

# Shoreline Reading Intervention Program 2017

*foundry10*  
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## 1.0. Introduction

### 1.1. Brief Overview of Program

During the summer of 2017, foundry10 teamed up with a School District in the Seattle area to provide a month-long reading program that had an integrated drama component with the goal of enhancing student skills and motivation. This is our third summer partnering with teachers from the summer school reading program.

In this collaboration, we partnered a teaching artist who specializes in dramatic arts pedagogy with teachers from two third grade classes and one classroom of ELL (English Language Learners) students comprising grades 2,3, and 4. We chose these groups because our previous research has suggested that third graders and ELL students seem to respond more positively towards physicalized storytelling. In addition, previous research has also shown that incorporating imagery, story segmentation and elaboration through dramatic arts pedagogy improves reading comprehension (Rose et al., 2010). There is also much literature on the benefits of dialogue and oral storytelling in terms of both language acquisition and skill development (Berkowitz, 2011; Trostle & Hicks, 1998; Labbo & Field, 1996; Gallets, 2005).

In response to our research from the previous year, showing the most positive effect of the dramatic arts component occurring with ELL students, we expanded the exposure ELL students had with dramatic arts. ELL students spent an hour and a half each day, for three weeks, in an integrated dramatics arts/reading style intervention. The ELL teacher and teaching artist chose curriculum that would be used in both the dramatic arts activities and traditional curriculum then split up the class into two groups to alternate their experience with the drama portion versus with the traditional reading curriculum. Third grade students spent thirty minutes, every other day, five days a week for three consecutive weeks, and then every day for a final week, with a teaching artist leading them in dramatic arts based activities designed to help with reading comprehension skills. This included a read aloud and accompanying story-segmentation and character exploration using the body and voice.

The data analyzed in this report is focused on what foundry10 was studying in this program: student interest, self-efficacy, motivation, perception of skill, and enjoyment and value of the dramatic arts components. The district collected its own pre/post reading level data which is not analyzed here.

## 1.2. Description of Dramatic Arts Curriculum

In summer 2017, a foundry10 teaching artist collaborated with an ELL teacher in order to build curriculum based on the teacher's classroom goals and materials. Students read the book Cricket in Times Square and used scenes written by the instructor, movement based games, and arts and crafts in order to respond to the narrative in personalized and meaningful ways, to demonstrate their understanding. Each day the teaching artist would read a section of the story to the class while they responded using hands-on techniques such as drawing, mask-making, or role-playing. Students were asked to elaborate on chosen characters from their read-aloud book by adding details about their character's backstory and making choices about what that character would do in new situations. Students identified vocabulary words from their work in the dramatic arts section of the day and connected it to the actual text. We know from research that vocabulary in isolation is not as useful as having a context for the words (Hirsch, 2016, pg. 105). Using dramatic arts activities, the students were able to connect words like "entomologist" with the character in the book they were portraying. Students memorized a script written by the instructor, adapted from the class text, and practiced speaking confidently in front of the group. Next they embodied chosen characters and in small groups, practiced taking turns with their lines, listening and responding in character. Ultimately, they staged their scenes within their groups and performed for the class.

The dramatic arts instructor worked on building imagination and ensemble skills, and asked students to physicalize characters, shapes, and settings related to a story she would read them each day. They worked on using their bodies and imagination to tell stories in the classroom space. Through this work with embodied cognition, students had different access points to key ideas from the text.

In developing this curriculum, the teaching artist met with the ELL instructor twice in person and then communicated via email in the weeks leading up to the month-long intervention. Additionally, they would check-in each day, before and after class. The teachers had significantly less contact with the teaching artist and the two segments ran largely independently of one another.

## 1.3 Description of Student Data Collected by foundry10

### 1.2.1. Demographic data

The school district provided foundry10 with data on students participating in the reading program. Classroom and grade were reported for each participating student.

### 1.2.2. Student-reported data

Students were asked to assess their own skills and opinions regarding reading. At the beginning and at the end of the program, students were asked to respond to the following Likert-type questions and statements:

- How do you feel about reading in school?

