
1996 - 1999 9th Grade Academic Literacy Course Studies

Funding for these studies of the Academic Literacy course at Thurgood Marshall High School was provided by The Stuart Foundations, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the San Francisco Foundation.

Three linked studies documented outcomes of a 9th grade course designed to accelerate academic literacy skills and engagement for a broad range of urban students in one San Francisco public high school. The course design incorporated a Reading Apprenticeship® instructional approach in three thematic content-based curriculum units. Students' growing independence as readers was emphasized throughout the course.

Initial Study

SLI research staff collected standardized measures from the entire ninth grade and collected a broader set of qualitative measures in two of the four Academic Literacy teachers' classrooms, selecting a subset of students in these classrooms for closer study. They found promising quantitative and qualitative results that applied across all ethnic groups and across all the classrooms of the teachers who taught the course.

Students gained an average of 2 years growth in seven months of instruction measured on a standardized reading comprehension test, *while engaging in rigorous, academic work* rather than remediation focused on basic skills.

Changes in students' behavior and attitudes reflected significant changes related to literacy behaviors and identity. For example, in a June 1997 survey, students reported reading *twice the number of books* they had read in the previous year. In addition, survey results indicated students' growing understanding of *comprehension* as the goal of reading and their increasing use of specific reading comprehension strategies.

10th Grade Follow-Up Study

A follow-up study in the 1997-1998 school year showed that the Academic Literacy students, now in tenth grade, gained over a year of growth at their independent reading level, even though they were not enrolled in a course focused on reading that year. These findings suggest that the students were given a jump start in the ninth grade that continued to accelerate their reading growth into the tenth grade.

Replication Study

A study was conducted with a new set of teachers and 9th grade Academic Literacy students in the following academic year, with similar results to those in the initial study.



1996-1997 • 9th Grade Academic Literacy Course: Initial Study

As an outgrowth of the research collaborative's work described in the 1995-1997 Case Studies (LINK), Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI) was invited by the English Department Head, Christine Cziko, with the support of her principal, Dr. Samuel Butscher to help develop a reading course based on adolescents' literacy learning needs and promising practices in early literacy development. The course, Academic Literacy, was designed as a mandatory course for all entering ninth graders at Thurgood Marshall Academic High School (TMAHS) in San Francisco.

At the time, TMAHS served a highly diverse population of students from the three neighborhoods in San Francisco with the highest rate of poverty in the city: 13.1% of the students were classified as English learners; 43% were classified as educationally disadvantaged youth because they scored below the 40th percentile on standardized measures of either reading or math. The diverse student body of TMAHS was comprised of 26.9% Chinese American, 24.9% African American, 20.7% Latino, 9.7% Filipino, 9.3% Other Non-white, and 6.5% Other White students.

The goals of Academic Literacy were to help students become **engaged, fluent, and competent** readers of the variety of texts necessary for them to master in order to be successful in high school and beyond. Three units, Reading Self and Society, Reading Media, and Reading History, provided the text materials and content of the course.

Key components of the course were:

- "Sustained Silent Reading" with accountability and social interaction with peers through reading logs and book projects
- Metacognitive writing and talking about reading processes; in particular:
- "Think Alouds" modeling and practicing reading and problem-solving with texts, and
- A focus on taking control of one's own attention and reading process(es)
- Explicit comprehension instruction and opportunities for extensive practice reading and applying cognitive and knowledge-building strategies; in particular:
- Guided reading of exposition
- "Chunking"—or breaking down complex sentences in expository texts to understandable bites



1996 - 1999 9th Grade Academic Literacy Course Studies

- "Reciprocal Teaching" and its components of questioning, summarizing, clarifying, and predicting with expository texts
- Vocabulary building

SLI's book, *Reading for Understanding: A Guide to Reading Improvement in Middle and High School*, by Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, describes in detail the Reading Apprenticeship® instructional framework, the Academic Literacy course, and student learning outcomes from the course.

To evaluate the impact of the course on student learning, SLI research staff collected standardized measures from the entire ninth grade and collected a broader set of qualitative measures in two of the four Academic Literacy teachers' classrooms, selecting a subset of students in these classrooms for closer study.

