

Singing the Same Song: Engaging Families in Read Two Impress Plus

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This article shares learnings about implementing Read Two Impress Plus as a partnership-centered approach to creating culturally and linguistically affirming family literacy programming aimed at improving the literacy proficiency of young people in two urban schools.

Partnership-centered, culturally sustaining family literacy programs that build on and sustain families' diverse literacy practices can create conditions that strengthen literacy learning and proficiency (Epstein, 2013; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Machado, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017; Sanders et al., 2005; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). One practice used by diverse families and highly effective teachers alike, echo reading, involves orally echoing the reading (sometimes repeatedly) of a more experienced reader while tracking the printed text (Samuels, 1979; Volk, 2016). Similarly, Read Two Impress Plus (R2I+) is a method of repeated oral reading and an echo reading process adapted from the Neurological Impress Method (Heckelman, 1966, 1969) and Read Two Impress (Young et al., 2016). Engaging in R2I+ can help improve children's fluency, or expressive, prosaic oral reading that leads to comprehension (Young et al., 2015). The purpose of this study was to investigate the outcomes of offering R2I+ as a partnership-centered family engagement program aimed at improving the literacy proficiency and families' attitudes toward helping their children, aged 7–12, with reading, at two urban schools in the Mid-Atlantic.

Read Two Impress Plus (R2I+) Nuts and Bolts

As a fluency engagement for young people at the early, elementary, and secondary levels who read significantly below grade level, R2I+ is a one-to-one echo reading process where a more experienced reader, sitting on a student's dominant side, reads aloud a challenging text expressively and slightly faster than the student. While reading a text slightly behind the partner reader (in our study, family partner-readers) and rereading pages

independently after reading, students answer comprehension questions about their reading (Young et al., 2016).

Heckelman (1966, 1969) first identified the method R2I+ builds from through observation of an adolescent whose reading level increased three grade levels after just 12 hours of tutoring. A tutor used kinesthetic, auditory, and visual reinforcements to support reading fluency in brief 10- to 15-minute sessions. Heckelman (1969) repeated the method, which he called Neurological Impress Method, with 24 middle and high school students who were struggling with reading fluency and comprehension. After 7.5 hours of instruction using this method, the mean grade level gain was 1.9 with gains within a range of 0.8–5.9 (Eldredge & William Quinn, 1988; Heckelman, 1969).

In the last two decades, this method has experienced a resurgence with many adaptations including asking comprehension questions (Flood et al., 2005), or

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rereading each page independently after the initial echo reading (Young et al., 2016). These iterations have also led to increases in comprehension and fluency (Young et al., 2017) and have contributed to students' positive attitudes and motivation toward reading (Flood et al., 2005; Henk, 1981; Young et al., 2016), although more recent studies have shown mixed results (Young et al., 2017).

In R2I+ (Figure 1), students choose challenging, frustration level texts that are culturally and linguistically relevant and authentic. These kinds of texts increase learners' comprehension (Garth-McCullough, 2008; McCullough, 2013), interest, and motivation by creating mirrors and windows into students' identities and languages (Bishop, 1990) (Take Action! Sidebar).

This engagement has never been used as a tool for facilitating school and literacy engagement with families (Figure 1). However, strong evidence demonstrates that partnership-centered (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007) literacy programs create important roles for family members to play in their child's learning, and increase students' opportunities for school success (Epstein, 2013; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sanders et al., 2005; Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

R2I+ connects to a sociocultural framework (Vygotskii, 1978). Sociocultural theory views learning as shaped by

Figure 1
Families as Partner Readers



Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

PAUSE AND PONDER

- What does a culturally sustaining learning environment look like? How can schools engage and empower families as partners in problem solving low literacy proficiency? What does it look like to work with families to improve their children's fluency?

“cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors, along with personal interests and situational dynamics” (Dyson, 2013, p. 5). A more experienced partner-reader apprentices the student in expressive, fluent reading, providing guided practice with word recognition, comprehension, and proficient oral reading. Students thus work within their zone of proximal development, or the distance between what can be performed independently or with guidance (Vygotskii, 1978).

