Evaluation of Sound Partners Reading Intervention for First Grade
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Introduction
Reading difficulties are more difficult to remediate as children age (Good, Simmons, & Smith, 1998). As a result, schools are offering more early literacy interventions to students at risk for reading difficulties, an initiative commonly referred to as Response to Intervention (RtI; Howell, Patton, & Deiotte, 2008). Early literacy intervention programs commonly focus on developing early literacy skills including phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and beginning alphabet principle (Adams, 1990).

The delivery of early reading intervention programs can vary in a number of ways. Some programs are designed to be delivered in a one-on-one setting (Vadasy, Jenkins, Antil, Wayne, & O’Connor, 1997a; Vadasy, Jenkins, Antil, Wayne, & O’Connor, 1997b; Wasik & Slavin, 1993); whereas, others can be delivered in small groups (Buffum, Mattos, &Weber, 2009). Sound Partners is an early reading intervention program targeting phonics skills for children in kindergarten. It is intended to be delivered in a 1:1 tutoring setting 4-5 days per week (Vadasy, 2013).

A local school district recently chose to deliver Sound Partners in 1:1 tutoring for some children and in small group for others. This study will address the following research questions:
• Is Sound Partner an effective method of intervention?
• Is intervention delivered in a group setting as effective as 1:1 tutoring?

Methods
Participants
Data from 18 first grade students (33% female, 66% male) was collected archivally from a local school. All students were Caucasian; none received special education services.

Procedure
9 students had received the Sound Partners intervention beginning in the fall of 1st grade. To compare participants and nonparticipants, a matched comparison group was created which included 1st grade assessment data for 9 students currently in 2nd grade. Students were matched to current 1st graders on gender and 1st grade performance on fall measures of Nonsense Word Fluency. Fall NWF scores for the participants in Sound Partners were compared to the Fall NWF scores for the control group and no difference was found. (t(16) = .073, p = .943), suggesting no significant difference between the intervention group and comparison group.

Sound Partners participants had received 12 weeks of intervention for 150 minutes/week at the winter benchmark assessment. The intervention was delivered by a general school assistant who received training in Sound Partners from the reading specialist. Sound Partners includes instruction in alphabet skills, practice reading connected text, and writing. Children were provided with explicit instruction in letter naming, letter sounds, and early phonics skills. Each tutoring session lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Results & Implications
Question 1
The overall impact of Sound Partners on early literacy skills was examined by comparing winter scores on NWF for the matched control group and Sound Partners group. The winter benchmark assessment occurred after 12 weeks of intervention for Sound Partners participants. The current study extends the finding of Sound Partners to the first grade level.

Participation in the Sound Partners intervention was associated with higher performance on NWF at the winter assessment (t(16) = 2.197, p = .043). The mean of the control group was 24.11 with a standard deviation of 23.073. The mean of those who participated in Sound Partners was 49.33 with a standard deviation of 25.573. Findings are consistent with previous research evaluating Sound Partners as an early literacy intervention (Vadasy et al., 1997a; Vadasy et al., 1997b). In the first study, children who participated in Sound Partners scored higher than those who did not on measures of reading, decoding, spelling, and segmenting, and writing. A later study showed that children who participated in Sound Partners also scored higher than those who did not in both spelling and segmenting (Vadasy, et al., 1997b).

Measure
Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) is part of the AIMSweb Tests of Early Literacy. Students are presented with a list of “nonsense words” following a CVC or VC pattern. They are provided with one minute to read as many words as possible. Letter sounds are provided if the student does not respond within three seconds. Errors are noted and the total number of correct letter sounds read in one minute is counted. NWF demonstrates adequate validity and reliability for screening and progress monitoring purposes (AIMSweb Technical Manual, 2012).

Future Research
In future research, conducting the same procedure with a larger sample size would allow for statistical analysis in the group vs. 1:1 tutoring. A project to test the level of effectiveness among students in an atmosphere other than Montessori and in other specific populations would explore the use of Sound Partners on a larger scale. Further research could be conducted to explore the degree to which improvements through Sound Partners can be generalized to activities such as reading books. If a child in 2nd grade or older meets the needs for the intervention, further research could test if Sound Partners can be used at higher grade levels. In future research, a design other than single case design could be used to ensure the results are because of the intervention. Replication is needed to expand the findings for Sound Partners Intervention.

Limitations
Generalization of the current findings are limited. First, the school decided who would be in each group making it not random. The students in the 1:1 tutoring had lower benchmark scores compared to the group intervention group. The students who took part in the study only received a Montessori style of education. Other unknowns included; parents involvement in supporting the children at home, how much reading instruction was received prior, or whether students received other interventions such as speech or language instruction.

The years of experience for both the teachers and the interventionists were not known at the time of the study. Other unknowns in regards to teaching were whether teaching methods and resources remained the same in subsequent years and how classroom instruction was conducted. A plan to access the fidelity of the delivery of interventions was not used.

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