

**KOREH L.A.'s TEEN LITERACY CORP (TLC)
Teen Literacy Volunteer Program
of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles**

Final Evaluation Report

Prepared for

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Gisele Ragusa, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Director, Center for Outcomes Research and Evaluation
University of Southern California
Rossier School of Education
University Park Campus
3470 Trousdale Parkway
Waite Phillips Hall 401B
Los Angeles, California 90089
Tele:(213) 821-3147
Fax: (213) 740-0164
ragusa@usc.edu

Executive Summary

The Teen Literacy Corps (*TLC*) program is The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles's non-sectarian teen volunteer literacy intervention program focused on both the empowerment of teens in urban Los Angeles area schools and the development of literacy skills in Los Angeles Unified School District elementary-aged reluctant readers. *TLC* assists teens in leadership skill development and builds their independence and interest in school while at the same time enables them to help struggling readers in lower elementary grades in LAUSC to improve reading skills and achievement. The University of Southern California's Center for Outcomes Research and Evaluation (CORE) was contracted to complete a comprehensive evaluation of the *TLC* intervention program.

This evaluation had three important objectives:

- (1) To measure the reading-based academic achievement of *TLC* elementary grade student participants in grades 1-3.
- (2) To measure the engagement, leadership and empowerment of teens as a result of participating in the *TLC* intervention.
- (3) To measure teen participant support, perceived success, and satisfaction with the *TLC* experience.

Summarily, results from this evaluation revealed that the teen participant made significant gains resulting from participation in the *TLC* program. Post *TLC* intervention, the teens showed significant gains in College Going Efficacy, $m = 3.09$ $t(148) = -4.913$, $p < 0.01$. In addition, the results for the Youth Empowerment Scale approached significance, $m = 3.21$ $t(148) = -1.891$, $p = 0.061$ (objectives 2 and 3).

Additionally, the grades 1-3 elementary students had reading achievement gains resulting from program participation. Statistically significant gains were observed for first graders in Word Knowledge Grade Equivalency as measured by the Gates MacGinitie, pretest $m = 2.06$, post test $m = 2.49$, gain = .43, $t(13) = -4.054$, $p < 0.01$. In addition, gains that are approaching statistical significance, were observed in Reading Comprehension Grade Equivalency, $t(13) = -1.855$, $p = 0.081$, during the 6+ month intervention period. Additionally, the third graders in the *TLC* program demonstrated achievement gains in all sections of the Gates MacGinitie reading achievement test (including Vocabulary, Comprehension, and Total Reading). There was statistically significant gains in Total Reading, pretest $m = 2.34$, posttest $m = 3.35$, gain = 1.1 $t(9) = -2.176$, $p < 0.05$ in the 6+ month intervention period. In addition, the students' gains in Vocabulary approached statistical significance, $t(9) = -1.826$, $p = 0.088$ (objective 1).

These results indicate that the *TLC* program was highly successful both for teens and the grades 1-3 students with whom they worked. This evaluation indicates the importance of continuing the *TLC* program, as it has greatly benefited both children and teens in urban settings.

Introduction and Program Overview

The Teen Literacy Corps (*TLC*) program is The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles's non-sectarian teen volunteer literacy intervention program focused on both the empowerment of teens in urban Los Angeles area schools and the development of literacy skills in Los Angeles Unified School District elementary-aged reluctant readers. *TLC* assists teens in leadership skill development and builds their independence and interest in school while at the same time enables them to help struggling readers in lower elementary grades in LAUSC to improve reading skills and achievement. This intervention program combines a rich blend of formal and informal learning experiences in reading for urban teens and young elementary students utilizing the resources of The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles and its Community Engagement Initiative. The program consists of in-school literacy intervention and associated teen leadership training and support in Los Angeles Unified school District. The elementary student intervention is provided by urban teens that have been recruited and trained for the *TLC* intervention program by the Jewish Federation. Each *TLC* Teen volunteer spends one hour, once a week reading with an primary grade elementary school child (grade 1-3). Since its inception, the program has trained greater than 800 volunteers to work with more than 2,000 children in Los Angeles schools. This report represents the results of an evaluation of the *TLC* intervention program taking place during the 2009-2010 academic year for approximately one approximately six-month period with 132 volunteer teens and the elementary grade students with whom they worked.