Culturally and linguistically authentic, challenging texts facilitate reading at the outer limits of students' zone of proximal development (Young et al., 2016). Creating space for children and families to read culturally and linguistically authentic and challenging texts is particularly important because our educational system privileges dominant

languages, literacies, and cultures and are often “at odds with the ways that children make meaning in their lives outside of school” (Machado, 2017, p. 310). Engaging in these kinds of texts is also necessary because research shows that when readers are identified as “struggling,” they actually read fewer books and have less time to read and talk about books at school (Allington, 2014; Spencer et al., 2011).

This study is also grounded in culturally rooted instructional approaches (e.g. culturally sustaining pedagogies, funds of knowledge, culturally relevant teaching) that “aim to foster, support, and sustain children's home, heritage, and popular language practices.. .as resources to be cultivated rather than as challenges to be overcome” (Machado, 2017, p. 310). This study centered students as having valuable language and literacy practices, and family members as students' first teachers, co-educators in supporting their children's language and literacy development.

Research Methodology

Mixed methods were ideal for the problem-solving nature of this study. We employed a parallel mixed design in two phases (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). In the first phase, we collected qualitative data about families' skill and engagement about reading with their children, along with qualitative literacy proficiency data that were compared to a control group through a differences-in-differences quasi-experimental design. Based on findings from the first phase about the interesting ways in which multilingual families reciprocally read and discussed bilingual texts,

the study was replicated at a second partner school with modifications and limitations. Although quantitative data about literacy proficiency were collected at the second school, existing literacy proficiency data did not allow for causal estimates of the engagement because of the timing of the study and the variation in existing assessment data. Thus, qualitative methods were most appropriate to address the focus of the second iteration of the study.

This article addresses the following two research questions from the study:

1. How does R2I+ influence students' fluency and reading comprehension?
2. How does implementing R2I+ influence the way family members view their skill and desire to engage their student in reading and literacy practices at home?

School Contexts

The two schools we partnered with are sites of ongoing, reciprocal, and collaborative university-partner school work in which all of the researchers have been deeply engaged. Our partnership to implement R2I+ is part of the ongoing efforts of university collaborators, teachers, administrators, and families committed to collectively working toward sustaining school improvement. For example, university collaborators teach onsite and provide professional learning, and teachers often serve as adjunct instructors and liaisons for the university. Each school has designated family engagement and literacy proficiency as areas for improvement.

These schools are located in a geographically isolated, historically industrial region where Black and White residents have lived together for a century. Latinx people, primarily from Central America, have also begun immigrating and establishing homes in this community.

At the first partner school, 30% of students are African American, 28% White, 36% Latinx, and 4.8% Other. Children at the school speak a number of languages including Spanish, Tagalog, African American language, and regional varieties of English. The majority of students receive free or reduced lunch. Fourteen percent of students at the school have an identified disability and 18% are learning English as a second language. It is a low-performing urban school; more than 90% of third-grade students do not demonstrate proficiency on the state assessment and nearly 60% perform at the lowest of five levels (NAEP, 2018).

The second partner school has 62% of students identifying as Latinx, a larger subgroup than most schools in the district. Thirty three percent of students are African American, and 6% Other. Forty-one percent of children are

learning English as a second language with Spanish as their heritage language, and many students speak African American language, and regional varieties of English. Eleven percent have an identified disability. While this school demonstrated growth in literacy and math proficiency from 2014 to 2019 on the state assessment, elementary literacy proficiency stands at 37.2% (NAEP, 2018). As one of the only district schools that offers a bilingual education program, the school clearly values biliteracy and bilingualism (Mata-McMahon et al., 2020).