- How do you feel about the stories you read in class?
- When I am acting out stories, I feel...
- How would you feel if you acted out stories in your reading class in the school year?
- I like reading that I'll learn from, even if I make a lot of mistakes.
- An important reason I read is because I am interested in it.
- I share my ideas with other kids in reading class.
- I know I will do well in reading next year.
- I am a good reader.
- Pretending to be a character in a story helps me understand the story better.

## 2.0. Analyses and Results

### 2.1. Analysis

Data was analyzed for a total of 29 students who completed both PRE and POST surveys. Two of the classes were made up of third-grade students. The third class, an ELL class, contained 9 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade students, 6 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students, and 3 4<sup>th</sup>-grade students.

*Table 1. Number of students completing attitudinal questions*

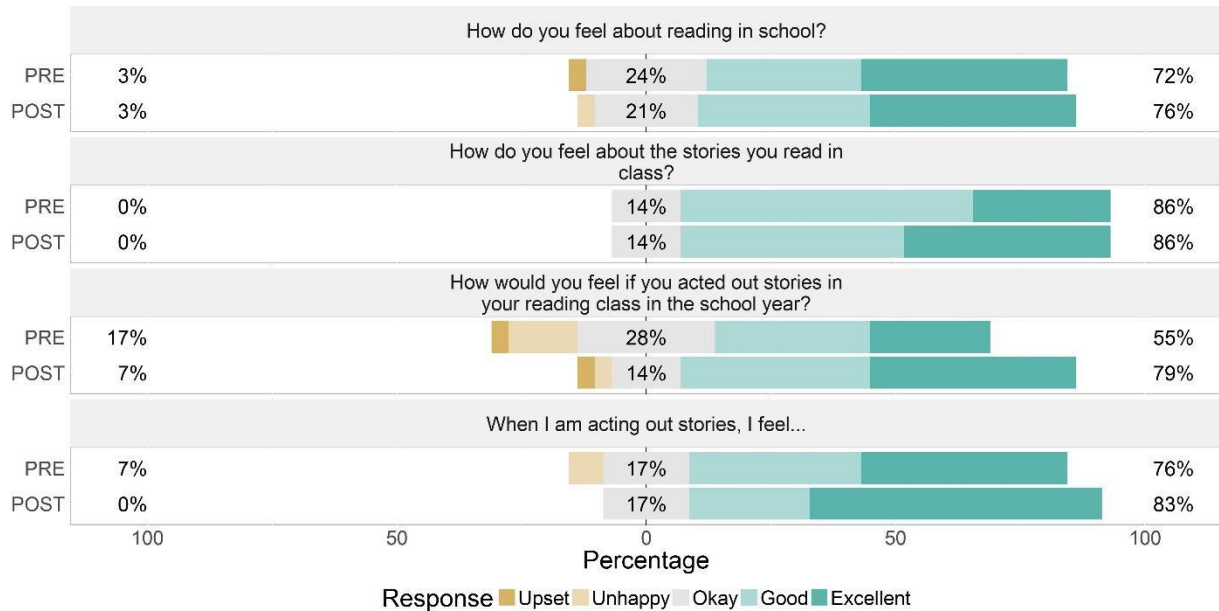
<i>Grade / Class</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> (1)</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> (2)</i>	<i>ELL</i>
<i>Number of students</i>	5	6	18

### 2.2. Results

#### 2.2.1. Feelings towards reading and acting

Overall, it appears that students' self-rated feelings about stories read in school improved over time, though for most items the change was modest. Using a Wilcoxon signed rank sum test, we found that feelings about acting out stories in reading class were higher after the program ( $V=120, p=0.037$ ). For the other three attitudinal questions, there was a shift in a positive direction between PRE and POST, however the shifts were too small to be deemed significant.

Figure 1. PRE and POST responses to reading and acting attitude questions



### 2.2.2. Attitudes towards self and reading

Self-ratings for attitudes towards self and reading did not change significantly, and for all items actually showed a decreasing trend from PRE to POST.