Quantitative measures included:

- Pre- and post-tests of reading proficiency using the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test <www.tasaliteracy.com>
- 8th and 9th grade standardized reading scores from the California Test of Basic Skills

Qualitative measures included:

- Pre- and post-course reading surveys
- Student written reflections and course evaluations
- Focus group interviews
- Classroom observations
- Samples of course work for 30 students selected randomly from the class rosters of two of the Academic Literacy teachers

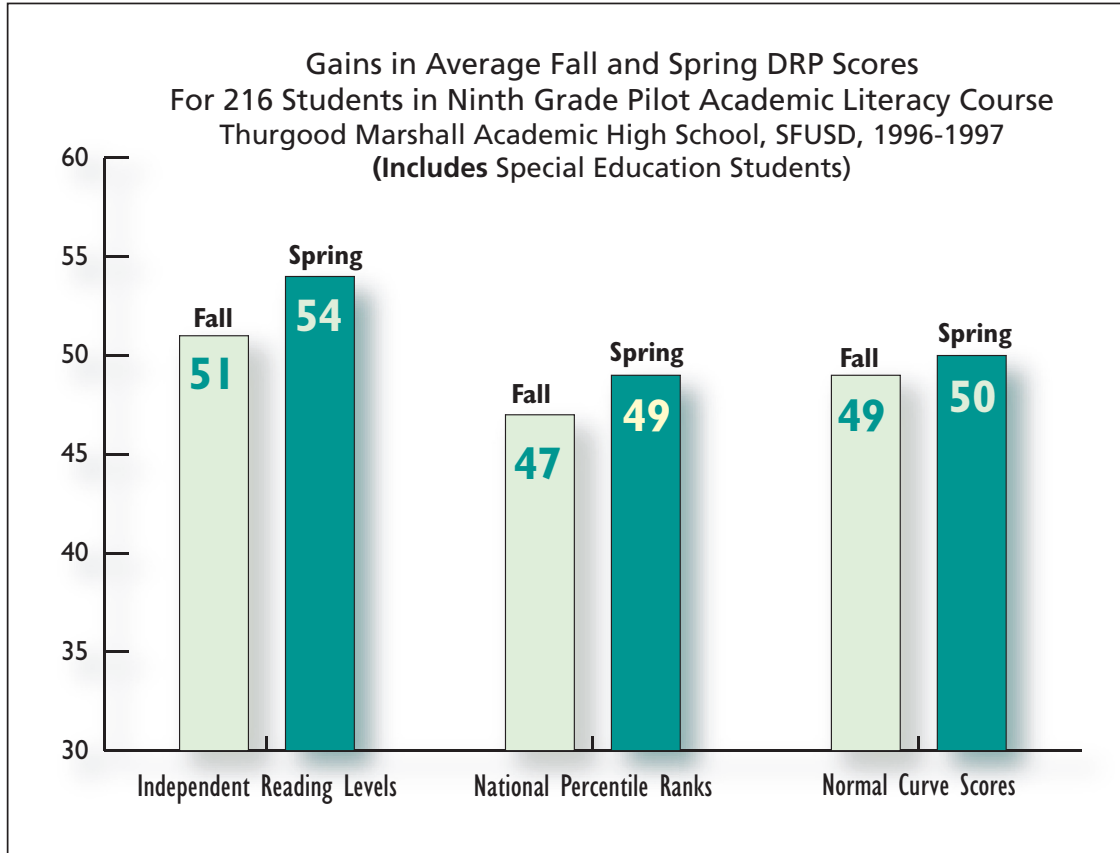
In addition, SLI research staff carried out intensive case studies of 8 of these 30 students, videotaping dynamic reading assessments with them three times during the year as they carried out their reading assignments for the course. A full report of this research appears in the spring 2001 issue of *Harvard Educational Review*, Volume 71, Number 1, pages 79 – 127, as "Apprenticing Adolescent Readers to Academic Literacy" by Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, and Mueller.



