

RESEARCH UPDATE

Department of Education
Randomized Control Study Results

ReadAbout® Is the Only Program Examined That Resulted in Significant Improvements in Social Studies Reading Comprehension

SUMMARY

From 2006–2008, *ReadAbout* was one of three programs (*Project CRISS*, *Read for Real*, *Reading for Knowledge*) that participated in a U.S. Department of Education randomized research study on the effectiveness of reading comprehension interventions for fifth graders. During the 2006–2007 school year, a cohort of 1,108 fifth-grade students used *ReadAbout* across ten U.S. school districts. During the 2007–2008 school year, a second cohort of 1,246 fifth graders was added to the study. In addition, researchers followed the fifth-grade cohort from the 2006–2007 school year into the sixth grade. The Passage Comprehension subtest of the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) and the Educational Testing Service Social Studies and Science Reading Comprehension Assessments were used to measure reading comprehension in the study.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS

This study focused on disadvantaged, urban districts. Ninety-six percent of schools were eligible for Title 1 funds. Fifty-seven percent of study students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 70 percent lived in urban areas. Approximately 37 percent of students were black, 32 percent were Hispanic, 27 percent were white, and 2 percent were Asian.

GOAL

Research indicates that American students struggle to comprehend texts used in elementary school science and social studies classes. This is especially true of children from disadvantaged backgrounds because the texts they read in subject areas often contain content beyond their knowledge and experience, new vocabulary, and unfamiliar text structures. In response, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a large-scale evaluation to study approaches for teaching reading comprehension strategies in the content areas to students in Title 1 schools.

READABOUT OVERVIEW

Scholastic developed *ReadAbout* to help improve elementary and middle school students' reading comprehension and vocabulary skills with motivating nonfiction content. The computer-adaptive technology contains 70 engaging, leveled topics in science, social studies, and contemporary issues, with three reading passages for each topic. Comprehension and vocabulary skills are reinforced through the use of offline SmartFiles, leveled reading cards linked with the content of each topic in the software, differentiated reading comprehension lessons, vocabulary routines, and writing lessons.

USAGE

Research schools were required to use the software at least three times a week for 20 minutes and the offline materials once a week for 20 minutes. All teaching staff using *ReadAbout* received two days of training designed to provide instructional strategies, hands-on experience, and practical advice on how to implement the program and how to use data to drive instruction.

PARTICIPANTS

In addition to *ReadAbout*, three commercially available supplemental reading programs were included in the study. Schools were randomly assigned to either an intervention group that used one of the four study curricula or to a control group that continued with its usual curriculum in the district.

- 1) **Project CRISS** by CRISS: *Project CRISS* focuses on five keys to learning—background knowledge, purpose setting, author’s craft, active learning, and metacognition.
- 2) **Read for Real** by Chapman University and Zaner-Bloser: In *Read for Real*, teachers work with a six-volume set of books to teach reading strategies appropriate for use before, during, and after reading.
- 3) **Reading for Knowledge** by the Success for All Foundation: *Reading for Knowledge* makes

extensive use of cooperative learning strategies and a process called SQRRRL (Survey, Question, Read, Restate, Review, Learn).

From 2008–2009, *Reading for Knowledge* was not studied because schools declined to use the program for an additional year.

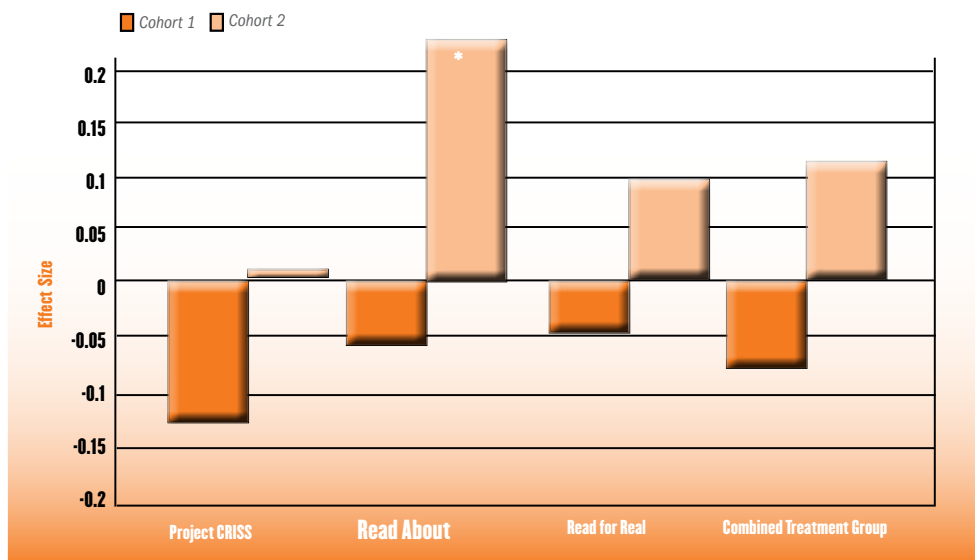
RESULTS

Results from the first year of the study indicated that scores on the three reading comprehension assessments were not significantly higher in schools using the selected reading comprehension curricula. However, results from the second and final year of research revealed significant positive effects for *ReadAbout* on the social studies reading comprehension assessment for second-cohort students taught by teachers who were in the study both years. As graph 1 demonstrates, the effect size was .22, which is the equivalent of moving a student from the 50th to the 59th percentile.

CONCLUSION

Data from this study indicate that *ReadAbout* improved students’ comprehension of social studies texts when the teacher had a previous year’s experience with the program. This suggests that using *ReadAbout* can be an effective aid in improving reading in the social studies content area.

Figure 10. Effects of Teacher Experience With the Curricula on Post-Test Social Studies Reading Comprehension Scores of Fifth-Grade Students



Note: These effects represent impacts of the interventions after one year of implementation.
*Statistically different control group at the 0.5 level.