Falasca, 2010). The flexible scheduling and informal environment of after-school programs provide the conditions that service-learning projects often require.

There are several reasons that service-learning may enhance the literacy development of second language learners. First, service-learning offers EL students opportunities for collaborative learning, a form of peer-mediated learning. In a recent meta-analysis of 28 experimental and quasi-experimental studies, peer-mediated learning was more effective in improving literacy outcomes for ELs than individualized or teacher-centered learning, with a mean effect size of .486 (Cole, 2014). The collaborative learning approach focuses on "completion of a complex task" with students "left to their own devices to divide the labor, develop relations of power and authority, and to navigate task demands" (Cole, 2014 p. 360). Service-learning fits this description of collaborative learning, as small groups of students identify a need in their local community and work collectively to address it.

Peer-mediated, collaborative learning finds its roots in Vygotsky's (1980) sociocultural theory of language development and Long's (1981) *Interaction Hypothesis*, both suggesting that language learning is a socially mediated process. As students work collaboratively in a service-learning project, they are able to, through purposeful interaction, scaffold one another toward improved literacy (Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky 1980). Interaction focuses learners' attention on language and increases motivation for learning more powerfully than individualistic or teacher-centered approaches to instruction (Long, 1981; Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Use of language in personally meaningful contexts created by student-driven service-learning projects also increases students' motivation for learning (Willems & Gonzalez-DeHass,

2012). Service-learning projects provide much greater opportunity for authentic language output through multiple modalities (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) than traditional classroom settings. Typical service-learning projects incorporate 1) *reading* as students gather and familiarize themselves with information on a chosen topic of interest, 2) *speaking* and *listening* as students interact with each other, adult facilitators, community partners, or school and city officials during the project, and 3) *writing* as students take notes during their project and engage in adult-facilitated reflective writing about their experience at the conclusion of the project.

Most importantly, the service-learning project provides a safe haven for individuals to engage in extended oral language practice and to build confidence speaking English. ELs can make significant gains in vocabulary and syntax through interactions occurring as part of the project (Falasca, 2010). Service-learning projects can help second language learners find their voice not only in academic contexts, but also in their communities (Falasca, 2010).

Methods

Purpose of the Study

Four evidence-based practices are commonly used by staff in after-school programs that effectively promote students' personal and social development. These evidence-based practices form the acronym SAFE: (S) a sequenced step-by-step training approach, (A) active forms of learning where youth practice new skills, (F) focus of specific time and attention on skill development, and (E) explicit definition of the skills being promoted (Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan, 2010). The Beyond the Bell Branch of the Los Angeles Unified School District initiated the ***Language in Action*** program as part of the after school program to help EL students reach academic and linguistic proficiency while attending high school. *Language in Action* incorporates SAFE practices while featuring service-learning as a vehicle for peer-mediated

language development. The current study tests the hypothesis that peer-mediation within the context of SAFE learning in an after-school program will enhance language development among high school ELs.

To test this hypothesis, the impact of Beyond the Bell after-school programs on ELs was examined at 53 high schools between the 2011–12 and 2013–14 school years. The outcome measured was the performance of ELs on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). Outcomes for a treatment group of 695 ELs who were frequent program participants were statistically compared with those of carefully matched control groups of EL non-participants. Changes were measured between each student's baseline school year prior to program entry and an outcome school year. The effects of frequent after-school program participation for one, two, and three years were examined separately. Methodology replicated a similar study performed by Research Support Services (a Los Angeles evaluation firm) among elementary and middle school ELs participating in Beyond the Bell after-school programs.

Rationale for Study Design

Despite growing pressure from policymakers and funders to produce academic outcomes among student participants including ELs, a consistent body of empirical evidence that after-school programs increase students' achievement is still lacking (Dynarski et al., 2004; Dynarski et al., 2003; James-Burdumy, Dynarski, Deke, Mansfield, & Pistorino, 2005; Gottfredson, Cross, Wilson, Rorie, & Connell, 2010; Lauver, 2002). Findings from quasi-experimental and evaluation studies on this topic are mixed (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Lauer et al., 2006). Apsler (2009) attributed mixed findings of after-school research to numerous limitations common to many program evaluations, including self-selection bias and poor methods for tracking attendance.

