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A Research Report of the Effectiveness of the “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn” in Grades 2nd and 3rd

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ABSTRACT

Pine Grove Elementary Pre-K through 6th grade is located in Bastrop, Louisiana. Our enrollment is 450 students with a demographic makeup of 85% regular education and 15% students with disabilities. The percentage of students with disabilities has increased over the last year by 10%. Our school has 20 classes with an average class size of 23. With the increased class size, we are looking for ways to motivate student achievement through technology. According to research conducted by the National Reading Panel in 1997, the "[What Works?](#)" report found that the five key areas in learning to read are [phonemic awareness](#), [phonics](#), [comprehension](#), [vocabulary](#), and [fluency](#). An important pre-reading skill is phonemic awareness. According to research, children become aware that words are made up of sounds which can be assembled in different ways to make different words. Children build these pre-reading skills by practicing nursery rhymes and playing sound and word games such as learning to hear and recognize rhymed words. Tutoring, workbooks, games, or structured computer programs can help teach or reinforce these skills.

(<http://www.reading-skills-pyramid.org/phonemicawareness.htm>)

We chose the “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn” programs because of the interactive learning games and songs for the students. They are easy to use, fun, and an engaging set of programs that makes learning enjoyable.

The purpose of this study was to identify the software’s impact on students in the 2nd and 3rd grades at Pine Grove Elementary School.

This study was conducted in one 2nd grade classroom and two 3rd grade classrooms at Pine Grove. Teacher observations and pre and post-test scores were included in the study to measure students’ progress throughout the school year.

Each class was allowed a scheduled time in the computer lab to practice the phonics program. The students were encouraged to complete each level and obtain as many gold stars as they could.

As a result, the teachers that participated in the study are suggesting that all classes incorporate this computer phonics program in their classrooms next year to improve phonemic awareness. This program will increase each child’s ability to read and comprehend, which will improve their test scores in all areas of study.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	4
Research Questions	5
Research Data	6
Problems	8
Subjects of Study/Description of Game	9
Findings	10
Conclusion	14
Resources	15

Results of the *Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn*

Grades 2 and 3

School Year 2007 – 2008

Introduction

Statement:

The purpose of this study is to identify the need for a computer based phonics program in lower elementary.

Rationale:

Today our students are entering the classroom with little motivation to learn. The competition between the classroom and the outside world is so great that teachers need an exciting way to help students learn to read. Students entering the second and third grades are reading below grade level and testing poorly on accountability tests. This carries on through high school because they do not have the confidence to motivate them to read, therefore their grades, test scores, and attitude toward school causes them to fail. By using a fun-filled program such as “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn”, students are engaged and excited about learning.

According to the Nation's Report Card, 31 percent of 4th graders and 31 percent of 8th graders are proficient readers. Minority students score lower - just 16 percent of African American and 22 percent of Hispanic 12th graders are proficient readers. (U.S. Department of Education, [Achievement Trends in Reading, 1992-2005](#)). Learning to read and write is critical to a child's success in school and later in life. One of the best predictors of whether a child will function competently in school and go on to contribute actively in our increasingly literate society is the level to which the child progresses in reading and writing. <http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/psread0.asp>

Research Questions:

- 1. Will students improve test scores from the phonics pre- test to the phonics post- test?**
- 2. Will “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn” improve students’ DRA levels?**
- 3. Are the students excited about reading?**

Research Data

According to Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA), children who have phonemic awareness skills are likely to have an easier time learning to read and spell than children who have few or none of these skills.

A press release on April 13, 2000, from the National Reading Panel said, in the largest, most comprehensive evidence-based review ever conducted of research on how children learn reading; a Congressionally mandated independent panel has concluded that the most effective way to teach children to read is through instruction that includes a combination of methods.

(http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Press/press_rel_4_13_00_1.htm)

The panel determined that teaching children to read effectively includes breaking apart and manipulating sounds in words (phonemic awareness), learning that the sounds are represented by the letters of the alphabet and can be blended together to form words (phonics), guided oral reading (having students practice by reading aloud with the guidance and feedback of the teacher), and applying what the students have learned to improve their

reading comprehension. The panel's review focused on the following areas: alphabetic (phonemic awareness and phonics instruction), reading fluency, reading comprehension, teacher education, and computer technology. The panel found that the research conducted to date strongly supports the concept that explicitly and systematically teaching children to manipulate phonemes significantly improves children's reading and spelling abilities. The evidence for this is so clear cut that this method should be an important component of classroom reading instruction. The panel also concluded that the research literature provides solid evidence that phonics instruction produces significant benefits for children from kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulties learning to read. The greatest improvements in reading were seen from systematic phonics instruction. This type of phonics instruction consists of teaching a planned sequence of phonics elements, rather than highlighting elements as they happen to appear in a text. Here again, the evidence was so strong that the panel concluded that systematic phonics instruction is appropriate for routine classroom instruction.

http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Press/press_rel_4_13_00_1.htm

The panel also found that computer technology was a way to reinforce skills taught and helped students comprehend those skills. “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn” reinforces all reading skills students have been taught.

