

Effectiveness Study of Scholastic Phonics Readers and a Comprehensive Reading Program

FIRST-GRADE STUDENTS MAKE STRONGER
GAINS IN WORD ANALYSIS SKILLS USING
SCHOLASTIC PHONICS READERS AND
SCHOLASTIC LITERACY PLACE® THAN WHEN
USING A TRADITIONAL READING AND
LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM.



THE RESEARCH

...*Scholastic Phonics Readers* provided intensive phonics practice in the context of stories written to engage young learners.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study, conducted by Lynn Hickey Schultz, Ed.D., of the Harvard School of Education during the 1995–1996 school year, examined the effectiveness of a comprehensive, skills-based reading program in promoting literacy for first- and fourth-grade students. It was hypothesized that students in the skills-based reading program classrooms would demonstrate greater growth in the reading and language skills measured by standardized tests than students in comparison classrooms. The results for first grade are highlighted here, due to the current national emphasis on phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency as essential early literacy skills, coupled with the promising results for first graders using *Scholastic Phonics Readers*.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Does *Scholastic Phonics Readers* coupled with the phonics instruction in a skills-based basal reading program enhance growth in early literacy skills during first grade above and beyond the traditional reading and language arts programs in comparison schools?

SAMPLE

Schools in four sites in California participated in the study. The sites included:

- Two urban school systems in large cities (Los Angeles and San Francisco)
- Two large school systems in the greater Los Angeles area (Pasadena and San Bernadino)

Participating superintendents were asked to choose two schools within their district that were relatively comparable with regard to student demographics and achievement. The two schools in each district were randomly assigned to the experimental or comparison group. Two first grade classrooms in each school were randomly chosen to participate.

Fifteen classrooms (7 *Literacy Place* and 8 comparison) with a total of 301 first-grade students participated in this study. The final breakdown included 162 students in the experimental group and 139 students in the comparison group.



PRODUCT BACKGROUND

First graders in the experimental group practiced reading with *Scholastic Phonics Readers* to independently build their decoding skills. These decodable texts provided intensive phonics practice in the context of stories written to engage young learners. In addition, *Scholastic Phonics Readers* were closely aligned by both theme and phonics skill to the *Literacy Place* reading program.

The experimental group implemented a comprehensive, skills-based reading program by Scholastic known as *Literacy Place*. This integrated reading and language arts program was built on a foundation of systematic skills development, award-winning children's literature, connections to real-world experiences, and multiple assessment options. The phonics instruction in *Literacy Place* is systematic, explicit, and focused on phonemic awareness and phonics skills.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The teachers in the experimental group received and began to use the program materials in September 1995. The teachers participated in an initial one-day training session in the previous summer. Teachers also attended two to three in-service training sessions conducted by Scholastic personnel during the fall, specifically focusing on phonics. In addition, the research assistant for the study visited each experimental classroom once a month to provide ongoing professional development and support.

ASSESSMENT MEASURES

Students in both experimental and comparison groups were administered subtests of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) to assess their language arts skills. The CTBS is a norm-referenced test that assesses individual student achievement in the areas of reading, language, mathematics, science, and social studies. Schools use the results from this test, in combination with other classroom assessments, to identify strengths and weaknesses of individual students in each of the areas tested.

THE RESEARCH *continued*

... the experimental students had Grade Equivalent (GE) scores more than two months ahead of comparison students on the CTBS Word Analysis sub-test.

The Composite Language Arts score includes four sub-tests: Word Analysis, Vocabulary, Comprehension, and Reading. The Word Analysis sub-test specifically assesses the following key skills:

- Recognizing initial and final sounds in words presented orally
- Recognizing initial and final consonant blends or digraph sounds
- Recognizing short vowel sounds in words
- Recognizing long vowel sounds in words
- Identifying sight words presented orally

Data were collected on students in both the experimental and comparison groups at three testing points during the school year. Baseline data were collected in the first week of October, followed by mid-year assessments in February, and end-of-year testing in June.

DATA ANALYSIS

Standard Scores were used for statistical analysis in this study. To assess whether the experimental students improved more than the comparison students on the CTBS, *t* tests were run on the change scores. The *t* test is a statistical procedure for evaluating whether the difference between the means of two samples (such as the experimental group and the comparison group) is large enough to be considered significant for a given sample size. The larger the *t* ratio, the more significant the difference between the two means.

THE RESULTS



BASELINE SCORES

October baseline CTBS scores were analyzed for both the experimental and control group students. Initial *t* tests on the pre-intervention scores revealed one significant difference between the experimental and comparison groups in the baseline testing. In first grade, the comparison students scored significantly higher than the experimental students on the Word Analysis subtest. Since baseline differences were in favor of the comparison group, any bias toward the experimental group using a comprehensive basal program and *Scholastic Phonics Readers* was considered minimal.

SCORES FOR FIRST GRADE

For Grade 1, the *t* tests revealed statistically significant differences in performance between the experimental and comparison groups on the Word Analysis sub-test of the CTBS, which included a determination of phonics skills. At post-testing, the experimental students had Grade Equivalent (GE) scores more than two months ahead of comparison students on the CTBS Word Analysis sub-test. There were no significant differences in performance between the experimental and comparison groups on the Composite Language Arts, Reading, Vocabulary, or Comprehension sub-tests of the CTBS.