Frequency of participation, or dosage, is a critical factor in determining the effectiveness of after-school programs regardless of the outcomes measured, yet a majority of studies have not accounted for it (Dietel, 2009). Those that do often group students into two crudely defined categories for comparison: those who attended, and those who did not.

The self-selection bias has also confounded most after-school program research. A set of common, positive traits were likely to be shared by students who enrolled and persisted in after-school programs, while negative traits may have been shared by students who did not enroll or dropped out after a short time (Gottfredson, Cross, and Soule, 2007; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Weissman, 2001).

The current study presents a quasi-experimental evaluation model for considering variables of dosage and self-selection in the evaluation of after-school programs. Only high-dosage participants who attended the after-school program for a minimum number of days were included in the study. Also, the number of years of program participation was considered. The self-selection bias was addressed by a sophisticated matching protocol, based on a regression model, that predicts the likelihood of each student to participate in the after-school program on the basis of school, grade level, gender, ethnicity, special education status, English learner status, and standardized test scores in the baseline year. This type of careful matching procedure is an alternative method for control group selection in quasi-experimental designs where randomization is not possible.

Context of the Study

In the **Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)**, students classified as ELs account for approximately 26% of the total K–12 enrollment, of which 93% speak Spanish as their primary language (California Department of Education, 2014–15). LAUSD's **Beyond the**

Bell Branch operates California's largest after-school program consortium, which includes programs at 73 high schools serving approximately 85,000 students annually, of which 15% are ELs. A majority of the ELs attending Beyond the Bell after-school programs in high school are categorized as *Long Term English Learners (LTELs).* In LAUSD, LTELs are defined as English learners who have been in U.S. schools for 6 or more years with no more than 1 year of interrupted schooling, but have not reclassified out of EL status. Typically, LTELs either shifted back and forth between bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) programs and mainstream classes within U.S. schools, or have received consistent but ineffective ESL support that failed to build upon their home languages (Menken, Kleyn, & Chae, 2012).

Beyond the Bell initiated the ***Language in Action*** program as part of the after-school program to help EL students reach academic and linguistic proficiency while attending high school. The program design addresses factors contributing to the underachievement of ELs by training staff in language development and academic language, offering ELs extended time for oral practice, and inviting them to participate in other after-school activities with English-fluent peers. The *Language in Action* program features the following components, incorporating opportunities for social interaction, collaborative project-based learning, and service-learning:

1. **Immersion Week:** The program begins with an intensive, five-day, Immersion Week during which EL students build relationships with staff and peers and participate in an activity-based curriculum after school that is designed specifically to improve speaking and listening skills and promote their continued involvement.

2. **Follow-up Sessions:** Following Immersion Week, EL students participate in 10 follow-up sessions where written and oral English skills are practiced using a project-based curriculum that includes leadership, self-reflection, arts and crafts activities, and a

service-learning project. These activities, scheduled regularly throughout the school year

during the after-school program, are designed to further develop language skills using

Specifically Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) strategies. Peer mentors

and after-school program staff receive SDAIE training.

3. **Service-Learning Project:** A service-learning project is embedded in the 10 follow-up

sessions. During the first 8 weeks, students plan their service projects and develop

English skills through project-related activities such as writing a business letter or e-mail

or making business calls to engage local community partners. In the 9th week, students

conduct their service project. In the 10th week, students engage in a reflection activity

designed to promote written and oral English skills. Service-learning projects conducted

at individual high schools included campus beautification, anti-bullying campaigns, food

and clothing drives, advocacy for pet adoption, and writing narratives for picture books to

be read to students at local elementary schools.

4. **Culminating Event:** EL students participate in a College Day held at a local university

where students celebrate their achievements, give presentations regarding their service-

learning projects, meet EL students from other schools, and take a campus tour.

To deliver the program, Beyond the Bell subcontracts with two experienced youth

development agencies (arc and EduCare) that collaborate with a number of community-based

organizations (CBOs) that staff local after-school programs to provide intensive language

immersion programs and professional development to CBO staff, ensuring consistency of

programming across sites. In addition, Beyond the Bell consultants, who are retired LAUSD

principals, partnered with these youth development agencies on providing ongoing professional

development sessions with after-school program staff as well as on conducting ongoing

monitoring and coaching at the sites.