Since the onset of implementation of the *TLC* program, participating teachers and teen volunteers have expressed positive anecdotal support of the impact that the program volunteers have on the reading abilities, attendance, classroom participation, and self-esteem of the teens and young children with whom they work. However positive the anecdotal reports of the program success have been, the Jewish Federation recognized an important need for an extensive, independent evaluation of the *TLC* program to assess the intervention program's impact on the teen leadership outcomes and the reading outcomes for children in grades one through three. Accordingly, the University of Southern California's (USC) Center for Outcomes Research and Evaluation (CORE) was contacted to conduct this important independent evaluation. This document represents of a report on the results of the *TLC* program evaluation during academic year 2009-2010.

Critical Evaluation Components: Goals, Objective and the Evaluation Model

Given that the conceptual focus of the *TLC* program is that literacy learning should be meaningful, supportive, and community-based, this program evaluation had as a primary goal *to measure the combined success of an enrichment-based teen leadership and empowerment program and a reading intervention for young elementary age students*. The USC CORE evaluative team included Dr. Gisele Ragusa, two postdoctoral researchers, and two graduate students in educational psychology. The evaluation team employed a mixed-method, multivariate approach to evaluating the *TLC* program. Three important objectives guided the evaluation:

- (1) To measure the reading-based academic achievement of *TLC* elementary grade student participants.
- (2) To measure the engagement leadership, and empowerment of teens as a result of participating in the *TLC* intervention.
- (3) To measure teen participant support, perceived success, and satisfaction with the *TLC* experience.

To accomplish the evaluative objectives for this program, the evaluation team, under Dr. Ragusa's direction, designed an evaluation model that included both elementary student and teen volunteer focused evaluative measures. The evaluation model includes context, implementation variables and outcomes. The figure that follows (1) illustrates how these components fit with the program evaluation objectives.