Families and Young people

There were 39 total young people and family members who participated in the literacy engagements at both schools. At Partner School #1, the 23 second-grade students and 18 family partner readers were 26% Black, 35% white, and 26% Latinx. All of the Latinx family readers spoke Spanish as their heritage language. They cared deeply about their children and seemed to enjoy the camaraderie of being in community with others. They even requested that they receive formal recognition for their participation in the engagement, and we did so by creating certificates for each family member and presenting a video, posted on the school's social media, that showcased our work together over 8 weeks. The student group was 61% female and 39% male. Seventeen percent were learning English as a second language and 17% were identified as having disabilities. At this school, a control group was developed with the remaining 55 second graders.

Participants from Partner School #2 included 16 children and family members in grades 2–6. From the 16 children that participated, nine completed both the study. The ethnic and racial backgrounds of these students and families were as follows: 6 Latinx, 1 African American, and 2 white. All of the Latinx family readers spoke Spanish as their heritage language. Families at Partner School #2 also showed deep care for their children; they seemed to relish the time dedicated to settling in throughout the school's large library to read with their children. Note, to protect confidentiality, no participant or school names are included in the article.

The five university collaborators included a white cisgender woman connected to the African American community by marriage, a white cisgender man, a Black woman who speaks Spanish and Portuguese, a Latina Venezuelan cisgender woman who speaks Spanish and English, and a Korean cisgender woman who studies multiple languages including Korean and Spanish. All have extensive experience with teaching and research in public school settings. Our collective

research interests and knowledge center on supporting historically marginalized students in schools, culturally sustaining pedagogies, children's spirituality, bilingualism, translanguaging pedagogies, language assessment, and school improvement.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative data collected for the study included field notes, focus group interviews, and informal teacher and researcher assessments of students' reading. Quantitative data included results from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and/or the Text Reading Comprehension (TRC) norm referenced literacy assessments. Quantitative instruments have been evaluated and determined to demonstrate validity and reliability (Amplify, 2014; DIBELS, 2018).

An iterative approach to coding qualitative data involved researchers in comparing codes and reconciling any emerging discrepancies (Miles et al., 2018), which facilitated intercoder reliability (Lavrakas, 2008). Qualitative data from focus groups and other sources were analyzed through an independent open-coding process (Charmaz, 2014) and an iterative process of pattern analysis (Miles et al., 2018). Research team members generated *Nvivo* codes (Charmaz, 2014), direct stems from participants' responses. Corroborating the initial analysis, we negotiated agreements about our codes (Miles et al., 2018). Students' quantitative performance on DIBELS and TRC, where applicable, were analyzed through descriptive and inferential analysis of mean differences of pre- and post-engagement results. Inferential analyses involved *t*-tests and ordinary least squares regression analysis.

R2I+ Family Engagements

R2I+ family literacy engagement nights focused on creating a culturally and linguistically affirming community space and providing family members with technical skills needed to implement the routine. Five sessions were held at the first school between September and December 2018. Grounded in practical considerations of our collective time constraints, each session lasted 2 hours. This provided ample time for a 30-minute meal and gathering, an hour-long training session, and a 30-minute family-child R2I+ practice session. Stipends and childcare were provided to support family members. Bilingual school-based liaisons fostered recruitment efforts and ongoing communication with families who volunteered to participate.

During the sessions, families engaged in trying out the four steps of R2I+: selecting texts with their children, positioning themselves on the child's dominant side and placing their pointer finger on the child's, orally echo reading

and rereading each text, and then asking natural comprehension questions (Take Action! Sidebar).

Two books per session were selected from a curated library of leveled texts. These culturally and linguistically authentic texts:

- Foregrounded main characters and highlight the languages and experiences of people of Color or of specific ethnicities
- Highlighted languages and experiences specific to the characters' cultural or linguistic background(s) or experiences
- Featured authors and illustrators that were authentically connected to the topic (Boutte, 2002).