Figure 2. PRE and POST responses to reading agreement questions

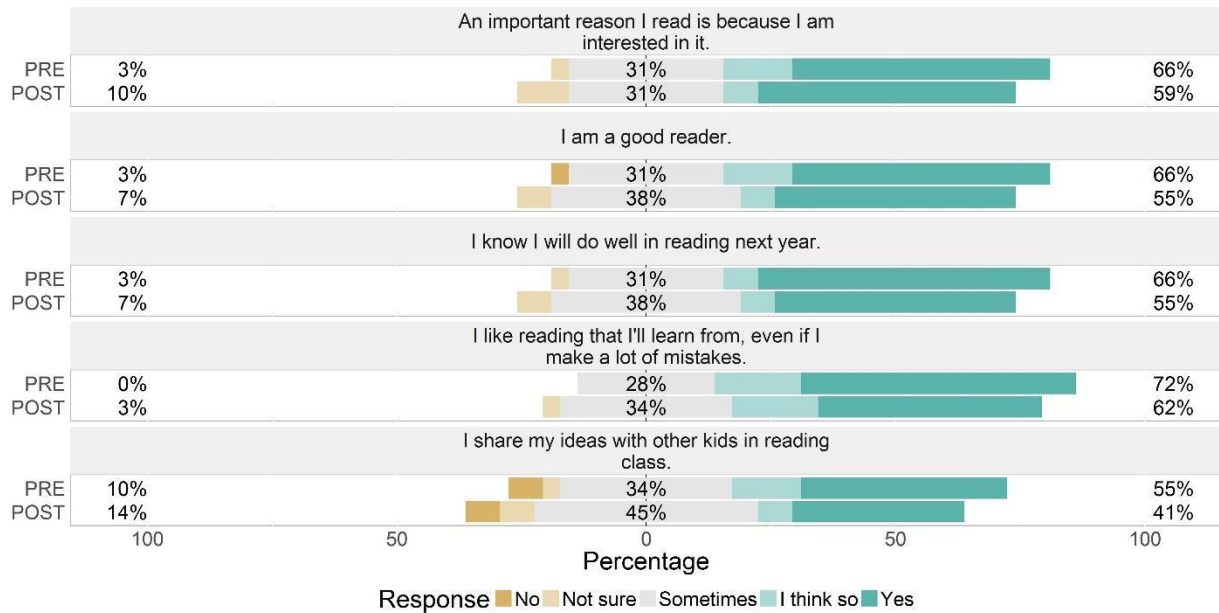
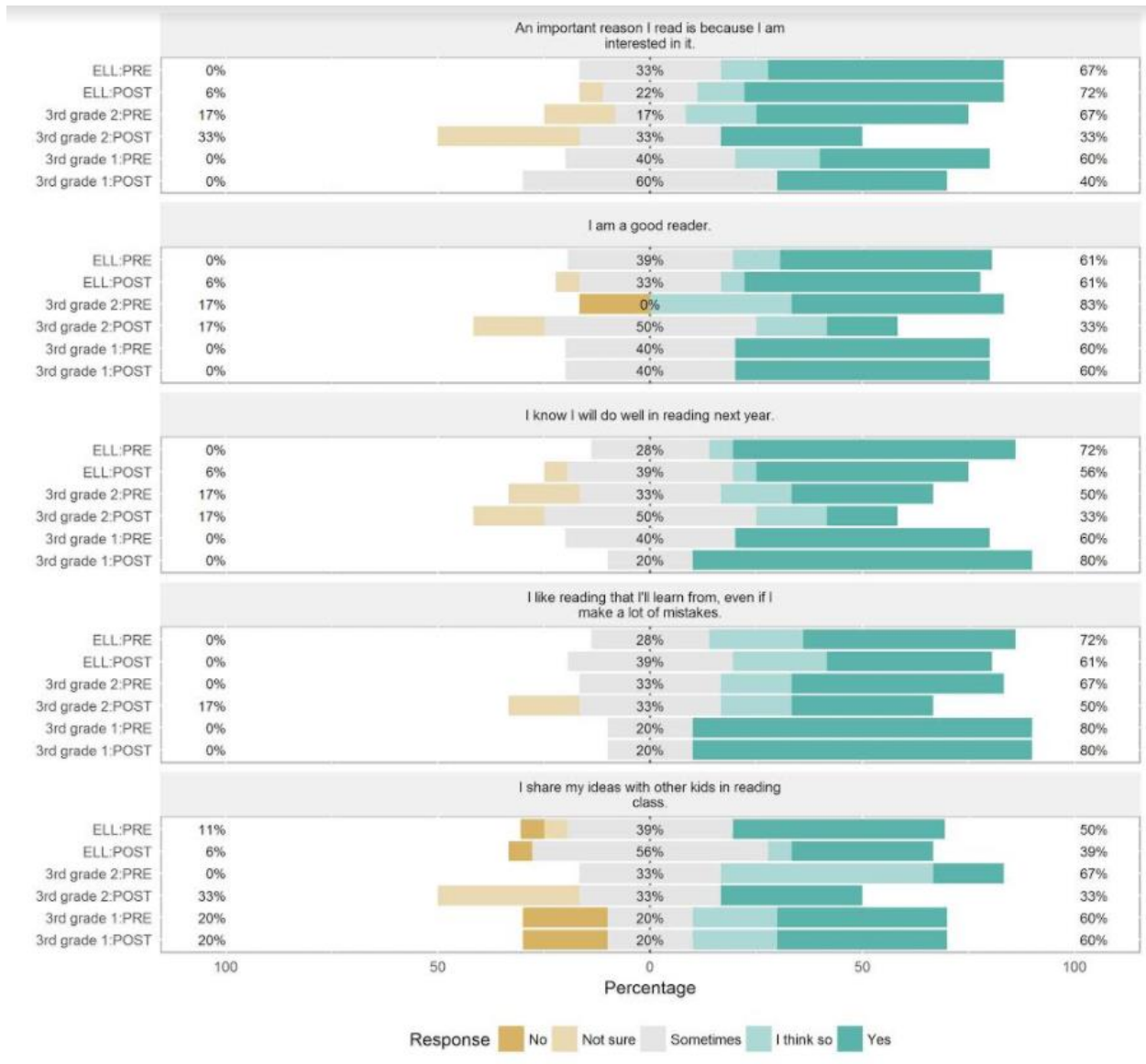