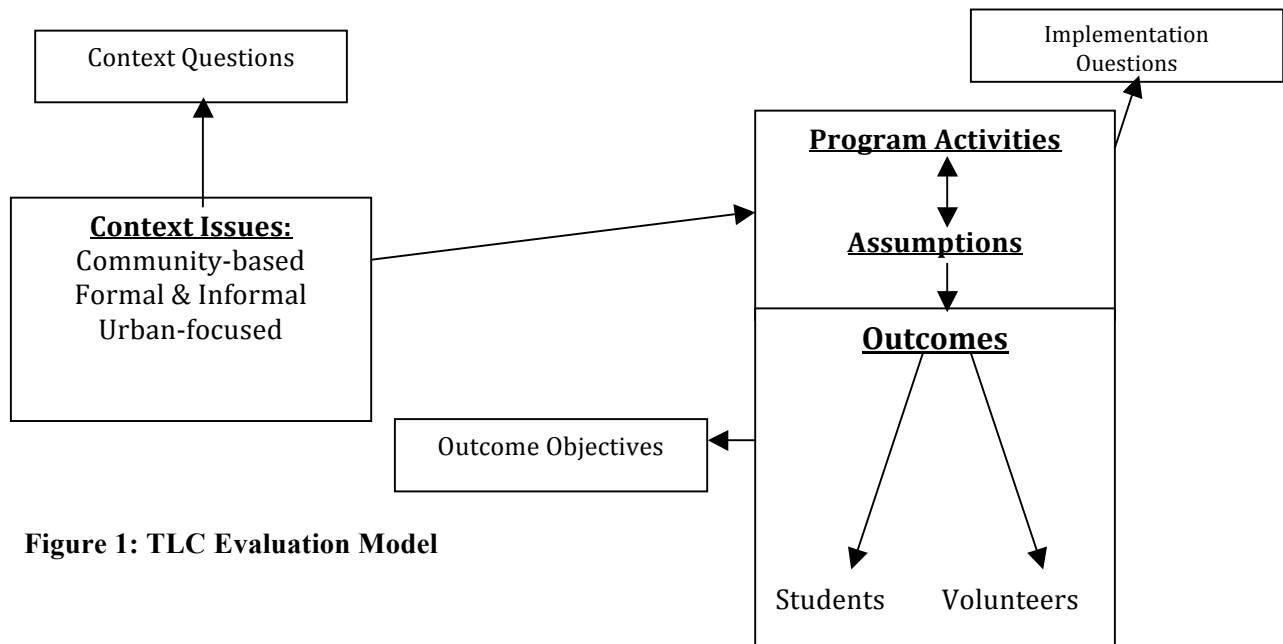


Figure 1: TLC Evaluation Model

Theoretical Approach to Evaluation Tied to Program Frame

A dominant perspective in learning with intervention-based school settings is based on theoretical approaches with strong roots in cognitive psychology and constructivism (Cobern, 1993; Crowther, Vilá, & Fathman, 2006; Gibbons, 2003). Much of this research focuses on students’ engagement in hands-on, learning activities, in particular “active learning” (Dobb, 2004; National Research Council, 2000) that includes participation in a variety of meaningful activities related to student empowerment, efficacy, and literacy, such as those involved in the *TLC* program experience. The goal for active learning is to develop and construct knowledge through meaningful enriching activities. From this perspective, effective teachers and teen volunteers need to structure learning environments to foster experiences that enhance students’ knowledge application. The guiding principles of constructivism in teaching suggests that teachers and teen volunteers (and in particular, those involved with *TLC*) utilize approaches relevant to students and structure learning around primary concepts and students’ suppositions (Brooks & Brooks, 1993).

This evaluation has drawn upon constructivist and sociocultural frameworks (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Moll, Rogoff, 2003) which emphasize that (1) learning is social; (2) learning is facilitated by assisted performance that is responsive to learners (the *TLC* teen volunteers); (3) learning is mediated by cultural tools, and artifacts; and (4) learning takes place in communities of learners and is documented by how individuals change their participation within these communities. From this theoretical perspective, learning is predicated on a collaborative relationship that allows the learner and “more competent others” in this case, the *TLC* teen volunteers, to negotiate understanding, sharing ideas, questioning, and other mediational means. It is for this reason; the *TLC* program was evaluated with both the teen volunteers and elementary aged students as evaluation participants. Evaluations with multiple participants require a carefully crafted logic model. The logic model employed for this evaluation was informed by the critical components of the evaluation (Figure 1 above) and is represented visually in Figure 2 (below).