Books were selected from Lee and Low publishers' Guided Reading Leveled Library. This publisher has an explicit commitment to cultural and linguistic authenticity and to publishing texts written by authors of Color (Retrieved from <https://www.leeandlow.com/about-us>). The anti-bias framework was also used to evaluate each book to ensure there were no stereotypical images or language (Derman-Sparks, 2013). Consistent with previous and recent research on this engagement, our goal was for children to read texts that were challenging, even frustrating and hard to read, because students had the support of a more experienced reader (Shanahan, 2020; Young et al., 2017).

Families took home the two challenging books that the children selected, a folder, and a reading log and were asked to practice R2I+ together for at least 40 minutes per week (3–4 10- to 15-minute sessions), recording the book title and time spent reading. The 40 minutes/10–15 sessions per week were determined to be an appropriate length based on prior studies (e.g. Young et al., 2015).

During the engagements, children and their family partner-readers were separated for book selection and the technical training, and then brought together to engage in reading practice using R2I+. University collaborators and school-based stakeholders provided feedback and answered questions as families practiced R2I+. Focus groups and surveys were conducted at the first and last engagement session.

All training materials and many available books were bilingual (primarily Spanish/English based on the schools) and sessions were simultaneously translated into Spanish. Families at the second school received the trainings between the months of October and November of 2019. Due to limited resources, only three training sessions were held, and as noted, we were unable to use a quasi-experimental design at the second school.

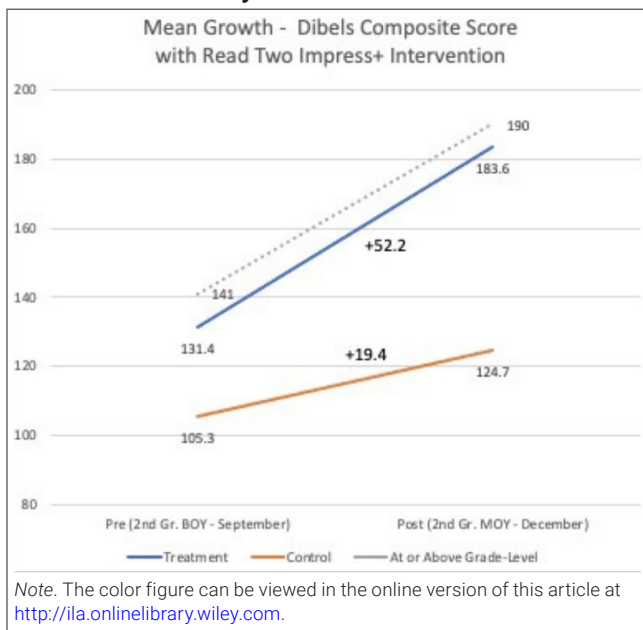
Results

Our study confirms previous findings about the effectiveness of this fluency engagement. Students' literacy proficiency improved after their participation in the R2I+ family literacy routine with their family partner-readers. Furthermore, qualitative data indicate that families felt like experts or partners, empowered with a useful tool that fostered bonding time, rich discussions about language, and reading at home.

Increased Fluency Proficiency: Partner School #1

At the first partner school, based on DIBELS, participating students demonstrated 52 points of reading fluency growth from beginning to middle of year compared to control group students who grew an average 19 points. For the 4-month family literacy engagement, the treatment estimate of R2I+ was 28 DIBELS points on the composite score, or $\frac{1}{4}$ of a year of growth in addition to regular growth (Figure 2). In other words, the expected annual growth for second-grade students below level is 71 points; students receiving the treatment grew 47 points compared to peers that grew only 13 points. Similarly, students scoring on-level who received the treatment grew 58 points, 34 points greater than comparison peers, who grew 24 points. This roughly compares to $\frac{1}{4}$ of expected annual growth for a second grader. For a supplemental family literacy engagement of relatively low

Figure 2
Increases in Fluency at Partner School #1



cost and disruption to core instruction, this level of growth is noteworthy. Qualitative findings, as in this comment from one family member, elucidate how the student–family connections supported that growth:

To touch each word, I think it helped her. As we were going along. I do not know how you explain it, but it seemed like, when I was touching each word and going along, then. ... it made her read and focus better, from us touching the words. So to me it was a gamechanger.

