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TIME for Kids Nonfiction Readers:
Report of a Field Study
in Milwaukee Public Schools

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Introduction

TIME for Kids Nonfiction Readers, a program developed by Teacher Created Materials with *TIME For Kids* magazine, is a K-3 curriculum that teaches beginning reading skills through high interest nonfiction texts. Lessons and activities are based on current best practices research in the teaching of reading and include instruction in all five essential elements identified in the Report of the National Reading Panel. These elements are: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension.

This report presents results of a field test of the *Nonfiction Readers* conducted between late January 2004 and June 2004 in Milwaukee Public Schools, a large urban school district. The purpose of the field test was to demonstrate the effectiveness of the *Nonfiction Readers* program to improve writing skills among ethnically diverse students and to assess teacher and student satisfaction with the program.

The *TIME for Kids Nonfiction Readers* program was designed to be implemented in three to five, half-hour to 45-minute lessons per week over a school year. The program was implemented in January and instruction concluded in June 2004.

Methods

TIME for Kids Nonfiction Readers was field tested in four elementary schools in Milwaukee Public Schools. 178 children in classrooms from grades one and two received instruction in the Nonfiction Readers over a period of six months. Another 178 children, serving as control groups, did not receive instruction with the Readers. Children in both experimental and control group classrooms were pre-tested in January 2004 and post-tested in late May 2004 with the On the Mark assessment the school district uses. Per school district requirements classroom teachers administer the assessment and report scores to administration. Teacher Created Materials was provided with these test scores to use for evaluation purposes.

In June 2004, WTFK teachers completed a brief questionnaire designed to assess their usage and satisfaction with the program. These questionnaires are used for additional analysis.

The field test commenced in January 2004 with a one-half day training workshop provided by TCM for experimental teachers.

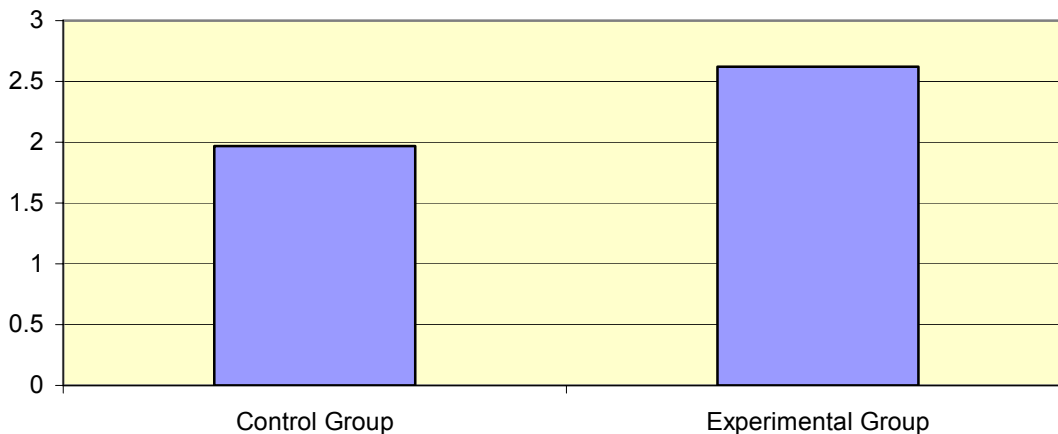
Results

Significant Gains in Grade 2 Reading Scores

Statistically significant gains in reading comprehension were found in grade two experimental classrooms. When compared with control group classrooms, grade 2 experimental classrooms showed significantly greater gains on the On the Mark diagnostic reading assessment.

Students in the experimental group gained an average of 2.6 levels on the On The Mark Assessment during the six-month period. Using the Milwaukee Public Schools equivalency chart, this equates to a gain of 1.2 grade levels in reading in just six months. Under normal conditions students would be expected to gain one grade level during a ten-month school year. Students in the grade 2 control group gained 1.9 levels on the on the Mark assessment. Additional scaling of the scores was required, because the control group students initially scored lower on the pre-test than the experimental group. Due to their significantly lower scores, these students would be expected to show greater gains in their scores. Therefore, the larger gain exhibited by the experimental group is even more significant. Figure 1 illustrates the gains made by both groups in the population.