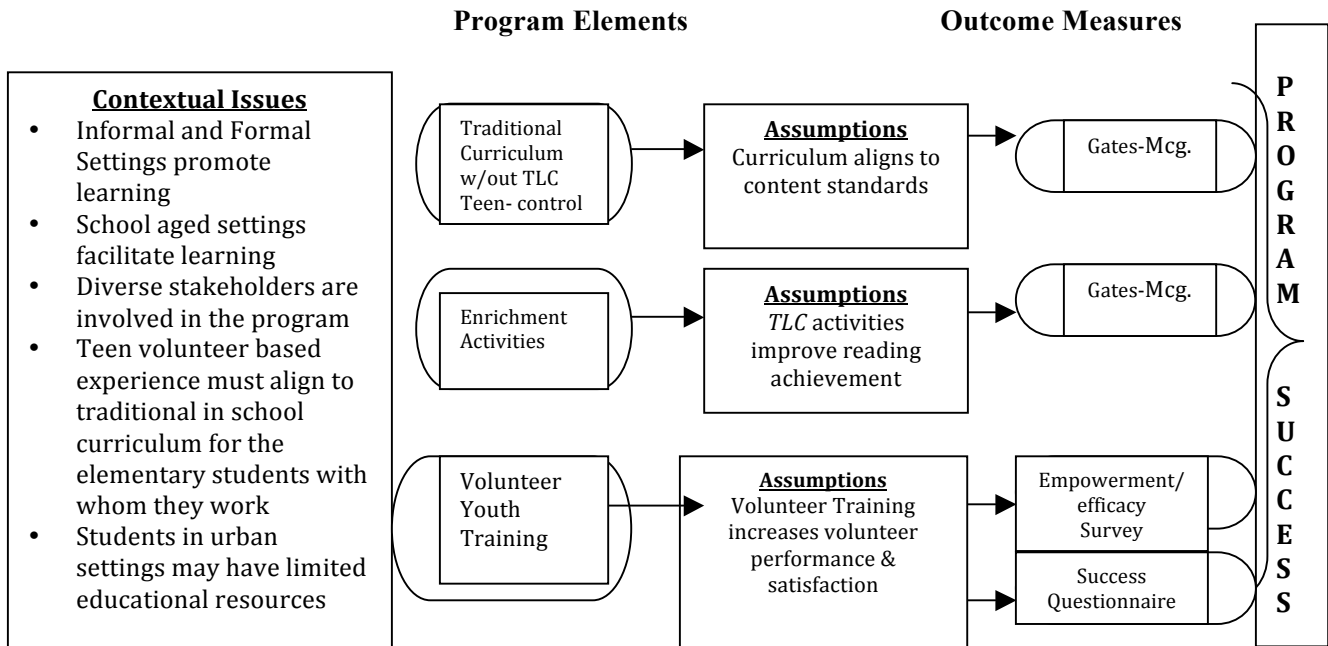


Figure 2: Logic Model- TLC Teen Evaluation

This logic model was designed as an adaptation of Mid-continent Research for Evaluation and Learning (McREL, 2006) comprehensive school reform logic model. The evaluative measures were included in the logic model as intermediate outcome measures. The overall evaluative goal aligns with the program success as measured by these instruments.

TLC Participant Groups

A total of 132 teens at urban high school sites participated in the program. A matched set of elementary age children in grades one through three participated in the program as the participating teens were matched with elementary children in the TLC program.

Data Collection Instruments

To accomplish the evaluation goals and aims of the TLC empowerment and reading intervention program, the evaluation team utilized a comprehensive battery of measures/instruments that are aligned with the TLC program's expected outcomes. This program evaluation employed a mixed-method design (quantitative and qualitative), formative and summative evaluation model that included both pre and post intervention measures designed to inform program activities and gauge program success. As such, both qualitative and quantitative measures were utilized.

The following three measures were utilized to evaluate the success of the TLC program:

- *Gates MacGinitie Reading Assessment*: This assessment is a standardized measure of leveled reading comprehension and vocabulary.
- *Youth Empowerment and College Going Efficacy Scales*: This survey served as a measure of empowerment, leadership, and college going efficacy resulting from the TLC program participation.
- *Teen Open Ended Questionnaire of Program Success*: A s questionnaire in which teens described what they got out of the TLC experience qualitatively.

The matrix of Table 1 provides an overview of the evaluation *TLC*. It was aligned to program objectives (section 1 of this report).

Table 1. Metric Comparisons/Descriptions of Formative and Summative Measures

Metric/description	Teen Volunteers	Elementary Grade Students	Timeframe Summative/ Formative	Project Goal & Objectives(s)
1. Gates MacGinitie Reading Achievement Test		✓	Pre and Post TLC Formative/Summative	Goal #1 Obj #1
2. Youth Empowerment & College Going Efficacy Scale	✓		Pre and Post TLC Formative/Summative	Goal #1 Obj #2, #3
3. Teen Open Ended Perceived Success Questionnaire	✓		Post TLC Summative	Goal #1 Obj #2, #3

Analysis of Formative, Summative and Pre-post Test Measures

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, the CORE team collected three data sets (listed as metrics in Table 1) related to intervention program’s evaluative objectives. Accordingly, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted. Rigorous analyses of the summative teen volunteer and elementary student related evaluation data were performed to measure the effect of the *TLC* intervention program participation and the resulting curriculum’s effect on the child participants’ knowledge in addition to the role that introduction of *TLC* mediated curriculum played in students’ academic success (as by Gates MacGinitie reading achievement test). Surveys were analyzed to determine program success. Student achievement scores (Gates MacGinitie reading achievement test) were analyzed as a means of determining student achievement grades first through third.

