

Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE)

From Rhetoric to College Readiness: The Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC)

**DOES THE EXPOSITORY READING AND WRITING COURSE (ERWC) HAVE A
POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE READING AND WRITING SKILLS OF GRADE-12
STUDENTS?**

Project Overview

THE PROBLEM: What Challenge Did the Program Try to Address?

The program was intended to improve the academic literacy of high school seniors, thereby reducing the need for remediation in English for first-year college students.

THE PROJECT: What Strategies Did the Program Employ?

From 2011-2015, Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE)¹, in partnership with California State University (CSU) and WestEd, received an Investing in Innovation (i3) development grant from the U.S. Department of Education to update and refine the Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC), a 12th grade English course developed in 2003-2004 to improve the academic literacy of high school seniors, and to improve its program of professional learning. The program's core components included: an ERWC curriculum, teacher professional learning, and ERWC curriculum materials. A quasi-experimental design (QED) was used for the evaluation, in which ERWC students were compared to students who took other 12th grade English courses.

¹Fresno County Office of Education received an i3 development grant supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation program through Grant Number U411C110425. Development grants provide funding to support the development or testing of novel or substantially more effective practices that address widely shared education challenges. All i3 grantees are required to conduct rigorous evaluations of their projects. The quality of evidence required to demonstrate a project's effectiveness depends on a project's level of scale or grant type.

THE ERWC MODEL

- **ERWC Curriculum.** Students were taught eight to 10 curriculum modules. The ERWC curriculum includes 12 modules, each covering a different topic, with teachers expected to teach eight to 10 of the modules over the course of the school year. The modules were organized by three major domains: Reading Rhetorically, Connecting Reading to Writing, and Writing Rhetorically.
- **Teacher Professional Learning.** Teachers received a two-day summer professional learning session. Then, on an ongoing basis, teachers were coached (4x a year) and attended professional learning community meetings (9x a year). Professional learning sessions were taught by ERWC curriculum developers and teachers were coached by ERWC experts.
- **ERWC Curriculum Materials.** Teachers received curriculum binders, and an optional ERWC online community. Students received student readers and two full-length books.

Summary of Results

DOES THE EXPOSITORY READING AND WRITING COURSE (ERWC) HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE READING AND WRITING SKILLS OF 12TH GRADE STUDENTS?

ERWC students outperformed their comparison peers on the English Placement Test (EPT), a standardized assessment that California State University (CSU) uses to determine student eligibility for credit-bearing English courses. The difference in performance is statistically significant and had an effect size of 0.13. Education researchers generally interpret effect sizes as follows: 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, and 0.8 = large.²

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- **HIGH TEACHER PARTICIPATION.** Teacher participation was high for the professional learning components (summer sessions, coaching, professional learning communities).
- **STUDENTS STRUGGLED WITH ERWC RIGOR:** Many students struggled with the rigors of ERWC, particularly at the beginning of the school year.
- **LOW IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY.** Of the 56 ERWC teachers who participated in the study, only 10 (17.9%) taught at least eight modules with fidelity. This low percentage is due to the stringent requirement that, for a teacher to be considered as having taught any module with fidelity, he/she needed to teach at least one activity in each of the module's six subject areas. Teachers were not aware of this requirement.
- **TECHNOLOGY IMPEDIMENTS:** Some teachers noted technology impediments that prevented them from completing certain ERWC activities.

For More Information

Evaluation Reports

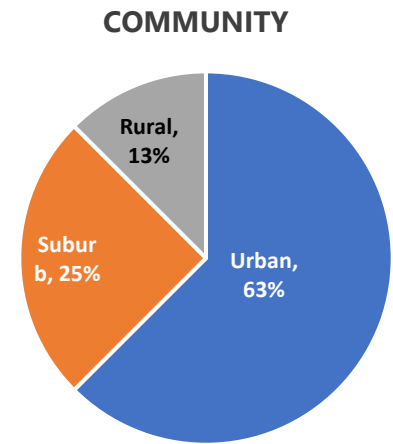
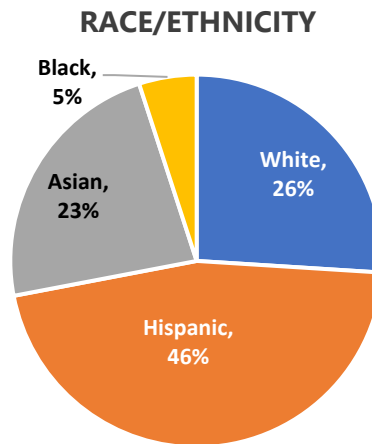
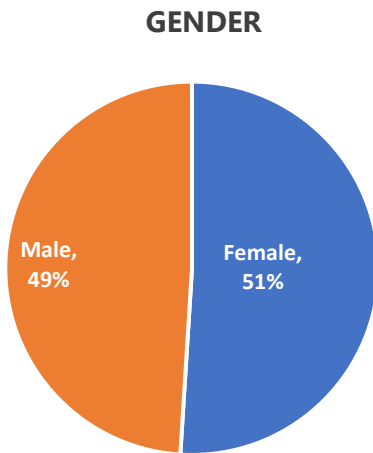
[Final Evaluation Report \(Full Report\)](#) (WestEd, July 2015)³

² If the impact does not have an effect size of 0.2 or greater, it is not meaningful, even if it is statistically significant. Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 155-159.