Standardized Reading Score Gains

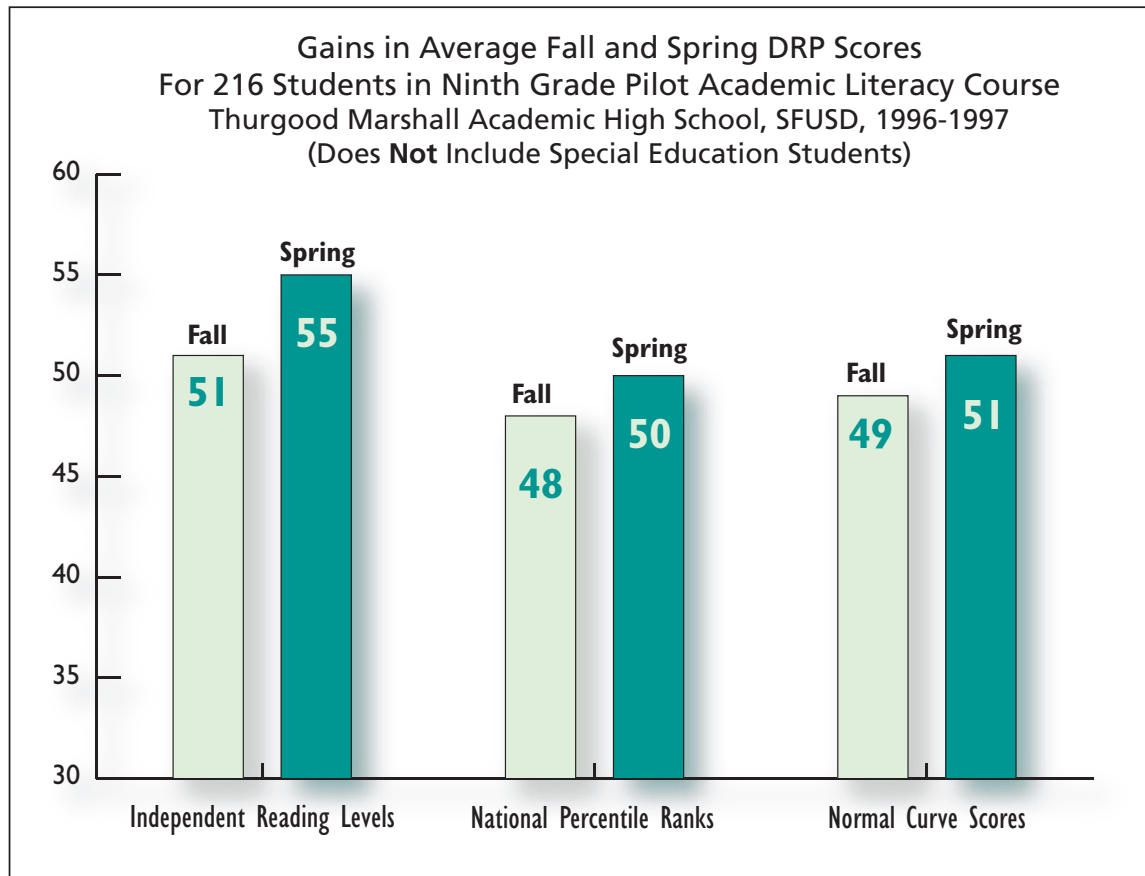
This highly diverse population of students developed what is normally two years of reading proficiency in only seven months of instructional time, *while engaging in rigorous, academic work* rather than remediation focused on basic skills. When the ninth grade students entered TMAHS, they were scoring, on average, two years behind grade level on the DRP, a standardized test of reading comprehension <www.tasaliteracy.com>. By May, these ninth graders had made a significant gain of four score points from fall to spring, significantly greater than one year's expected growth at the ninth grade level ($t = -7.558$, $df = 215$, $p = .000$). [The test publisher estimates that a normal amount of growth on the DRP at the high school level is 1 to 2 points; the TMAHS students gained 4 points.]

When the scores of Special Education students in the ninth grade were omitted from analysis, the remaining group of students again gained an average of 4 points in raw score from the fall to spring ($Z = -7.332$, $df = 202$, $p = .000$), but their mean scores were somewhat higher. In addition, their percentile scores increased over 2 percentage points from 49% (below the national norm) in the fall to nearly 50.5% (above the national



1996 - 1999 9th Grade Academic Literacy Course Studies

norm) in the spring ($Z = -2.152$, $df = 202$, $p = .031$). Significantly, their average reading comprehension score on the DRP was now at grade level.



Because the DRP is a norm- and criterion-referenced test of reading comprehension, the Academic Literacy students' gain scores are compared to those of a national population of grade-level peers, as reflected in the national percentile ranking of the TMAHS students. In addition, normal curve scores reflect the place of a group of students on the bell curve, relative to their peers, thus **a year's normal growth would be reflected in a normal curve gain of zero.** The increase of the Academic Literacy students' normal curve scores is therefore enormously important, since it shows a narrowing of the achievement gap for the socioeconomically, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students served by the Academic Literacy course, precisely those students for whom a persistent gap in achievement has been regularly documented.

This score gain represents an increase in the students' independent reading level from texts like *Old Yeller* to texts like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. In terms of trade materials, these students moved from independently being able to manage children's magazines to



teen fiction and adult fiction magazines. The average instructional reading level of these students reached the level of texts like *The Prince* or *The Scarlet Letter*. With instructional support, they would be expected to manage all but the most difficult of high school textbooks.

There were no significant teacher effects on student progress, indicating that differences among teachers did not result in differences in terms of student learning. All groups of students made impressive gains from fall to spring, without regard to ethnicity or language background.

A follow-up study showed that these Academic Literacy students retained their reading improvement, continuing to grow as readers at an accelerated rate into and through their tenth grade year.