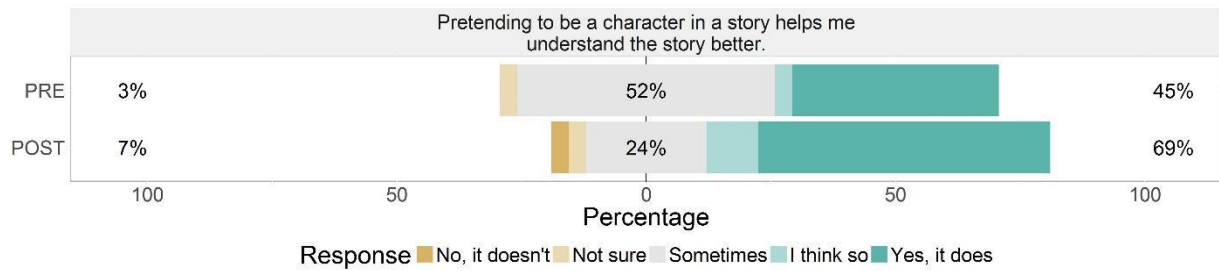
Figure 3. PRE and POST responses to reading agreement questions, broken down by class



### 2.2.3. Attitudes towards pretending to be a character

Overall, students appeared to have a more positive response to the statement, “Pretending to be a character in a story helps me understand the story better” after the program. This difference was not statistically significant ( $V = 55.5$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.179$ ).

Figure 3. PRE and POST responses to pretending to be a character item



Responses to this item varied by classroom. For the ELL classroom, responses to this item were more positive after the program ( $V=28, p=0.022$ ; see Figure 4), and the difference in responses from PRE to POST was driven primarily by 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade ELL students (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. PRE and POST responses to pretending to be a character item, by classroom