Importantly, in terms of conducting the quantitative analyses, three statistical concepts were important considerations. These concepts, which work together to form a closed system, included: desired significance level, effect size, and study sample size. The effect size is characterized as the smallest effect that would be of substantive significance, although some guidelines for characterizing small (.2), medium (.5), and large (.8) effects have been suggested. Finally, sample sizes are dependent upon study conditions. In this study, the student sample was sufficiently large over the full implementation and associated data analyses (N= 134).

The effect size in this study was predicated on a conservative estimate of the strength of the estimate of the relationship amongst the dependant variables of reading knowledge and subject specific literacy levels. For this purpose, the evaluators presumed a relatively small effect size of .20 to .25. This conservative approach ensured that the study possessed sufficient statistical power to detect effect sizes at the lower end of the anticipated range. In that way, the study was robust enough to detect both smaller and more substantial effects of the *TLC* program. Descriptive statistics in the form of means and standard deviations of all quantitative variables were tabulated. Comparative, multivariate procedures were used to explore the relationships among the variables and their associated measures, and multivariate techniques were used to model the relationships of the variables and their relationship to reading knowledge. The program’s data analyses were conducted at the close of the academic school year (with pretest measures taken approximately 6+ months prior to the close of the school year). Statistical comparisons (paired sample T-tests) across pre and post measures were conducted to demonstrate project success and teen and ultimately grade 1-3 student gain during the ~6 months intervention period.

The teens’ posttest (end of program) open-ended data was analyzed qualitatively using grounded theory as a basis of analysis. Transcripts were coded using Hyperresearch version 2.7. Themes emerged from the analysis.

Quantitative and qualitative evaluative results were then comparatively analyzed and were used to create a comprehensive picture of *TLC* Program’s successes. These results may be used to inform *TLC*’s implementation in an effort to inform and guide improvements that may be necessary for Program sustainability.

Results Pre and Post Intervention Comparisons

The results of the *TLC* program intervention evaluation are very positive and promising in terms of overall success of the program. Both the *TLC* teen and elementary education student participants showed documented gain (found herein). Accordingly, there is evidence to support that there have been significant gains for both the elementary students and teens involved in the *TLC* intervention program.

Teen Improvement Resulting from the TLC Training and Intervention Experience

As previously described, the *TLC* mentoring program matches LAUSC at-risk teens with local elementary students who are reading 1-3 grade levels behind, as personal reading mentors. The high school youth meet with the elementary students approximately once per week to assist with literacy, while also building relationships with the young readers. To measure empowerment and college going efficacy, the high school volunteer students were asked to complete surveys measuring College Going Efficacy and Youth Empowerment at the beginning of their mentoring experience and towards the end of the academic year (post program) as they were concluding their time with their reading partner. Post intervention, the teens showed significant gains in College Going Efficacy, $m = 3.09$ $t(148) = -4.913$, $p < 0.01$. In addition, the results for the Youth Empowerment Scale approached statistical significance in gains, $m = 3.21$ $t(148) = -1.891$, $p = 0.061$ (Table 2).

Table 2: Results *TLC* Teen Participation in Training and Intervention Experience

Category	Pre-TLC Experience	Post-TLC Experience
College Going Efficacy	Mean=2.93*	Mean=3.09*
Youth Empowerment	Mean=3.10*	Mean=3.21*
*4 pt Likert Type Scale		

In addition to the quantitative data collected from the teens, the teens were asked to describe the results of their success with working with the young struggling readers. These data were rich with descriptions of what the teens gained from participating in the *TLC* experience.

Empowerment: When asked to describe what the *TLC* provided to them, one teen stated: “*The program taught me to communicate and voice my opinion without judging others.*” This quote indicates that the teen recognizes the importance of communication as a leadership skill and a means for empowerment. The referenced quote is a clear indicator of program success, because the curricular components provided for the teen participants are directly aligned with the constructs associated with youth empowerment.

Leadership: Another teen recognized the activities as a means by which she gained strength and empowerment in that she stated that she had no limits on her future goals (post program). “*The leadership*

activities have affected me because I am now stronger person and I know that I can be whatever I want to be.”

Responsibility: Still another teen recognized the changes that he had undergone resulting from the *TLC* experience. “*It has changed me because I am depended on and children count on me to be there for them.*” This teen recognized the responsibility that he had for the students that he partnered with and saw how that changed him and enriched his life.