Student Survey Results

Students in nine of the Academic Literacy classes were given Reading Surveys to complete during September 1996 and again in June of 1997. These surveys consisted of a series of questions about their reading histories, reading habits, likes and dislikes, as well as an estimate of the number of books they had read during the previous year. Here is a sampling of their responses:

- In the spring, students reported reading twice the number of books they had read in the previous year.
- In response to the question, “What does someone have to do in order to be a good reader?” in the spring:
 - Twice as many students said that you must understand what you read;
 - Over twice as many students mentioned specific strategies good readers must use to make sense of what they read; and
 - Twice as many students thought that to become a good reader one must enjoy reading and pick books that interest them.

In general, the students’ changed responses in spring indicated that they had begun to think about reading as a sense-making activity that they could control by using strategies and choosing books they like, rather than as a set of skills that one either has or does not have. Students’ responses demonstrated that they had acquired a greater sense of their own agency, responsibility, and control of how they read over the course of the school



1996 - 1999 9th Grade Academic Literacy Course Studies

year, as well as a much more elaborate set of ideas, strategies, and resources for doing so. Students grew more knowledgeable about selecting books to read, knew how to create reading situations that worked for them, and valued reading in new ways.

Case Studies

Students were chosen for case study to represent a range of the ninth grade students enrolled in Academic Literacy. Case study students included English learners, Special Education students, and members of diverse racial and ethnic groups at the school. Focus group interviews as well as individual dynamic assessments carried out over the course of the year showed these diverse students gaining more complex and accurate conceptions of reading, a repertoire of reading strategies, and more importantly, an identity as reader and student, as an outcome of their metacognitive work in the course. Excerpts from the interviews and videotaped dynamic reading assessments making up these case studies continue to be a source of professional development material for secondary teachers. Follow-up interviews with the case study students as they were graduating in their twelfth grade year located the Academic Literacy course as an important milestone in the development of these young people. Looking back, they described how the course had helped them become responsible for their own learning. They also identified metacognitive awareness of their thinking and learning processes, as well as the collaborative work to make sense of complex texts and ideas, as pivotal in their growth and success in high school.

1997–1998 • 10th Grade Academic Literacy Follow-Up Study

The students who had taken Academic Literacy during the 1996 - 1997 school year as ninth graders took the DRP test in October and May of that year. They were given the DRP again, as a follow up to the pilot year study, in May of 1998.

The tenth grade students were given a rigorous battery of tests in Spring of 1998, all within a few days of each other, due to the demands of the state and district. They took the CTBS as well as the STAR (SAT9) series of tests. On top of this demanding testing schedule, the school itself imposed the DRP test for tenth graders. By this time, students were understandably test weary and many simply chose not to complete the test to their best ability. Omitting the test scores for these students, we were able to reliably compare 9th to 10th grade scores for 115 students on all three tests. For the 115 students, the following table summarizes the gains in independent reading level (DRP90) from Fall '96 to Spring '97, Spring '97 to Spring '98, and Fall '96 to Spring '98.



Table 1: Mean Independent Reading Levels

Comparison	Mean DRP90 Scores	N	t	df	sig
Fall '96 to Spring '97	51.2000 54.4957	115	-5.327	114	**
Spring '97 to Spring '98	54.4957 57.0435	115	-4.186	114	**
Fall '96 to Spring '98	51.2000 57.0435	115	-7.627	114	**

** $p < .001$

These data show that the tenth graders continued a statistically significant pattern of growth, continuing to gain over a year of independent reading level each year, even though they were not enrolled in a course focused on reading during their tenth grade year. By the spring of 1998, their national percentile rank had risen to the 53rd percentile in reading proficiency. These findings suggest that the students were given a jump start in the ninth grade that continued to accelerate their reading growth into the tenth grade.

1998–1999 • 9th Grade Academic Literacy Course Replication Study

During the 1998–1999 school year, Academic Literacy was taught at TMAHS by a new team of teachers. The population of students served by the course was similar to that served during the pilot year, with increases of both English learners, who comprised 19% of the ninth grade class, and Special Education students, who made up 12%, or 1/8th, of the ninth graders. In this replication study, 153 students were tested in the fall and spring, using the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test of reading comprehension. **On average, these students gained an average of four points in independent reading scores from fall to spring ($t = -5.102$, $df = 152$, $p < .000$). Importantly, English learners benefited preferentially from the course, increasing 5 points in independent reading from fall to spring.**

In this replication study, the Academic Literacy course continued to demonstrate strong, positive outcomes for student reading, as measured by gains in standardized test scores. In each year of data collection, the course produced a two-year gain in student reading



achievement within the seven months of instructional time between pre- and post-testing. It bears repeating that **these highly diverse groups of students developed what is normally two years of reading proficiency in only seven months of instructional time, while engaging in rigorous, academic work rather than remediation focused on basic skills.** This demonstrated acceleration of student reading achievement at a late point in students' school careers breathes new hope into the discourse of school reform, increased standards for student performance, low adolescent literacy achievement, and high stakes accountability for closing the achievement gap.