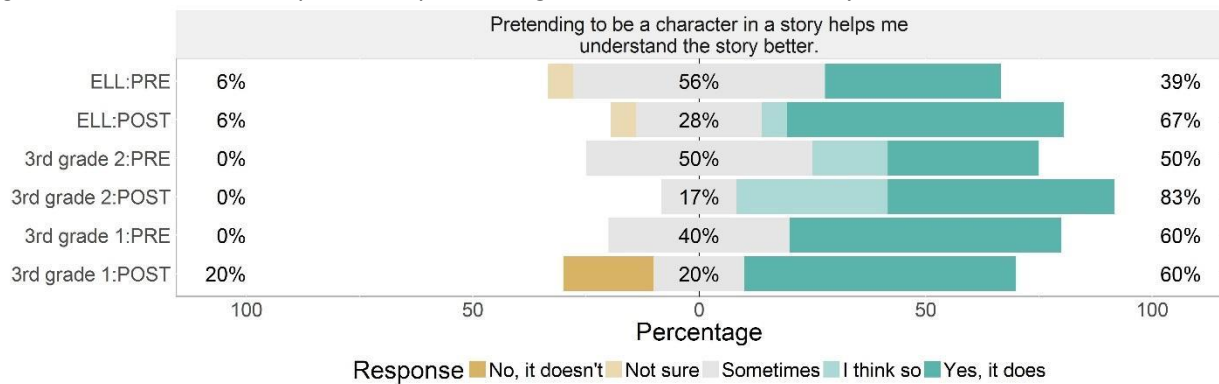
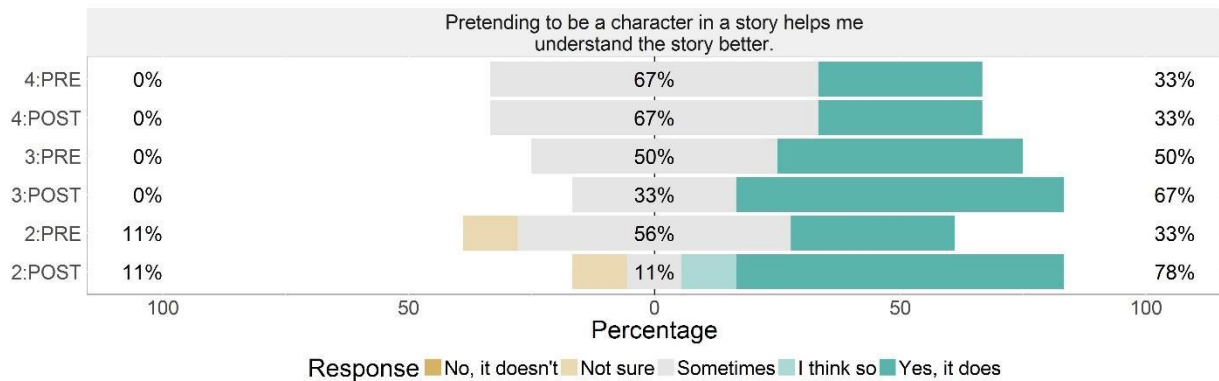


Figure 5. PRE and POST responses to pretending to be a character item, for ELL students, by grade



### 3.0. Discussion

Prior research on dramatic arts and reading shows a number of positive benefits, many of which we've seen through our work in these programs. Additional research work, specifically on reading, demonstrates that well-structured dramatic arts activities, using imagery, story-segmentation, and elaboration can have many benefits for readers including increasing vocabulary and comprehension.

Speaking aloud, reciting lines in front of a group increases retention and understanding. We believe that the more ways we can help students engage with narrative and story elements, the more likely they are to develop strong tools for analyzing and thinking about the material to which they are being exposed.

Overall, we were pleased with the results of the attitudes towards reading and acting. In the first set of findings, there were positive shifts in three out of the four categories with the fourth remaining unchanged. Students seemed to enjoy engaging with acting and dramatic arts as part of their reading curriculum and their responses showed a positive interest in doing more of it during regular school time. All students had either a neutral or positive result for how they felt when acting out stories, which represented a shift from pre to post. Students also had positive feelings about the stories they read in class. We know from research that if students are enjoying what they read they are much more likely to read, so their positive feelings about the books they are presented with is an important aspect of their overall reading development. Though a small percentage were still unhappy about reading in school, it represented a slightly positive shift at the negative end from “upset” to “unhappy” in the PRE to POST questionnaire. It can be more difficult to shift students with the most negative feelings so we see any movement at that end of the spectrum as positive.