Subjects

Subjects were students designated as English learners (ELs) in grades 9–11 attending

high schools within the LAUSD at which federally-funded After School Safety and Enrichment

for Teens (ASSETs) programs are operated through Beyond the Bell. EL students were selected

for inclusion in one of two groups: a treatment group of 695 frequent program participants and a

carefully matched control group of 3,060 non-participants. Control group students attended the

same schools and were in the same grade levels as the frequent program participants. They were

also matched on the basis of similarities in gender, ethnicity, free/reduced meal status, English

learner (EL) status, special education status, parents' education level, and baseline California

Standards Test (CST) scale scores in ELA and math.

Treatment Group Selection

The treatment group was comprised of EL students who were in the ninth, 10th, or 11th

grade during at least one school year for which outcomes were analyzed in this study (2011–12,

2012–13, and 2013–14). They were also frequent participants in a high school after-school

program during at least one of those school years. Frequent participation in a high school after–

school program was defined as a minimum of 30 days or more of attendance.[1]

For purposes of comparison in the study, frequent program participants were divided into

three smaller treatment groups according to *duration* of attendance. Duration is a student's

history of after-school program attendance in terms of years (Dietel, 2009), which may affect

academic outcomes (Chaput, Little, & Weiss, 2004). Therefore, treatment groups of students

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[1]The U.S. Department of Education defines a participant as any child who has attended the program for 30 days or more (21st Century Community Learning Centers and ASSETs programs).

who were frequent participants for one, two, or three consecutive years were compared

separately with matched control groups.

For two- or three-year participants, one or more consecutive years of frequent after-

school program attendance may have occurred in middle school. For example, ninth graders in

the three-year participant group were frequent participants in their seventh and eighth grade

years. To remain consistent with the study by Research Support Services being replicated,

frequent program participation for middle school students was defined as a minimum of 76 days

of attendance (Frankel & Daley, 2007).

Inclusion in treatment and control groups required the availability of baseline year data

for all matching variables as well as the dependent measure being compared. This was necessary

because treatment and control group members were matched according to baseline year data.

The baseline year for each student was defined as the school year prior to after-school program

entry. For example, the eighth grade year would be considered as the baseline year for a student

who first participated in the after-school program as a ninth grader. Due to the scope of the

study, the baseline year for each treatment group member must have occurred between 2010–11

and 2012–13. This means that potential treatment group members with baseline years occurring

prior to 2010–11 were not included in the study.

Finally, inclusion in treatment and control groups required a CELDT score in the

outcome year, which was the dependent measure being compared. The *outcome year* for each

student was defined as the most recent year of frequent after-school program attendance. For

example, the outcome year for an 11th grader in the three-year participant group would be 2013–

14. However, the outcome year for an 11th grader in the one-year participant group who

attended fewer than 30 days in 2012–13 and 2013–14 would be 2011–12. Table 1 shows the

numbers of EL students included in the one-, two-, and three-year participant groups, with

respect to baseline and outcome years.

Table 1

School Years and Number of Frequent EL Participants Included in Comparisons

Baseline School Year	Outcome School Year	Years of Participation	Number of Frequent Participants with Baseline and Outcome Data
2010–2011	2013–2014	3	$n = 11*$
2010–2011	2012–2013	2	$n = 37$
2010–2011	2011–2012	1	$n = 197$
2011–2012	2013–2014	2	$n = 86$
2011–2012	2012–2013	1	$n = 200$
2012–2013	2013–2014	1	$n = 164$

*Due to the small sample size, the three-year participant group was not reported.

Control Group Selection and Matching

Procedures for control group selection and matching were a replication of methodology

used by Research Support Services in similar studies on elementary and middle school after-

school programs. Control group students were matched with students in the treatment group

using the following criteria:

1. They attended the same school in both the baseline and outcome years.

2. They were matched directly on the basis of grade level, gender, ethnicity, free/reduced

   meal status, special education status, and EL status.

3. They were also matched using a weighted average of CST scores in the baseline year,

   grade level, gender, ethnicity, free/reduced meal status, special education status, EL

   status, and parent educational level. The weights assigned to these factors were

   generated using a regression model predicting the likelihood (or "propensity") that each

student would enter the after-school program the following year. Program participants were then matched with control group students who had similar predicted propensity.

Up to 5 matching control students were identified for each after-school program participant, with an average of 4.4 controls each. When more than 5 control students were available using criteria 1 and 2, the weighted average score from 3 was used to select the closest 5 controls. When fewer than 5 control students were available using criterion 2, the weighted average score from 3 was used to expand the number to 5.