Other family members noted their children's increased fluent reading. An 8th-grade sibling partner reader said R2I+ helped his sister "use her finger to read. ... the book better." Another mom said, "She likes reading behind me because it helps her be able to read the story at her own pace."

While we detected no significant difference in reading comprehension between the treatment and control groups, fluency has well-researched links to comprehension (Fuchs et al., 1988; Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Samuels, 1979; Young et al., 2015). Furthermore, our qualitative data support the notion that children were better comprehending the texts they read weekly. For example, family partner readers reflected:

"She understands more of what she read and understands me better."

"You really gettin' them to comprehend it".

"They understand, then you know they understand the book better."

Figure 2 displays pre- and post-test results for students at the first partner school.

Increased Fluency Proficiency: Partner School #2

At the second partner school, participating children's fluency scores on norm-referenced assessments increased from beginning to middle of the year. We cannot necessarily attribute this growth to the family literacy engagement, since we were unable to establish an appropriate comparison group. However, the qualitative data also point to improvements. For example, one mother poignantly remarked, "She loves when we read together every week. She says it really sounds better. When we're both [reading together], she says mom it's like we're singing the same song. Yeah, *we're singing the same song.*" Another mother exclaimed that after using R2I+ her child "reads way faster than I can." Similarly, one mom shared, "When we read, I can't, you know, catch up to my child. It's like come on!"

Families as Experts: Partner School #1

Partner School #1's fluency gains complement qualitative findings about family members' feelings of increased

skill and ability with supporting their children with literacy. Families were so confident after they had been through the engagement that they decided to hold an additional school-wide literacy night to train others, including a group of pre-service teachers. Furthermore, many of the family members told us that they had already shared the practice with friends and family: “I taught her dad,” “I have shared it with a few friends who had kids who didn’t like to read,” “Yeah, I showed it to two of my friends,” and “I shared with my cousin.”

Families also talked about how R2I+ created positive “bonding” along with reading routines at home. A mother said, “Yeah it brings you closer together, I think. Because of the one on one time, they kind of look forward to this time in the evening.” Many others shared these sentiments:

“I have two sets of twins, it’s eight of them home. So this time when she sittin’ right here with me and I’m talkin’ into her ear. . . it’s her own little world, Grandma and her.”

“Yeah, they love this Mommy time, and they’ll fight so hard over everything for it.”

“Yeah, it brings you closer together, I think. Because of the one-on-one time, they kind of look forward to that time in the evening.”

For multilingual families, the linguistically authentic bilingual texts helped position bilingualism as an asset, and bilingual families as language experts. For example, as they read, students took on the role of “more experienced reader” when echo reading the English text, while family partner readers took the lead with the Spanish text. In playful, rich discussions across languages, they compared and contrasted and discussed the differences between Spanish/English words, as one mother said:

We parents are learning more with them... because there are many English words that I ask my son, ‘what does this word mean?’ And he would tell me [the word in English and then I would say it to him in Spanish.]

Another multilingual family member said, “I see my daughter trying to translate the Spanish words and that makes me happy.”

Families as Partners: Partner School #2

At Partner School #2, qualitative data also showed families’ general engagement and feelings of literacy partnership with their children. One mother explained: “I came here quite in a rush, and I came because they were excited to come and read books. He told me, ‘I’m going to go and read another book!’” Family members also spoke about the “bonding” and “closeness” afforded by this practice. One parent remarked that before the engagement reading was *enforced* at home, making it unpleasant for everyone,

but after learning about R2I+,”when they sit with you, and you hold their hand to point with their finger, they feel more comfortable with you.”