The second set of findings were a bit more puzzling to us. This category of question had to do with students’ attitudes towards themselves as readers. In this set of questions, across the board, we saw students feeling slightly less sure about their skill level. Though they were not using a “no” response, in most cases, to prompts such as, “I know I will do well in reading next year” we saw an increase in the number of students who were “not sure”. Perhaps, as students spent more focused time thinking about and working on reading, they may have had a stronger sense of knowing what they don’t know and thus were more willing to be critical about their own skill level. Other explanations might be a continued lack of confidence in their abilities despite a positive shift in their scores. Still, other explanations could be that they are unsure of the teacher and reading assignments of the following year will include, so they are not sure if they’ll improve. There were some positive shifts within grade levels, such that one group of third graders did feel positively about doing well in reading next year.

It is important that we, as educators, consider why this data appears the way it does. Though students seem to enjoy reading stories (from the previous question set) it appears that reading because they are “interested” captures a more intrinsic or personality-driven appeal to reading. What we took away from student responses in this category is that we may not be capturing how they are really considering “interest”. The majority of students felt that at least “sometimes” interest was an important factor in reading and many responded with “I think so” or “Yes” with regard to reading for interest being important. It would likely behoove us to look a bit more closely at motivations for student reading and book selection and how they define “interest” as a concept and how interest intersects with books they may be required to read in a classroom setting.

Students overall felt relatively positively about their willingness to make mistakes. Making mistakes in reading, like mispronouncing or saying a word that isn’t written, could contribute to student perception of success or interest. It makes sense, in a reading intervention where they are regularly being assessed on their reading skills, to feel that it is part of their growth “sometimes”. It is also well-established that if readers are really struggling, it can be incredibly difficult to read for meaning and content and thus they

may find mistakes incredibly distracting or frustrating at times, contributing to a negative feeling about reading.

When students mentioned that they do not share their ideas in reading, we began to wonder if the way the program was structured had them respond to the questions in a way we had not anticipated. Because there was a bit more separation than anticipated between the dramatic arts component and the traditional classroom reading portion, it appears that students may have focused on their in-class reading experiences when answering these questions rather than considering the program as an integrated whole. We know from direct observation that the students really did share ideas and engage with one another in the dramatic arts reading activities. So either students did not recognize they were actively doing this, or, perhaps, they did not realize they were doing it in “reading” class. Another detractor in terms of the students linking the reading to the dramatic arts was that in all classes they moved to a different space for the dramatic arts integration component of the day in an effort to have more room for movement. We wonder if that transition to a new location allowed for a separation in the students’ minds between the two components.

In the attitudes towards pretending to be a character we noticed the most drastic positive shift from PRE to POST across most classes. This suggests that students’ engagement with story through the lens of a character increases their understanding of the story. This is line with previous research that suggests dramatic arts pedagogy is an effective tool for developing reading comprehension (Gallets, 2005). There was one group of third grade students where a percentage of the class did not feel that pretending to be a character helped with story understanding. This particular class of students struggled a bit more throughout the program with in-class behavior and engagement across both the dramatic arts and the regular classroom time components. We wonder if that contributed to their responses to this question.

Based on student responses for this year, we are thinking more broadly about how we frame the questions we are asking, particularly so that the students link their experience with dramatic arts as part of their regular reading class. Though there may be an impact due to how students interpreted the surveys, we do think it is important for educators to pause and consider what the results may mean from a student’s perspective.

Perhaps in future iterations we need to think about how mistakes in reading are framed during intervention class times. Maybe there should be additional discussion with students about the types of reading materials they are selecting and how those intersect with their interest areas. Also, since there will likely be future iterations of this program, we may want to consider how the dramatic arts piece is integrated into the overall intervention such that the reading instruction and dramatic arts are more tightly woven together.

## 4.0 Conclusions

We were pleased with the student participation in this iteration of the summer reading intervention. Though some categories of results showed slight shifts into less confidence in their skill level after the program, other categories showed positive influences as a result of the dramatic arts component.



Overall, we found some evidence that participation in the summer reading program was associated with small changes in feelings towards reading and acting; in particular, feelings towards acting out stories in reading class were higher after the program. Attitudes towards self and reading were not significantly different before and after the program. The participating ELL class had more favorable views towards how pretending to be a character helped them to understand the story better, at the POST.

Next year, we are planning to alter the measures we use slightly to better capture student motivations for reading and interest, and consider creating a more integrated approach to the curriculum. Based on our own and others' research, we believe that integrating the dramatic arts component more fully will improve students' abilities to connect and contextualize their reading experiences.