³ The information and data for this result summary was collected from the most recent report as of 01/22/2020: WestEd. (2015, July). *Evaluation of the Expository Reading and Writing Course*. Retrieved from https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/1438034849ERWC_Report-3.pdf

Appendix A: Students Served by the Project⁴

GRADE(S)													
PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12



HIGH-NEED STUDENTSⁱ

Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	English Learners ⁵	Students with Disabilities
Not reported/Not applicable	Not reported/Not applicable	Not reported/Not applicable

⁴These data reflect the entire student population served by the intervention, not just the evaluation sample used in the impact study.

⁵ The report provided a percent of students described as "English speakers." This value is the inverse of that percent.

Appendix B: Impact Evaluation Methodology⁶

RESEARCH DESIGN:

Design:	Matching Analysis
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students in the ERWC were compared with students who took a different 12th grade English Course (AP English Literature or English 4) ▪ Matching methods were employed to compare ERWC students with similar students who enrolled in a non-ERWC English class ▪ The key outcome measure used to assess the effectiveness of the ERWC was the English Placement Test (EPT), which is the standardized assessment that California State University (CSU) uses to determine student eligibility for credit-bearing English courses
Study Length:	One year (2013-2014)

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Study Setting:	Twenty-four high schools in California (nine districts)
Final Sample Sizes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Intervention Group</i>: 3,309 students ▪ <i>Comparison Group</i>: 3,309 students
Intervention Group Characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Female: 1,692 ▪ Male: 1,617 ▪ Black: 162 ▪ Asian: 755 ▪ Hispanic: 1,536 ▪ White: 856 ▪ AP English: 442 ▪ Non-AP English: 2,867
Comparison Group Characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female: 1,692.25 • Male: 1,616.75 • Black: 162 • Asian: 755 • Hispanic: 1,536 • White: 865 • AP English: 442 • Non-AP English: 2,867
Data Sources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student assessments ▪ Student records data
Key Measures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ English Placement Test (EPT) ▪ Mahalanobis distance metric

⁶ These data reflect only the evaluation sample in the impact study, not the entire population served.

Appendix C: Quality of the Evidence

Although an evaluation may not have been reviewed by the time of publication for this summary, it is possible that the study will be reviewed at a later date. Please visit the websites found in the footnotes on this page to check for updates.

WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW⁷

STUDY	RATING
Department-funded evaluation (findings for Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC)) 8/16 https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/study/32029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study meets WWC standards with reservations At least one statistically significant positive finding

EVIDENCE FOR ESSA REVIEW⁸

STUDY	RATING
Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) https://www.evidenceforessa.org/programs/reading/middlehigh-school/expository-reading-and-writing-course-erwc	Moderate

NATIONAL CENTER ON INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS REVIEW⁹

STUDY	RATING
Not reviewed as of 01/22/2020	N/A

⁷ <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW>

⁸ <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/>

⁹ <https://intensiveintervention.org/>

Investing in Innovation (i3) Grantee Results Summary

Development, 2011-2015

The [*Investing in Innovation Fund \(i3\)*](#), established under section 14007 of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, is a Federal discretionary grant program at the U.S. Department of Education within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). i3 grants help schools and local education agencies work in partnership with the private sector and the philanthropic community to develop and expand innovative practices that improve student achievement or student growth, close achievement gaps, decrease dropout rates, increase high school graduation rates, and/or increase college enrollment and completion rates for high-need students.

This summary was prepared by the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Program Dissemination Project. The project is conducted by the [*Manhattan Strategy Group*](#), in partnership with [*Westat*](#) and [*EdScale*](#), with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, [*Office of Elementary and Secondary Education*](#), under Contract No. ED-ESE-15-A-0012/0004. The evaluation results presented herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education should be inferred.

ⁱ “High-need student” refers to a student at risk of academic failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, attend high-minority schools, are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, in foster care, have been incarcerated, have disabilities, or who are English learners. For more information see: [*Applications for New Awards; Investing in Innovation Fund-Development Grants, 81 FR 24070 \(April 25, 2016\)*](#).