Following this procedure, one control student could serve as a match for more than one frequent program participant from the same school. To avoid overweighting the results for control students, their results were averaged to form a one-to-one comparison with results for after-school program participants. Therefore, the control "student" in each matched pair was actually a composite of up to 5 students rather than a single student. This substantially reduces sampling error in identifying the control outcomes that were compared to outcomes of frequent program participants. Table 2 shows characteristics of frequent program participants in the treatment group and students in the matched control group.

Table 2

Baseline Outcomes and Characteristics for Frequent Participants and Matched Controls

	Frequent Participants (*n* = 695)	Matched Controls (*n* = 3,060)	
Outcomes	*M*	*M*	Difference
CST ELA score	272.7	268.5	4.2
CST Math score	272.9	263.6	9.3
CELDT score	545.4	544.0	1.4
Absences/days enrolled	3.3%	6.5%	-3.2%
Characteristics	%	%	Difference
Hispanic	92.8%	94.9%	-2.1%
Black	1.7%	2.3%	-0.6%
Asian	3.9%	2.4%	1.5%
White	0.6%	0.0%	0.5%
Other ethnicity	1.0%	0.4%	0.6%
Male	61.4%	60.8%	0.6%
Female	38.6%	39.2%	-0.6%
Free/reduced meal	88.3%	88.4%	0.0%
Special education	21.4%	33.0%	-11.6%
Gifted/talented	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%
Limited English proficient	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Parent education			
HS grad or above	24.5%	23.8%	0.7%
Unknown or not HS grad	55.0%	64.5%	-9.5%

Dependent Measure

Performance on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), measured by change in mean scale scores between baseline and outcome years, was used as the dependent measure in the study. The CELDT was used in California schools to identify students who

needed improvement in speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English. In California,
students in grades K–12 designated as ELs are required by law to take this test each year in the
fall and are allowed to retest multiple times a year until they achieved a score high enough to be
reclassified as fluent English proficient.

Changes in mean CELDT scores for treatment groups were compared with scores of
matched controls. Net gains were reported as differences in the mean changes between the two
groups (mean change of treatment group minus the mean change of the control group).

Statistical Comparisons

Paired samples *t*-tests were used for comparing group means, with an alpha level of .05
used to determine statistical significance. A paired samples *t*-test may be used on a matched-
pairs sample when an unpaired sample is used to form a paired sample based on additional
variables measured along with the dependent variable of interest in order to reduce or eliminate
confounding effects. This was done by identifying pairs of dependent measures, consisting of
one case from each of two conditions (treatment and control), where each pair was similar in
terms of other measured variables (David & Gunnink, 1997).

Cohen's *d* was used as the measure of effect size. This is calculated as the difference in
the two groups' means divided by the average of their standard deviations. A *d* of 1 indicates
that group means differ by one standard deviation, a *d* of .5 indicates that group means differ by
half a standard deviation, and so forth. Cohen considered a *d* of .2 to be a small effect size, a *d*
of .5 to be a moderate effect size, and a *d* of .8 to be a large effect size. This means that if group
means do not differ by at least .2 standard deviations, the difference is negligible, even in cases
where statistical significance is found.

Findings

For one-year participants, the mean CELDT score gain of frequent after-school program participants (*M*=34.7) was significantly greater than the mean gain of matched non-participant controls (*m*=23.2), *t* (560) = 4.96, *p* < *.001, d* = .29. For two-year participants, the mean CELDT score gain of frequent participants (*M*=53.4) was significantly greater than the mean gain of matched non-participant controls (*m*=36.2), *t* (122) = 2.95, *p* < *.001, d* = .45. Net gains of three-year EL participants were not reported due to the small sample size (n=11). Table 3 shows the net gains of one- and two-year participants and results of statistical comparisons.

Table 3

Comparison of Mean CELDT Score Gains of Frequent After-School Program Participants and Matched Non-Participant Controls

	M (SD)*	t	df	p	d**
One-Year Participants	11.5 (55.0)	4.96	560	.001***	.29
Two-Year Participants	17.1 (48.2)	3.95	122	.001***	.45

*Mean change of frequent participants minus the mean of matched controls.