TABLE 1: Mean Grade Equivalents for the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills

CTBS	COMPARISON GROUP (N = 139)		EXPERIMENTAL GROUP (N = 162)		T-TESTS ¹
	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	T (P-VALUE)
COMPOSITE L.A.	K.73	1.52	K.77	1.62	1.70 (NS)
READING	K.73	1.50	K.77	1.61	0.64 (NS)
VOCABULARY	K.69	1.61	K.80	1.64	0.96 (NS)
COMPREHENSION	K.76	1.47	K.72	1.69	1.83 (NS)
WORD ANALYSIS	K.86	1.48	K.72	1.53	1.98 (P<.05)*

* Indicates a statistically significant difference at $p < .05$.

NS indicates Not Significant.

1. The statistical analyses were performed on the Standard Scores; these means are presented in grade equivalent form.

THE RESULTS *continued*

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON TEACHER IMPLEMENTATION AND PROGRAM RESPONSE

Teachers were asked to complete self-report questionnaires, which requested information about the extent of their basal program usage, as well as their experiences with and reactions to the program (see Table 2). Teachers were uniformly enthusiastic about *Literacy Place*. They were particularly impressed with the degree to which the high quality and varied literature engaged their students, as well as the integration of phonemic awareness, phonics, reading, and writing skills into a comprehensive literacy program.

TABLE 2: *Literacy Place* Implementation and Program Response

LITERACY PLACE	TEACHER OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS
Program Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All but one teacher used the program every day ● Program usage was an average of 90 minutes per day
General Response to Basal Reading Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Very positive reviews regarding the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and variety of multicultural literature • Appropriateness level and relevance to their students' lives • Integration of language arts, particularly the connection between reading and writing • The large number of tools and resources available for teachers ● Teachers found these features lacking in any language arts curriculum they had used previously
Response to Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Firsts-grade teachers emphasized that the program literature was appropriate to their children's reading level ● Teachers observed that literature is complementary to emergent readers and gradually gets more difficult ● Teachers noted that the cultural connections made by the themes and selections in the books were relevant to students, as well as invaluable to motivating them to want to read
Response to Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teachers indicated that the integrated technology provided both visual and tactical stimulation for children ● Technology was especially effective at motivating slow learners, as well as reinforcing learning

... Literacy Place and Scholastic Phonics Readers are more effective at promoting first-grade phonics skills...



SUMMARY

The results of this study provide evidence that *Literacy Place* and *Scholastic Phonics Readers* are more effective at promoting first-grade phonics skills, as measured through the CTBS, in comparison to the traditional language arts curriculum in similar classrooms.

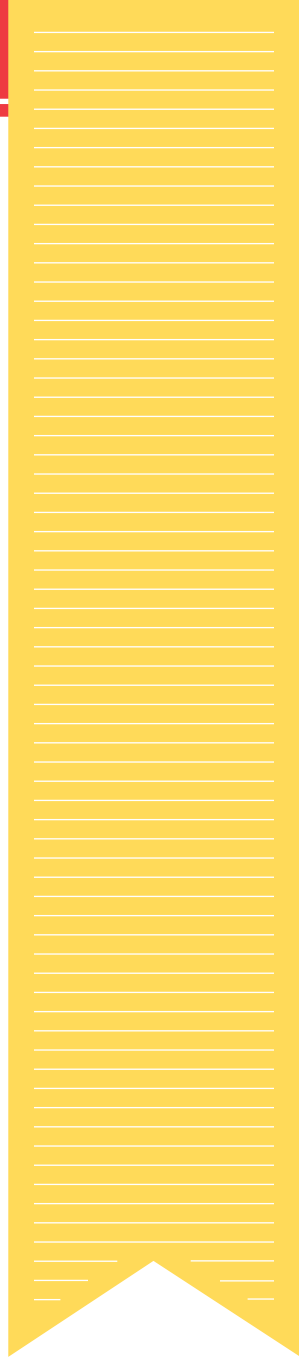
Research has repeatedly revealed that explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics is critical for early reading success. *Literacy Place* and *Scholastic Phonics Readers* provide opportunities for just such purposeful instruction and practice. The combination of a comprehensive, skills-based reading program and *Scholastic Phonics Readers'* purposeful reading practice lays the foundation for success in reading.

ANALYSIS

This study's findings are particularly impressive given that a number of factors related to the newness of the program made the fidelity of implementation less than desirable for research purposes. For example, the *Literacy Place* program was not on the market at the beginning of this study. Thus, teachers did not have all the *Literacy Place* components in hand, including the CD-ROM technology. Furthermore, the teachers were not experienced with the curriculum at the start of the intervention. They had never taught *Literacy Place* or worked with *Scholastic Phonics Readers* prior to the research year. Finally, the intervention period of one year was relatively short.

Scholastic's *Interactive Phonics Readers* were developed based on the same carefully leveled and sequenced books in the *Scholastic Phonics Readers* series. This study's findings provide evidence that the explicit, systematic phonics practice offered through *Interactive Phonics Readers'* computer-based books, games, and activities will contribute to increased decoding skills.

Future research will study the development of phonics skills through the implementation of Scholastic's early literacy products, as well as the key contribution of phonemic awareness and phonics to early reading achievement. It is expected that research will continue to demonstrate impressive gains in phonics and early reading outcomes for students regularly exposed to systematic and explicit phonics instruction and practice.



For more information call
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