As with the first partner school, routinizing home reading seemed to be constructive. Reflecting on the importance of the regularity of the 10- to 15-minute practice and the reading logs, one mom said, “I really liked the teaching method. Because she’d tell me, ‘Mommy, we need to make notes [on the reading log]. Remember, we have to read.’ That begins to draw their attention. It creates that reading habit in them.” Similarly, another parent said “Now, I have noticed that they always read because they give them a page to read, and they have to write what the title was, and all that. So, I’ve noticed that they’re starting to like reading a little more.”

Like the families at Partner School #1, multilingual families echoed the value of bilingualism. As one mother observed “I like it because she improves in both languages, because when she doesn’t understand a word in Spanish, she asks me, ‘Mommy, what does this mean?’ To me, it’s good that they read in both languages.” Expressing how much her son loved the book *Xóchitl and the flowers/Xóchitl la niña de las flores* by Jorge Argueta, she described,

My son loves that book. He’s always like, ‘Bring out that book about the roses. It’s about-- It’s all about Hispanic culture, about a person who comes here to the United States. He says, ‘Mommy, he went through the same thing as we did.’ To him, this story resembles what we went through because we left our land, we came here, the change in weather. The advantage of this book is that it’s in Spanish. He reads it in English, I read it in Spanish, and I tell him, ‘Tell me what you read.’ It really helped.

Singing the Same Song

Over the last half century, many studies have shown positive links between methods of repeated oral reading (e.g. echo reading) and student fluency (Arnold, 1972; Crawley & Merritt, 1996; Flood et al., 2005; Young et al., 2015). Our iteration and implementation of R2I+ with families supports and adds to prior research in three ways. First, adding the steps of asking comprehension questions and rereading seemed to positively impact fluency. Second, our findings showcase how culturally and linguistically authentic texts engage both families and young people in rich, close (in both senses of the word) discussions of texts. Relatedly, using this practice in partnership-centered ways proved a powerful way to privilege families as knowers and doers, experts, and partners. While fluency increases were no, we were struck with the way families felt like experts and partners, bonding and

TAKE ACTION! SIDEBAR

Step 1: Selecting and Previewing

Child has selected a book that is challenging or even frustrating (family partner readers can support the child in selection). Texts should authentically reflect students' lives, cultures, languages, and experiences. To preview the text for selection, ask questions like: What is the title of this book?, What do you already know about [topic of this book]?, What do you think this book will be about?

Step 2: Positioning

Sit on the child's dominant side (determined by what hand the student writes with) and close enough so you can easily speak into their dominant ear. Place your pointer finger on top of their pointer finger (make sure they are okay with this first!)

Step 3: Reading and Rereading

Begin reading the book slightly ahead of the student. Read with expression! The student should echo you. Read the book page by page for about 10–15 minutes, 3–4 times per week. Reread the book together. You may have to read faster if the student reads faster. If the student speeds up and “catches” you, increase your rate while still remaining fluent.

This includes:

- Moving your finger and the student's finger underneath the text as you read it
- Speaking slightly louder than the student
- Reading with natural, expressive fluency including “chunking” phrases together and reacting to punctuation

Step 4: Comprehension

After completing the book or parts of the book, ask several comprehension questions to engage in a discussion about what they read. What was this [book, article, story] mainly about? Who were the main characters? What was the setting? What was the main idea? Does this remind you of anything else you have read? Learned? Heard about? Experienced?

singing the same song with their children while reading bilingual texts.

Doucet (2017) poses the question “What does a culturally sustaining learning climate look like?” With this question in mind, even if schools are not prepared to

implement the whole R2I+ engagement program with a large group of families, we invite educators to think about ways they might engage in culturally sustaining partnerships to develop fluency through:

- providing R2I+ training to older peers/siblings, family members, or class volunteers
- incorporating repeated readings of challenging, culturally/linguistically authentic texts
- using R2I+ as a 1–1 practice for struggling readers in their classrooms.

When families in urban schools are invited into spaces that receive and honor their local, cultural, linguistic, and community knowledge and position them as experts, they can become partners with schools, singing the same song.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Funding Information

Funding for this project was provided by the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

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