**Cohen's *d* was used as the measure of effect size.

***Indicates statistical significance.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

In summary, mean increases in CELDT score points were significantly greater than increases for matched control groups for one- and two-year EL participants, with small to moderate effect sizes. This is one of few studies of an after-school program with positive academic findings for high school ELs, many of whom are LTELs, where a standardized test of English language development is the outcome measured. The majority of quasi-experimental studies on after-school programs with positive academic findings were conducted among mainstream elementary or middle school children and used standardized tests in English-language arts and math as outcome measures.

The results of this study support the hypothesis that peer-mediation within the context of safe, active, focused, explicit (SAFE) learning in an after-school program enhances language development among high school ELs. The results of the study also support the use of service-learning as an approach to literacy development in second language learners, consistent with Cole's (2014) meta-analysis showing the effectiveness of peer-mediated learning for ELs. The *Language in Action* program targets both oral language and literacy while combining peer mediation with direct instruction, which is suggested to be more effective than peer mediation alone (Cheung & Slavin, 2005).

With respect to methodology, findings are consistent with existing quasi-experimental findings, summarized in meta-analyses (Apsler, 2009; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Lauer, et al., 2006), suggesting that positive academic outcomes for after-school program participants become evident when control groups are included in the study's design. The results of this study also support research findings showing a greater likelihood of positive academic outcomes for

frequent after-school participants who met minimum participation levels (Apsler, 2009; Dietel, 2009). Previous studies found associations between after-school participation and standardized test scores in English-language arts and math for elementary students who attended for at least 100 days (Frankel & Daley, 2007; Huang, Leon, La Torre, & Mostafavi, 2008). This study found positive significant results in math for high school students who attended for a minimum of 30 days.

Limitations of the Study

When interpreting the results of this study or making applications to policy or practice, the following limitations should be taken into consideration.

1. Characteristics of individual staff members who delivered the program were not measured or accounted for, nor were specific areas of training they received. Huang and Dietel (2011) identified quality and training level of staff as key components of effective after-school programs.

2. Despite similarities in program design, the quality and consistency of program implementation across schools were difficult to ensure. No instrument was used to measure fidelity of program implementation.

3. No measure was used to account for student engagement or student-staff interaction, which were potential predictors of program effectiveness (Smith et al., 2008, 2010).

4. The study was conducted among high school ELs (many of whom were LTELs) in an urban setting, which may limit generalizability.

Suggestions for Future Research

To draw stronger conclusions regarding the potential for after-school interventions involving peer mediation and service-learning to support literacy development of ELs, this

methodology should be replicated in other settings, at elementary and middle school grade levels, and among EL populations where the predominant language background is not Spanish. Also, school-level, staff-level, and student-level variables should be better accounted for.

In keeping with Long's (1981) *Interaction Hypothesis* and the notion that language development is socially mediated, student-level, socio-emotional factors might be examined in a more complex study design. Recent research has shown that socio-emotional factors had a positive effect on the academic achievement of children and adolescents, in addition to other outcomes (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Phelps et al., 2009). Student-level, socio-emotional constructs to be considered as mediators of academic achievement including language development are interest (Larson & Rusk, 2010), engagement (Marks, 2000; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006), self-management (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Phelps et al., 2009), and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008, 2010; Larson & Rusk, 2010).

Future studies may also consider the impact of after-school programs featuring service-learning and peer mediation components on the development of different language modalities separately. Although these data were not available for this research, the CELDT includes subscales for reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Not only could each language modality be treated as a separate outcome variable, but relationships between these variables could also be explored. The relationship between oral and written language development is of particular interest (Cole, 2014), especially since after-school programs provide extended time for oral practice that is lacking during regular day instruction.

Conclusion

In summary, after-school programs provide the extended time and flexible scheduling to support EL instruction during the regular school day. More specifically, after-school programs provide additional time for oral practice among peers outside the limitations of the traditional classroom structure and for the implementation of service-learning and peer mediation to support literacy development. Service-learning gives ELs the opportunity for authentic, purposeful interaction in applied contexts, which increases motivation to learn English. Peer-mediated learning has significant advantages over teacher-dominated forms of language learning, which are more frequently implemented in U.S. classrooms and leave little opportunity for active participation or interaction among peers. Beyond the Bell's after-school programs and *Language in Action* component support service-learning and peer mediation as effective instructional approaches for high school ELs and offer a model for dissemination to other settings.

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