Problems Associated With the Study

While students were working with the “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn” programs, several factors interfered with measuring the impact the program had on student academic performance and scores. Students often missed time in the computer lab due to resource instruction, make-up tests, fund raisers, etc. The main factor was absenteeism, which limited participation in the program not only on the days absent, but when returning to school. Make-up work kept them from attending computer lab class. Due to these factors, the mastery of phonemic awareness could have been impacted negatively.

Subjects:

The subjects for this project were 2nd and 3rd grade students in a rural class setting. Several students were bused in from low achieving urban schools. The classes will be referred to as Class A, Class B, and Class C for 2nd grade, and Class D and Class E for 3rd grade. The socioeconomic backgrounds for students in all classes were low to middle income. All classes had traditional classroom settings with certified teachers. In 2nd grade, Class B took pre-tests, worked in the programs, and then completed post-tests. Class A and Class C served as control groups and were only allowed pre-tests and post-tests. All classes were given the pre-test and post-test during the same week. Both 3rd grade classes were given the pre-tests, worked through the program and given the post-tests.

Description of the Super Star Phonics Program:

The following “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn” titles were used in this study:

Phonics 2a – Intermediate Level – used by 2nd Grade

Phonics 2b – Intermediate Level II – used by 2nd Grade

Phonics 3a – Advanced Level with Sports – used by 3rd Grade

Phonics 3b – Advanced Level II with Sports – used by 3rd Grade

The “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn” programs offer a motivational way for students to engage in reading activities to develop reading skills. The students are actively involved in the music, games, pictures and drills to enhance reading skills for a lifetime of reading. These programs are a structured, interactive computer game which teaches and reinforces reading skills in a sequenced manner that keeps students coming back and motivates them to learn.

Data Used to Interpret Improvement in Students’ Achievement

1. Pre-Test versus Post-Test (Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn)
2. DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment)

Findings

Question 1:

Will students improve test scores from the Super Star Phonics pre-test to the post- test?

Class A and Class C were given only the pre and post-test, they were not allowed to work the Super Star programs, they served as a control group.

3. Test Score Results as measured by DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment)

Class	Pre-test scores	Post-test scores	Points	Results in percent
Class A (did not use Super Star Programs)	8796	7742	-1054	- 12.0%
Class B (used Super Star Programs)	8216	11324	+3108	+ 37.8%
Class C (did not use Super Star Programs)	8200	8756	+ 556	+ 6.8%
Class D (used Super Star Programs)	3748	5444	+1696	+ 45.2%
Class E (used Super Star Programs)	8284	10076	+1792	+ 21.6 %

- Post-test scores for control group Class A fell on post-test by 1054 points, a loss of 12%.
- Post-test scores for control group Class C improved on post-test by 556 points, a gain of 6.8%.
- Post-test scores for Class B, which played the games on the program, increased up by 3108 points, a gain of 37.8%.
- Post-test scores for Class D, which played Phonics 3B games, increased by 1696 points, a gain of 45.2%.
- Post-test scores for Class E, which also played the Phonics 3B game, increased by 1792 points, a gain of 21.6%.

Question 2:

Will “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn” improve students’
DRA, (Developmental Reading Assessment), levels?

Class A and Class C were not allowed to play games on the Help Me 2
Learn Phonics programs, Classes B, D, and E were allowed to play.

In all 5 classes with a total of 123 students, only 10 fell below level on the
DRA test in May, (all 10 were special needs students). Considering this
we looked at the above level students, 64 out of 123 students in all 5
classes were above level. Of this 44 of the 64 students were in the 3
classes that were allowed to continue and play the games on the Super Star
Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn programs. To break this down per class;

- Class A, (not allowed to play), 43 % were above level.
- Class C, (not allowed to play), 43% were above level.
- Class B, (allowed to play), 60% were above level.
- Class D, (allowed to play), 61% were above level and
- Class E, (allowed to play), 50% were above level.

In conclusion, the Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn program
increased reading comprehension in all 3 classes that were allowed to play

the games by a greater percentage than the 2 classes that were not allowed to play.

Question 3:

Are the students excited about reading?

At Pine Grove we use the Accelerated Reading program in grades 1 through 6 to increase reading comprehension. The students check out books and read them. They then will come to the computer lab and take a computer based comprehension test on the book. The AR program then gives students points for correct answers. In the Classes B, D, and E students increased points acquired by 45% prior year. They also had a higher percentage of points compared to Classes A and C. This year students in Classes B, D, and E asked to check out new library books while students in Classes A and C moaned and complained about checking out books. Overall the students who played the games in the “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn programs were interested in reading, would come to class, tell the teacher what the book was about, and what they thought about it. In a teacher’s mind this is a great accomplishment seeing students love reading. Our goal next year will be encouraging all grades to use the programs Help Me 2 Learn offers.

Conclusion

The computer based “Super Star Phonics by Help Me 2 Learn” programs have proven to be an outstanding asset in motivating students to read. The programs have also proven to be a factor in improving DRA and post-test scores.

The program also has the state standards correlated to the games; the teachers found this very useful and time saving for their lessons. Overall, the program was a benefit to our students in reading progress and motivation for reading.

REFERENCES

<http://www.reading-skills-pyramid.org/phonemicawareness.htm>

U.S. Department of Education,
[Achievement Trends in Reading, 1992-2005](#)

<http://www.naeyc.org/about/positions/psread0.asp>

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA)

http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Press/press_rel_4_13_00_1.htm