Grade 2 Gains in On the Mark Assessment Levels

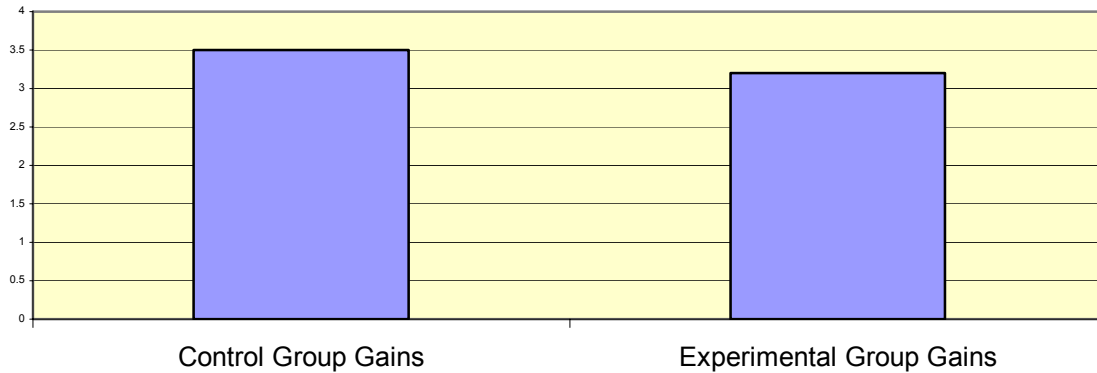


Significant Gains in Grade 1 Reading Scores Among Both Groups

Analysis of the grade 1 data revealed statistically significant gains were achieved by both the control and experimental groups. There was not a significant difference between the groups, however. This indicates that at the first grade level, the Readers helped experimental students achieve as much as the control group students. It should be noted that due to record keeping anomalies in the data, some control group scores were discarded. However, these anomalies did not affect the final results when further analysis was completed.

Students in the control group gained an average of 3.5 levels on the On the Mark assessment, which is highly significant. Students in the experimental group demonstrated equally significant gains with an average post-test gain of 3.2 levels. These gains equate to an average increase in reading achievement of two grade levels in just a six-month period. While the difference between the control and experimental group scores are not significant, it is highly significant that both groups improved their reading scores so dramatically. Figure 2 illustrates gains achieved by both groups.

Grade 1 Gains in On the Mark Assessment Levels



Teacher Satisfaction

Teacher satisfaction was evaluated using a survey completed at the end of the study. Teachers are overwhelmingly positive about the program. 100% of teachers rated ease of use, presentation format, and organization of the program support materials and lesson plans as either “Excellent” or “Very Good.” All the teachers felt that *TIME for Kids Nonfiction Readers* was “Extremely Effective” or “Very Effective” in teaching students to develop reading skills including fluency and comprehension. In response to the question “Overall, how useful was the program in helping you teach reading?” 100 percent of the teachers indicated the program was either “Extremely Useful” or “Very Useful.”

Evaluation of individual teacher comments indicated teachers were pleased with the quality of the books and felt the content was of high interest to their students. Teachers who used the Active Literacy CD felt it was a strong addition to the program. Several teachers commented the CD provided necessary reinforcement of skills for students. The one thing that was requested by teachers was higher levels of the program for students who require more challenging material.

Student Reactions to the Program

Students in one first grade classroom were asked to write about how they liked learning with the *Nonfiction Readers*. 100% of the students reported they enjoyed using the Readers. Sample student comments are listed in the following box. (Note student spelling has been corrected).

“My favorite book was A Bee’s Life, because it taught me all about bees.”

“My favorite book was A Bee’s Life. I liked the pictures.”

“My favorite activity is ‘Write About the Story’ on the computer.”

“I like reading books on the computer.”

“My favorite book is A Trip to a Publisher, because maybe someday I could write my own book.”

“Dear Lady. Thank you for making these books. They help kids to read.”

Conclusions

The field test clearly showed that students in all grades showed significant gains in their reading skills. Additionally, grade two students in the experimental group showed significantly greater gains than the control group. These gains can be attributed to their use of *TIME for Kids Nonfiction Readers*. These gains are even more significant when considering the limited time of the study and the greater gains that would have been expected from the lower-scoring control group.

Teachers reported being very pleased with the program’s design and ease of use. Students reported they enjoyed the content of the books and the active literacy CD.

Overall, it can be concluded that the *TIME for Kids Nonfiction Readers* has the potential for improving student achievement in reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and reading fluency.