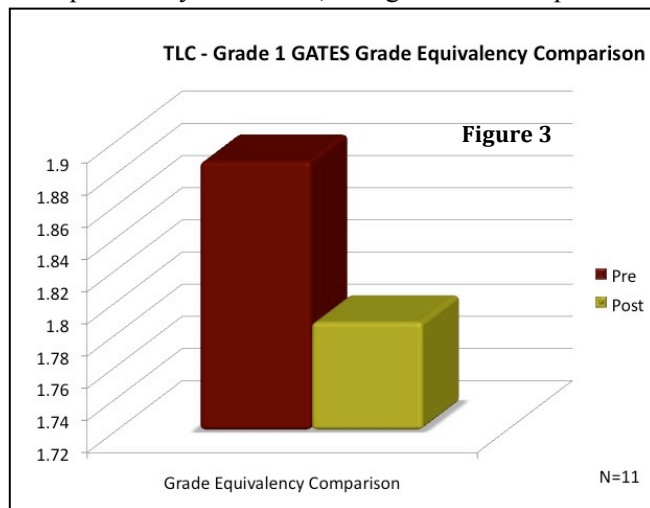
Two other teens recognized their growth and increased ability to lead. Each stated: “*The program has helped me to grow and to become a better person,*” and “*The program has helped me to lead others.*”

These quotes are but a few that represent the depth of growth and empowerment experiences that the teens had resulting from the *TLC* training and mentoring opportunity. These results indicate that the teens had increased empowerment, college going efficacy, leadership, and other growth related experiences resulting from the *TLC* training and mentoring experience.

In addition to the anecdotes provided by the teens about their *TLC* experience, a principal at one of the high schools shared important positive anecdotes about the program. His anecdotal comments included: “*They (the teens) feel empowered. It (the program) gives them a sense of responsibility and purpose, which drives them.*” “*I take pride in watching them (the teens) become leaders and come out of their shells in their efforts to engage their mentees.*” “*I have the best relationships with my students who participate in the KOREH program. I have a better rapport with them because they see this as something positive I am providing for them and they respond to this.*” These quotes are a sampling of a two page comment document provided by a principal who provided candid feedback about the *TLC* program. These data are indicative of the positive experience and support of the school’s leadership for the *TLC* program.

Reading Achievement Results of Mentoring Elementary Students:

As previously described, a significant component of the *TLC* program is for teens to mentor young elementary aged students in reading. As such,



measurement of elementary school reading levels that may be attributed to the teen mentoring of the children was needed. Results of this aspect of the intervention were also promising and positive. In addition to the gains observed for the teens in college going efficacy and empowerment, there were significant achievement gains for the elementary age students that were being mentored by the teens throughout the six-plus month intervention period (November 2009 through June 2010). The students’ achievement was measured on the Gates MacGinitie reading achievement test. As previously described, this test is a well recognized standardized exam that measures

children’s reading comprehension and reading vocabulary by grade level (equivalence). The elementary students who participated in the *TLC* program child reading intervention component ranged from first to third grade. Each grade level received the Gates MacGinitie examination as a baseline measure prior to working with the *TLC* teens and after participating with the teens as a post intervention measure. Importantly, these students were grouped by chronological grade level in this report as total classes of students were included in this program rather than individual teacher selected readers.

Results reveal the following information achievement-wise. Importantly, in statistical terms, a *t* value denotes the strengths of the differences pre and post intervention, and the *p* value denotes the level of statistical significance. A *p* value of < .05 is statistically significance, a *p* value of <.01 is highly significant, and a *p* value of <.001 is very highly significant statistically. For the 1st graders, there appeared to be no absolute statistically significant gains, however, this may be attributable to the small sample size pretest mean 1.84, posttest mean = 1.8 (little change pre and post due to small sample size-*n*=11, and limited participation of 6 of the 11 first graders; Figure 3 above).

Figure 4

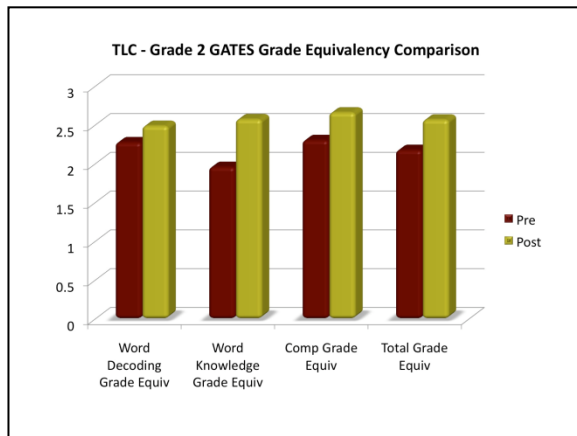
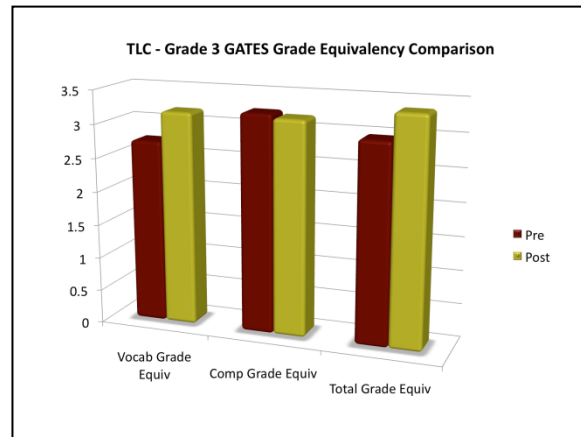


Figure 5



The second grade group, however, demonstrated gains on all subscales of the Gates MacGinitie test (Figure 4). Significant gains were observed in Word Knowledge Grade Equivalency as measured by the Gates MacGinitie, pretest *m*= 2.06, post test *m*= 2.49, gain = .43, range from 0 to 3.6, *t*(13)= -4.054, *p*<0.01. In addition, gains that approach statistical significance were observed in Reading Comprehension Grade Equivalency, *t*(13)= -1.855, *p*=0.081 (Figure 4) during the 6+ month intervention period.

Additionally, the third graders demonstrated achievement gains in all sections of the Gates MacGinitie (Vocabulary Grade Equivalency, Comprehension Grade Equivalency, and Total Grade Equivalency) reading achievement test. There was statistically significant gains in Total Reading Achievement Grade Equivalency, pretest *m*= 2.34, posttest *m*= 3.35, gain = 1.1, range from 1.6 to 4.7 *t*(9)= -2.176, *p*<0.05 in the 6+ month intervention period. In addition, the third grade students' gains in Vocabulary Grade Equivalence approached statistical significance, *t*(9)= -1.826, *p*=0.088 (Figure 5). These data suggest that most students approached grade level chronologically in reading achievement after participating in the *TLC* intervention. This is a particularly promising finding of this evaluation both for second and third grade students and is further demonstration of the need and use of the *TLC* program.

Summary and Conclusions

As has been demonstrated through analyses conducted for both the teen and elementary students, there are promising outcomes for both age groups resulting from the *TLC* intervention program. A majority of the elementary aged readers included in this evaluation demonstrated increases in literacy skills (word decoding, word knowledge, comprehension, and vocabulary) over the *TLC* intervention period. In addition, substantial gains in college going efficacy and empowerment were observed with the teens that provided mentoring to the young readers. The increases in college going efficacy and empowerment for the teens participating in the *TLC* program may be attributable to the engagement and leadership that they experience with their young readers. The teens were able to assist the elementary age students with their reading; this engagement leads to increased levels of self-efficacy and empowerment, while also allowing

them to recognize their own capabilities to teach and lead independently, which they may have been unaware of prior to becoming involved with the *TLC* intervention program.

It is important to also recognize the gains observed within the elementary students. The young participant readers showed gains in various aspects of literacy. As the teens built relationships with the elementary students, they established rapport with the young students, thereby providing encouragement and support to the readers. Overall, the *TLC* program provides reciprocal, promising positive results for all individuals involved in the program. Elementary aged young readers are able to benefit through the extra literacy mentoring support; moreover, the intervention was clearly advantageous to the teens that greatly benefited through providing support to the elementary age students.

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